

E. EDUCATION

Nursery Staff Member 1

(now retired)

On a daily basis, at Merkinch Nursery, the staff are dealing with children from many vulnerable families i.e. families where there are drug and alcohol problems, domestic violence, various aspects of disturbed home lives, a lot of the children have major developmental delays (mainly because of the needs of the parents as well as the environment that they are living in). In the year that Danielle attended Merkinch Nursery it was a particularly difficult year. More than a third of the children on the nursery roll had specific educational needs which could present problems in the future, Danielle was not reported to be one of those children.

Nursery staff did not visit homes but did know the area well and knew the families well. Staff were trusted within the community and in conversation learned a lot about families and their situations. Nursery staff member 1 cautioned that living in an area where there is so much vulnerability can re-adjust one's perception of normality. One can learn to accept crisis and chaos on a daily basis; dealing with it as a matter of course. In contrast, in other environmental areas/postcode sectors, some people can live their whole lives and perhaps never experience this level of crisis.

Inter-agency working was absolutely essential and was occurring on a daily basis. Despite this very good inter-agency work, there were concerns about "misplaced confidentiality" from time to time i.e. some agencies not being prepared to make the Nursery aware of other concerns which would have a bearing on children's care, Health and development.

The nursery was aware that Danielle had a physical problem and therefore were keeping a watchful eye on this. It was discussed regularly. Nursery staff spoke of the fact of good relationships with Community Policemen, such that if a little girl was found screaming or shouting out in the street at the weekend, the Nursery would appropriately be informed so they could keep a watchful eye on the child's development. This level of liaison appears to have been personality dependent. This continues to be too personality dependent. Nursery staff member 1 requested far more systematisation of this type of information sharing for the sake of children's welfare and to protect them. The Breakfast Club was connected to the Community Centre across the road from Merkinch Nursery. It appears that Nursery staff have been offering breakfast in the morning and food at other times for years. Nursery staff member 1 stated "what is the point of having a wee one coming in at half past eight and starving. You're not going to get any good behaviour or not going to get any constructive work from them".

Danielle was described as "a lovely wee girl...she was alive, she wasn't one of these wee girls that would sit at the back and keep quiet and you ignore or miss she was a vital wee girl...she was a

wee girl who would just lean against you and chat away...she was one of the better ones I suppose that year because she could communicate and she did communicate". Tracy Reid told the nursery staff that she (herself) couldn't read. Staff therefore would go through every newsletter or any other material that was being given out to parents and it would be explained to Tracy very clearly i.e. what was going to be happening or what was expected. Nursery staff also met the grandmother (whose health had deteriorated during that year). She had actually spent quite a considerable amount of that time in a wheelchair. Nursery staff described that Tracy did appear caring. She didn't always bring Danielle nor did she always come for her at that time, though was described as very much a part of an extended family. They did all seem to be getting on at that point. Nursery staff were surprised when they eventually realised that the grandmother had made the anonymous referral to Social Work in 2001. This was because Nursery staff noted that the family were living very much together at that time even at the time when the referral was made. Nursery staff member 1 felt that if neighbours saw anything happening to Danielle whilst in the Merkinch area that Nursery staff would have almost certainly got to hear about it through neighbours or others in the local community (this is not corroborated by the family who said they might fear recriminations). When Danielle later attended Crown Primary, it becomes clear that no local community people or neighbours there told the school re the little girl who at that stage was out in the street unsupervised. She then would be dragged into the house and shouted at.

Crown was reported to be "your typical English sort of village school". The parents at Crown stand outside waiting for the children. If you're driving up they obviously know each other and you don't see that in places in Merkinch because the kids usually go home on their own.

Nursery Staff Member 2

Nursery staff member 2 described the relationship between Tracy and Danielle as "more like an equal relationship; an equal partnership rather than mother and daughter". She thought Tracy knew that Danielle's grandmother was there and the buck stopped with the grandmother; if anything went wrong then the grandmother would deal with it. At that time though it was felt that the relationship between Tracy and her own mother seemed to be reasonable. Danielle's key worker in nursery described a great deal of involvement with the previous Clinical Medical Officer (now retired). The Nursery had very close working relationships with the Doctor and also with the School Nurse. She stated that level of contact unfortunately no longer occurs which may be less beneficial in terms of information sharing.

Nursery staff member 2 described Danielle in Nursery as "a lovely bairn, who smiled...". They described that they had "absolutely no hint of anything". A school diary was kept every year. Danielle's name was in the diary three times: firstly when the children were enrolled due to Danielle having known medical problems; the second time was the actual day that Danielle commenced Merkinch Nursery, that was on Tuesday 4th September 2001. The third diary entry was Danielle's last day at the Nursery which was Wednesday 15th May 2002... "and that was her sponsored walk day". Nursery staff member 2 remembered that she took Danielle's hand most of the way on the forest walk in Foyers. Danielle was "chatting away quite the thing". Danielle was invited back for the end of term party on Tuesday 2nd July 2002. She did attend that day and that was the last time Nursery staff saw Danielle. One of the Nursery staff met Danielle's mum at parent's day on 23rd November 2001. Everything appeared positive but at that point Tracy said she didn't want Danielle to go to Merkinch School and wanted to know how to enrol her in St Joseph's.

