

PE1391/D

Learning Directorate

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Alison Wilson
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

18 August 2011

Dear Alison,

CONSIDERATION OF PETITIONS PE 1391

I am writing in response to the petition by Renfrewshire Parent Council Forum calling on the Scottish Parliament *to urge the Scottish Government to make it a legal requirement that qualified teachers teach children for 25 hours in a normal school week, subject to existing local flexibility of school hours in primary 1 and 2.*

The Committee will know that teachers have a maximum class contact time of 22.5 hours per week. In essence this means that for the remaining 2.5 hours of the primary week pupils are taught not by their classroom teacher but by other teachers. Our understanding of the proposal by Renfrewshire Council was to pilot bringing in experts in drama and sport to enrich the learning experience of their pupils.

The Scottish Government certainly agrees that the issues raised in the Committee debate are worthy of consideration. In particular I note Mr Stewart's views on the relevance of other professionals in the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence.

I have outlined the Scottish Government's views on the specific questions raised in the petition as requested on the attached proforma. However, it is worth pointing out that, as no doubt the Committee will know, the Scottish Government established in January an independent review of teacher employment arrangements chaired by Professor Gerry McCormac.



The Review has been asked to consider the current arrangements for teacher employment practices in Scotland to ensure progress on the educational outcomes that we all wish to see for our children and young people. Part of its work will examine the role of other staff in schools and their relationship with teachers.

We expect the Review to publish its recommendations by mid September. I hope this is helpful.

RACHEL SUNDERLAND

PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF PE1391 QUESTIONS ARISING FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Scottish Government has been asked for its views on the issues raised in the petition by Renfrewshire Parent Council Forum. The petitions itself raises four key questions:

- Should teaching time of 25 hours be protected by law?
- Should individual authorities be able to define the number of hours in the teaching week?
- Is it acceptable that individual authorities can, by lack of legislation, redefine what education is (with particular reference to Renfrewshire Council's attempts to replace teaching with "enrichment" for part of the school week)?
- Should Scotland provide an education system that is equal in its provision for all?

The Scottish Government expects all local authorities to provide a quality education that is fair and consistent for all of Scotland's children. Whilst local authorities have the flexibility to consider options which might best suit their local needs they have a duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to meet their statutory obligations to provide adequate and efficient school education. The Committee will know that the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975 make provisions that schools must be open for 190 days per year and that only registered teachers can teach a class.

The Scottish Government does not define the length and structure of the individual school day or the minimum class contact time that pupils have with teachers in legislation as we believe that local authorities should have the discretion to manage their schools. However, local authorities and schools are subject to HMIE inspections on the quality of the curriculum being provided and the outcomes in terms of pupils' learning and achievements.

More widely the Committee will no doubt be aware that that the Scottish Government established in January an independent review of teacher employment arrangements chaired by Professor Gerry McCormac. The Review has been asked to consider the current arrangements for teacher employment practices in Scotland to ensure progress on the educational outcomes that we all wish to see for our children and young people. As part of its work, the Review will examine the role of other staff in schools and the relationship between their responsibilities and those of teachers, and the need for a more flexible workforce that supports Curriculum for Excellence and excellent education for the future. The committee may be aware that Renfrewshire Council decided that further to the announcement of the Review, their proposal was perhaps better explored in a national context. We expect a Report with recommendations to be published in mid September.

Scotland does provide an education system that is equal in its provision for all but this does not, and cannot, mean that young people learn the same things at the same stage in every school. Every school and pupil is different and Curriculum for Excellence takes this into account so that the needs and abilities of the learner dictate the pace and nature of their progress through the Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. It is right that it is for schools and local authorities to develop their curriculum in light of local needs and circumstances, it is not for central government to determine this.

Every child and young person in Scotland is entitled to experience a broad general education. This takes place from the early years to the end of S3 and is represented by learning across all the experiences and outcomes to the third curriculum level together with those selected for study at the fourth level, as far as is consistent with each child and young person's needs. Every child is also entitled, as described in 'Building the Curriculum 3'¹ to support to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which Curriculum for Excellence can provide. This includes support to enable them to gain access to learning opportunities that will meet their needs and to prepare for changes and choices and be supported through these.

Curriculum for Excellence is a curriculum for all. It is not a static programme, but involves a continuous process of review to make sure that the curriculum remains up-to-date. It aims to be more flexible, offering a framework within which schools and teachers can work. A curriculum that will support them in developing a wider range of skills, as well as deeper knowledge and understanding which will enable them to develop skills for life, learning and work in an ever changing world, locally, nationally and globally.

The Scottish Government is committed to promoting parental involvement at all levels in our education system. We strive to ensure that the views of parents and carers are considered when developing education policies at a national level. We work in partnership with the National Parent Forum of Scotland and other parent organisations.

All education authorities in Scotland must actively promote parental involvement in their schools, in line with the provisions in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement Act) 2006. The Act makes provision for parents to be members of the Parent Forum at a school, and to have their views represented to the school, education authority and others, through a representative Parent Council for the school.

I hope that this is helpful.

¹ <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/buildingyourcurriculum/policycontext/btc/btc3.asp>