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Speech in the Scottish Parliament

Right to Read campaign

I congratulate Alison McInnes on securing the debate.

It shows that there is an interest across the Parliament in the right to read campaign, the aim of which is for everyone to be able to read the same book at the same time and at the same price.

I am particularly pleased that the motion singles out Craigiebarns primary school in Dundee, which I used to visit regularly as it was one of the feeder primaries for the school at which I worked.

Indeed, I still keep in touch with it and am very aware of the excellent work that has gone on there for years and still goes on.

All children must have access to books not only to feed their imagination but to give them essential knowledge about our world.

Primary and secondary school pupils need a range of curriculum materials; it is, as Alison McInnes made clear, a long list and includes fiction, text books, work books, work sheets, assessment materials and examination papers.

The books for all project, which began in June 2006, picked up on the Labour-led Administration's excellent work.

Labour is committed to literacy for all and promoting the right to read, and we feel that there is a need not only to co-ordinate all the good work that is being done in schools throughout the country but to ensure that it is properly funded.

I have often thought that the services of speaking books for the visually impaired should have been rolled out to people who could not access text, and I am delighted that such connections have been made in the right to read campaign.

Given that everyone will benefit, it is essential that the Government responds to this issue and I look forward to hearing the minister's ideas on how we can end the book famine that 3 million people in the United Kingdom still face.

Huge improvements in technology have made it easier to access books.

For example, parents can let their children listen to books on tapes and CDs.

Indeed, such a method is open to everyone, whether they have a visual impairment—which, after all, can affect the old as well as the young—or whether they have a difficulty such as dyslexia or another learning disability. Such tools are widely available commercially and libraries throughout Scotland are well stocked with them.

I draw the chamber's attention to the inquiry into disability that the Equal Opportunities Committee in the previous session undertook.

The committee's report was published simultaneously in accessible format, which is an excellent example of how the right to read can be taken seriously and a very practical demonstration of how the Parliament can lead on such issues.

Moreover, the debate's web page contains the very important information that the Parliament is committed to engaging with all the people of Scotland.

In line with that aim, our information is available in a range of accessible formats and languages to assist everyone in engaging equally with the Parliament.

We must also act on the RNIB Scotland report "Make it Count—Election experience of people with sight loss", which examines institute members' voting experience at last year's Scottish elections.

The right to read must extend to the right to read ballot papers and voting instructions, to ensure that everyone can take a proper part in the democratic process.

In 2006, the Labour-led Administration funded a symposium on accessible digital curriculum resources.

Now that a year has passed, I call on the Government to work with stakeholders to organise a similar event to discuss the findings of the working group on the "Books for All: Accessible curriculum materials for pupils with additional support needs" report.

I also wholeheartedly support the call for a national transcription service.

WEBSITE LINKS

MARLYN GLEN www.marlynglen.org.uk

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