

**PE1391/E**

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

19 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.*

I have outlined Education Scotland's views on the specific questions raised in the petition, as requested, and I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Dr Gill Robinson  
HM Chief Inspector  
Education Scotland

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<sup>1</sup> This is a service for deaf users. Please do not use this number for voice calls as this will not connect.

## PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF PE1391 QUESTIONS ARISING

Education Scotland has been asked for its views on the issues raised in the petition by Renfrewshire Parent Council Forum. Our response to the key questions raised is noted below.

- **What are your views on the issues raised in the petition?**

The petitioner seeks to ensure that it is 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.

There are some differences in the length of the school day in primary schools across Scotland, but almost all of these relate to the hours undertaken by children in the early years. The school week in secondary schools is usually longer than 25 hours. The following comments thus relate solely to primary school provision.

In inspecting primary schools, Education Scotland's focus is on the quality of children's learning experiences and on the outcomes children achieve as a result of these experiences. We comment on staffing arrangements, including school hours, if we consider that these have an impact on the quality of curricular provision and thus on children's experiences and achievements.

At present, any change in curricular arrangements falls under *SEED Circular 3-2001 on Curriculum Flexibility*. This Circular sets clear expectations that such changes will involve consultation with parents, be clear about the educational gain intended from the proposals, and have sound arrangements for evaluation. The Circular further states that "*Innovative approaches to the content and delivery of the curriculum which fulfil the above criteria will be welcomed, and judged on their merits in terms of the outcomes achieved.*" It would thus be important that any significant changes to the curriculum meet these stated expectations. This Circular is an important point of reference in school inspections.

All activities related to the curriculum in primary schools are directed by the headteacher, with delegated responsibility from the education authority. The headteacher, in turn, delegates responsibility for the planning, delivery and evaluation of suitable learning experiences to class teachers. Providing appropriate activities involves teachers working flexibly with partners, including professionals other than teaching professionals and non-professionals, to deliver a range of learning experiences which will allow children to learn and achieve. In some weeks these learning experiences may be taught exclusively by class teachers. In other weeks, these may involve children in a range of experiences which are planned and organised by the class teacher but not taught by a teacher. This type of approach has been part of practice in Scotland for a considerable period of time, and also fits well with expected approaches within Curriculum for Excellence

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence lay strong emphasis on the value of involving a range of partners in children's learning and on the benefits which this can provide. Curriculum for Excellence also has a focus on outcomes for learners. Schools are asked to achieve national expectations across the curriculum in ways that address identified local and individual needs. Each education authority and school can thus decide how best, in local circumstances, to develop and employ partnerships and resources to enhance the quality of children's learning experiences. The focus should always be outcomes for learners and how to make these better for all.

Partnerships can involve children in a range of valuable learning experiences. These may include residential outdoor learning, musical instruction and sporting and cultural activities. These activities would be organised by teaching staff as part of the school's curriculum, under the direction of the headteacher, but may not be delivered by qualified teachers. Indeed, teachers may not be able to offer the types of specific activities provided in these instances.

A statutory requirement that all children should be taught by qualified teachers for 25 hours each week would, we believe, be unduly inflexible and potentially detrimental to children's education. Such a requirement might constrain many of the range of valuable partnership activities that operate currently.

- **Are you aware of any other local authorities who currently do this or who may be planning to do this?**

The evidence we have gathered from our engagement with schools and local authorities indicates that staff across Scotland are reflecting professionally and continuously on how best to achieve the intentions of Curriculum for Excellence. They are addressing these in a range of diverse and sometimes innovative ways.

We are not aware of any local authority making it an explicit requirement that within the 25 hour primary school week all activities must be taught at all times by a qualified teacher. We do not know of any who plan to do so.

We are not aware that any authority has specified an amount of time within the 25 hour primary school week in which activities should **not** be taught by a qualified teacher. We do not know of any who plan to do so.

The McCormac Review of teachers' conditions of employment, which is due to report in early autumn 2011, will provide a focus for further consideration of the issues raised by this petition. Consideration of the school week and the concomitant responsibility on teachers for organising and evaluating learning activities within that week are likely to be part of this consideration. It is unlikely that there will be significant changes in this area until the publication of the McCormac Review.

- **Views on the issues raised during discussion of the petition.**

It is clear that there was a full and detailed discussion of key and pertinent issues during the consideration of the petition. These deliberations will be helpful in informing the discussions which are likely to take place around the publication of the McCormac Report.

Education Scotland  
August 2011