The only other memory of significance was one day at gym in the Community Centre. Danielle complained of her legs being sore. Nursery staff told this to mum and she came to pick her up. Tracy still wanted her to go to gym and said gym was good for her. Tracy at that stage once again was reported, as being a caring mum.

Danielle's attendance in general was quite good with "the odd day off". Danielle was described as "always well clad and fed with usually her hair done and her face shiny".

Nursery staff were clear that Tracy had no male partner at that time coming to collect the child or delivering the child to Nursery.

School Staff Member 1

Danielle commenced Crown Primary School in August 2002. She was described as a lovely friendly little girl who got on with most of her peers within the class. She was not subdued in any way. She was an outgoing happy, cheery little girl, an average pupil within the class who didn't stand out at all. She always wore her school uniform. She did always look well presented. School staff member 1 met Danielle's mother on the first day that Danielle came into the school. That was a week later than the rest of the children as Tracy Reid reported that her own grandfather had a stroke. (This is disputed in transcript of family members.) Tracy provided a letter at that time to this effect. The next occasion on which the staff member met Tracy was when head lice were found in Danielle's hair. School staff member 1 tried to contact Danielle's mother at home but the telephone answer phone said that the number was no longer available. She then put a note into Danielle's school bag and instructed Danielle to ask her mother to see her after school. Danielle's mother did come into school that afternoon and she was able to tell her about the head lice in Danielle's hair, Tracy at that point said that she hadn't picked up the head lice because she had an eye condition. Tracy related that she wouldn't have seen the head lice so easily. She also spoke about Danielle's leg condition and that Danielle had a muscle condition. It was therefore decided to have a meeting with the Learning Support Teacher. Tracy's mother had also raised that she couldn't help Danielle with her homework because it was smaller print.

At the next meeting, homework was discussed and it was decided to enlarge the homework print so that Tracy could help Danielle more at home. It was also decided to enlarge all letters of communication between the school and Tracy Reid so that Tracy could read them. Danielle's leg condition and muscle condition were discussed in relation to getting tired in PE and drama. Teachers agreed to keep an eye on that. Mother still wanted Danielle not to do PE but to sit out if she became tired. School staff member 1 asked for any information about the condition for the file at school. Tracy Reid never gave this information. Tracy's mother regularly told School staff member 1 that Danielle was having physiotherapy appointments. Teachers asked for further information on that; yet again it was never received. School staff member 1 met Danielle's mother for the last time on the 8th October when Tracy came in to tell her that they were leaving the school. Danielle's mother was asked to send a letter to the school, specifying the dates that she would be leaving, where she would be moving to and the name of the school. Yet again, that was never supplied. At that time Tracy said that she would be going to the Greater Manchester area. Tracy Reid provided staff with a mobile number for contact.

In relation to PE, in fact no one ever noticed anything different about her movement during PE. She appeared to be ok. Danielle apparently did say once that she was tired but she herself did not want to miss out... "Danielle wanted to join in everything".

After missing the first week at school, frequent absences during the next three weeks were mainly half days. It was usual for a parent to bring in letters to explain absences. School staff member 1 gave Tracy special dispensation to not bring things in writing, due her apparent disability. (Tracy has a visual

acuity of 6/36 as assessed by an ophthalmologist in 1996). Tracy Reid always said that the appointments for physiotherapy were first thing in the morning which therefore meant coming in later. Absences were therefore classified as half day absences rather than full days. Danielle was absent for 9 and a half full days i.e. 19 half days during that total six-week period when she attended Crown Primary. School commenced on a Tuesday; therefore four of those half days related to the note with regard to the grandfather's death due to a stroke. Danielle was also absent when she had the reported head lice treatment. The only other explanation given appears to have been "physio appointments". The last day of school was actually 9th October i.e. the child was only at Crown Primary for a total of three and a half to four weeks. (On checking enrolment dates, Danielle was actually enrolled in Crown Primary in June 2002 rather than February 2002 due to an attempt to enrol at St. Joseph's School previously.

There is a policy in place in Crown Primary to report to the Head Teacher if there are a considerable number of absences. Due to the very short period that the child was in the school, the absence issue was not reported.

The current transfer system in Scotland is that if a child transfers school in Scotland one awaits a letter from the new school to the Head Teacher at the old school. This can sometimes take weeks to months. Schools can indeed decide not to bother asking for the records.

