

naire a' Chaibineit airson Foghlaim agus Ionnsachadh Fad-bheatha  
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Scottish Parliament  
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Ar faidhle/Our ref: POL/11625  
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Dear Stewart,

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2012 seeking the Government's view on the Committee's consideration of Public Petition 1391 on 11 December 2012 and the general issues raised by the Petition.

The Scottish Government, in line with much of the evidence the Committee has heard to date, does not believe that the introduction of legislation to provide for all pupils in primary schools to be taught by qualified teachers for 25 hours per week as called for by the Petitioner is the way to proceed. The legal responsibility for the provision of education rests with local authorities and it is therefore for them to provide adequate and efficient education to all pupils in their schools. This approach allows flexibility and innovation to meet local circumstances which is at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence.

You will also beware that The Requirements for Teachers (Scotland) Regulations 2005 require that education authorities employ adequate numbers of teachers in schools under their management with the appropriate professional skills and knowledge necessary to enable those teachers to undertake the teaching duties allocated to them. Those Regulations go on to require that education authorities shall employ only registered teachers.

As the Committee will know, Curriculum for Excellence requires a transformational change in the way we look at education in Scotland and aims to drive up attainment and ensure that we have an education system that is fit for the challenges of our rapidly-changing world. It requires creativity and flexibility, and a new way of looking at how we deliver the best education for our young people. Other learning partners have in the past and will continue to support schools in providing the best learning experiences for children. Curriculum for Excellence encourages partnership working, and it is for schools and authorities to decide how best to do this, ensuring that at all times the interests of learners is at the heart of planning and decision making.

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Partnership working to deliver Curriculum for Excellence also includes effectively involving parents in decisions that affect their children's education. It is the duty of authorities under the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 to promote the involvement of parents in the education being provided to pupils. An authority must set out in their Parental Involvement Strategy how they will consult with parents and both schools and local authorities must take account of any representations made by a Parent Council. Such representations can cover any matter relating to the education of pupils. In the case of the changes referred to in the Petition, and indeed any other major changes being introduced which affect the education of their children, we would expect Renfrewshire, or any other authority, to carry out a full and effective consultation with parents before making any decisions.

The findings in Education Scotland's report '*The involvement of external experts in school education*' published on 6 November 2012 confirms that well planned and managed use of external experts can and does enhance both teacher professionalism and outcomes for young people. Pupils and teachers are benefiting from the contributions of external experts at all stages of school education and across the curriculum. The report identifies features of good practice in local authorities and is clear that whilst external experts represent a valuable resource which teachers can use to support the learning for children and young people, they are not a substitute for the professionalism of the teacher. I fully accept the recommendations in the report.

I would like to assure the Committee, as they are already aware, that I would not support the variation that was suggested by Renfrewshire Council. I do, however, have every confidence in local authorities to ensure that all of Scotland's children will receive the best quality of education to achieve their potential.

**MICHAEL RUSSELL**