

Cross Party Group on Children and Young People

Minutes

**Tuesday 6 December 2016 3-4.30pm
Committee Room 1 The Scottish Parliament
Chair: Alex Cole Hamilton MSP**

DELIVERY PLAN FOR SCOTTISH EDUCATION GOVERNANCE REVIEW CONSULTATION EVENT

WITH

JOHN SWINNEY MSP

**DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER AND CABINET SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND
SKILLS**

MSPs in attendance: Jenny Gilruth; Alex Cole Hamilton; Claire Haughey; Brian Whittle; John Swinney; James Dornan and Jeremy Balfour

Introduction to the background for the meeting:

On 13 September this year, a Scottish Government consultation entitled *Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity – a governance review* was launched, seeking views on how education is run, who should take decisions in relation to the education of children and young people and how the funding of education can be made fairer.

A series of engagement events have been planned throughout the consultation period. This meeting of the CPG was another opportunity for the children and young people's sectors to engage and feed into this process.

About the event

The event took the format of a facilitated discussion chaired by Alex Cole Hamilton MSP based on the themes and questions identified in the consultation document.

The event offered a chance to explore views with representatives from across the children's sector.

For smaller organisations and individuals who may not have the capacity to respond to the consultation document, this event provided the opportunity to feed their views directly to the Deputy First Minister.

The event

Welcome from the chair, minutes of the last meeting and matters arising.

Introduction from John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills which included the following points:

- Welcomed pupils from George Heriots.
- Government are in listening mode and the discussion will continue.
- Education is not just about schools, development outwith the school format like Girlguiding Scotland or LGBT Youth is important as well.
- The recent statistics show a fall in our performance. We need to look at the strengths and weaknesses:

OECD report said that we need to:

- Develop better assessment to ensure it's the same across the board.
- Simplify the curriculum
- Empower school leading to review of governance.

- Strengthen leadership, remove bureaucracy, empower schools etc.

- If the relationship between teacher and pupil is key, then we need to look at how we strengthen that. We need to look at the role of different agencies and organisations and how they can add value.

- What about the role of parents? Parents are in my mind the most under-utilised resource we have, but one of the most important.

- There are excellent schools in all parts of the country, but there is no systemic approach to organising this.

Member contributions

A range of members were present, the following is a selection of points made to the Education Secretary:

Cathy McCulloch, Children's Parliament - school culture is the most important thing. Our school culture depends on headteachers. The way around that is for the Scottish government to commit to a rights based approach. This is a minimum set of standards as to how we engage, with parents, children, teachers.

Amy Woodhouse, Children in Scotland - I have concerns about ASL and how we can secure better performance and think that devolution to headteachers will provide more disparity.

POINTS from John Swinney:

Ethos is definitely important. You can feel ethos in a school. If you go to the heart of curriculum for excellence, there are four values right at the centre of it - the same values that are written on the mace in the Scottish Parliament.

The challenge is to make it systemic but that's not to make them the same.

We need to make sure to equip and develop headship, leadership qualifications to deliver good training for headteachers as it's crucial to develop good ethos.

Response to the rights based agenda idea. I've been to visit the school at Craigmiller, they received an award from UNICEF for their work on the rights based agenda. The children were so empowered, it meant a lot to them and to the school.

Pauline Cavanagh, Partners in Advocacy - mainstreaming, about 90 percent of referrals are because of a lack of support. This needs to be very high up on the SG agenda. autism awareness training is optional - it should be mandatory.

Linda O'Neil CELCIS - we have some of the worst attainment figures. Relationships are very important to pupils, how will the governance review support building these relationships.

POINTS from John Swinney:

Training for particular circumstances, such as autism is crucial. One of the things we have to be aware of is that if we pursue a mainstream approach we need to create a space where teachers can acquire new skills. It cannot just be at initial training where this is done. We need to create space, by reducing bureaucracy to allow teachers the opportunity to learn and grow within their position.

I've been struck that when it comes to LAC, we have a raft of legislation. The thing that makes a difference is always a person, not a regulation, so training is really important.

Kim Hartley Kean, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists - Upskilling of teachers

Eileen Prior, Scottish Parent Teacher Council - I agree with what parents can bring to the party. I come at this as a parent. We talk about capacity, parents have enormous untapped capacity. It is easy to look at parents who are struggling and think that parents don't have anything to offer. The truth is that schools must recognise that not everyone

can sit round a table like this and make a contribution. But people have capacity and different skills that can be utilised.

Cara Spence LGBT - there is great work, but it is not consistent. When it works it's about leadership, not just the heads.

CPAG - cost of the school day. The cost of school trips, how do we address barriers but continue things that enrich the school experience.

POINTS from John Swinney:

I am keen to intensify the role of parents. To do that, you have to create an atmosphere of there being a school community. I think a lot of this comes down to leadership. Good practice, inevitably is good leadership. I want local authorities to acknowledge that there are deficiencies in the way they work. I want local authorities to be more open to school choosing how they meet the needs of pupils. Better partnership between local authority and school is necessary to go forward.

In terms of deprivation, we will put more resources into closing the attainment gap and removing some of the barriers. If schools get more power they are able to choose where they can spend their resources and it can remove those barriers.

Olivia, pupil from George Heriots School - On technology, how do you keep teachers up to date?

Jenny Adams, Parent Network Scotland - putting the schools in the driving seat sounds good, but we get approached by our members saying that schools struggle with talking to parents.

POINTS from John Swinney:

Pupils should be taking the IT lessons for teachers! There is a general decline in science across the world. One of the commentators asked the question, what is the impact of the time that we spend online? We need to be alert to the changes in the learning environment. The way we learn would be assisted if we made better use of digital technology. There are acute challenges in the rural areas, we need to look at this.

The general comment I would make, we've got to get it right for every child.

What does parental involvement look like? Assisting the delivery of the curriculum, questions about the direction of the school. The schools need to open up and start reaching out past the school boundary.

The meeting then moved to open discussion after the Deputy First Minister departed.

Alex Cole Hamilton made the closing comments from chair and it was agreed that dates and subjects for further meetings would be circulated to the membership in due course.