School Staff Member 4

School staff member 4 of Crown Primary reported that when a child leaves Crown Primary School, parents are provided with the child's record (i.e. a PPR file). In that are all the records on the child. There are details of their enrolment and their absences (obtained from the "Phoenix" system). On starting another school, contact is made with the previous school by telephone to request records. This is followed up in writing. Often, if children from England commence Crown Primary, their reports are not sent. Often reports have to be requested on two or three occasions. Apparently, the opposite occurs when a child leaves Crown Primary and goes to England. Often English schools will not ask for their records (due to a completely different system in operation).

Effectively, when children travel to or from English schools (mainly believed to be due to the different system) records are either not requested or sent to follow the child. Apparently, the Scottish system is based more on comments that teachers make and the actual written documentation. Teachers add their own comments about each child i.e. it is fairly detailed documentation. The English system is mainly a tick box system. The Scottish system includes in the file if there have been links with other agencies such as with Social Work Department or with Medical staff. This is what is called PPR (Pupil Progress Record).

At Crown School, the teacher fills in a leaver's report because they feel it is helpful to the child in settling into the next school. In this report, there are details of the child's progress in reading, what topics they have done, academically where they are and if there was any special learning support needs. That is signed and dated by the teacher and a copy is given to the parent to take with them. A copy is also placed in the "PPR". Social issues are documented there if that is felt to be pertinent. If there are direct Child Protection concerns about a child or if there is any sensitivity about documentation on that record, a phone call is made directly to the Head Teacher of the future school.

Differences in school term time dates between Scotland and England is also problematic.

A form has more recently been designed for Educational staff such that there is always documentation re referral to Social Work. There is also a designated person in each school nominated by the Head Teacher, whose role it is to complete that form.

Education 5

Director of Education

Education 5 brought to my attention two key issues for future consideration. One was in relation to the absences at school. In Education 5's view the Area Education Manager would probably not have been alerted in this case, so early on in a young person's school career, especially as there was open parent communication established between the school and the parent to flag up concerns at that stage. Nevertheless, had the pattern continued Education 5 would have expected that the absences would have been flagged to the Area Education Manager.

Education 5's second concern related to the manner in which Danielle was withdrawn from school and taken off the school roll. Education 5 described the established procedure for Scotland whereby if a concern is expressed either by a School or the Area Education Manager, that a child has been withdrawn from the school, taken off the roll and yet the notes have not been called for, a note would be put round all the Education authorities asking for information on the child or family. Education 5 felt that currently the arrangements were too loose and as a consequence of that the Director of Education in Highland had already introduced new procedures and new policies for Head Teachers on an interim basis. The interim direction was that if within ten school days a record had not been requested, that the Area Education Manager should be informed and thereafter the matter handed over to the Area Officer who would liaise with Social Work. If there were concerns identified, Social Work Services would take up the case and provide a copy of this to Education. Some capacity issues have been raised by Social Work staff on the ground in relation to this implementation, particularly due to Social Work having an already pressed service. Education 5 appreciated that but was not prepared to use capacity as a reason for not introducing best practice. Education 5 indicated that the First Minister for Scotland and the Prime Minister of the U.K. had agreed that the respective Education Departments would work together to prepare U.K. wide requirements on pupil transfers. The Child Protection Steering Group of the Scottish Executive Reform Programme are maintaining an interest in that. There was no indication at the stage of interview of the timescale for publication of the new policy which would be U.K. wide.

I further enquired of Education 5 in relation to his views on inter-agency communication and the whole issue of inter-agency information sharing in Highland. At that stage Education 5 was also at the concluding stage of leading a report on another serious critical incident involving a baby. In light of that and in his role he very strongly stated that best practice in Child Protection would confirm that as a cornerstone one needs to have effective communications, effective information sharing, effective assessment. All of that needs to be inter-agency as well as within the agency. On further questioning, Education 5 did say that Crown Primary School did not have access at that time to some of the Health records that some professionals may have had relating to Danielle. Neither were Crown Primary School made aware of the kind of social/criminal background that surrounded the mother. This led to discussion on the importance of training of staff at all levels

within the Education System. Child Protection training has now been introduced as part of the induction training of all Education staff. Other aspects of training were being rolled out. Education 5 thought that we have at our disposal nowadays the huge advantage of information technology. Therefore it should not be beyond the wit of man to establish a shared information and indeed an assessment system that would protect Scotland's children. Common standards were required to work on in terms of young people's records, their files, the I.T. Systems as well as addressing some professional protocols including in particular the sharing of information by medical professionals. Education 5 stated that his ideal for the future would be one inter-agency file for one child i.e. "the one file child". Education 5 spoke about some of the particular challenges in relation to Highland.

- The challenge in relation to the geography of Highland
- The challenge in relation to resources
- The challenge in relation to availability of qualified personnel.

The interview was drawn to a close in discussing involvement and support required of local communities in ensuring the safety of our young people. A school has only a child for six hours a day, five days a week, 190 days per year. There must additionally be a community safety dimension. The discussion concluded with agreement that some form of Central Helpline Number for people to contact directly if they had a concern about a child would be most helpful.