

PETITION PE1391

RESPONSE BY THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

1. In relation to the proposals made by Renfrewshire Council in January 2011 for a "Revised Model for the Delivery of Primary Education", the EIS fully supported the campaign of opposition which was led by the Petitioners, the Renfrewshire Parent Council Forum. As part of that campaign, the EIS conducted an indicative ballot of its Primary members in Renfrewshire. On a 75% turnout, 97% of respondents voted to reject the proposals and to support industrial action. In the event, the proposal was set aside.
2. Subsequently, the Annual General Meeting of the EIS, held on 9-11 June 2011 in Perth, adopted the following Resolution:

"This AGM condemns and opposes the dilution of education provision incurred by using non-GTCS registered staff in lieu of GTCS registered teachers and instructs Council to campaign to ensure all classes are taught by qualified GTCS registered teachers."
3. The EIS strongly holds to the view that the delivery of teaching time and the curriculum should be undertaken only by GTCS registered teachers.
4. The Renfrewshire Council proposals uncovered a lacuna in respect of pupils' curricular/teaching time entitlements. While schools are required by statute to be open to pupils for 190 days in a school year, there is no stipulation as to the number of hours during which they are to be open on any day or week.
5. There is a very long-established convention that the Primary pupil week is 25 hours (though sometimes fewer for pupils in the Early Years or, for a limited period of induction, for P1 pupils). This convention appears to have been based on the long-standing maximum class contact time of 25 hours for Primary teachers. However, when the 2001 Agreement moved to harmonise all teachers' maximum contact time at 22.5 hours, there was no expectation or appetite for also reducing the pupil week (apart from Renfrewshire Council, which moved on this almost 7 years after the event).
6. For Secondary pupils there is an equally long-established convention that the timetabled pupil week is 27.5 hours. Again, however, this is not prescribed in statute.
7. The 2001 Agreement reduced Secondary teachers' maximum weekly contact time from 23.5 to 22.5 hours. Since there has always been a gap between the Secondary pupil week and the teachers' contact maximum – this change was less significant in the Secondary sector; Secondary pupils have always been taught by a number of different teachers. However, in Primary where, traditionally, pupils mostly were taught by the same

teacher for the full week, (albeit with many exceptions), this change required a greater degree of adjustment to past practice.

8. We are aware only of Renfrewshire Council contemplating the use of non-teachers to staff this weekly 2.5 hour requirement. Bearing in mind that the change in Primary teachers' contact time was introduced from as far back as August 2004, it is clear that the Renfrewshire proposal was driven by budgetary pressures and not by any credible educational rationale. Given ongoing pressures, there remains a risk that Councils will be driven further to explore different dilutionary measures, including cuts in teaching time.
9. In the absence of any concrete specification of the length of the pupil week, it appears to be open to any Education Authority to vary at will the teaching time it offers to its pupils. In view of continuing budgetary pressures, it is understandable that many parents would prefer their children to have clearly specified and enforceable entitlements to teaching time beyond stipulating only the number of days in the school year. Otherwise, the only redress left to parents is to question whether an Authority, in offering just 22.5 hours weekly teaching time, is meeting its general obligation under Section 1 of the 1980 Act to provide adequate and efficient school education.
10. If legislation were to be contemplated some care would need to be taken in its drafting. The petition appears to propose a 25 hour per week teaching entitlement for all pupils, apart from some flexibility in respect of P1 and P2. If adopted, this would reduce the typical Secondary teaching week by 9%. Furthermore, while not advocating any expansion in the pupil week which is already quite long by international comparisons, we would suggest it might be prudent to express any pupil entitlement as a minimum, rather than an absolute figure.