



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01391

Name of petitioner

Susan Calcluth-Russell on behalf of Renfrewshire Parent Council Forum

Petition title

Protecting the right of children to be taught by qualified teachers for 25 hours a week

Petition summary

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.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

As this petition has arisen from a policy affecting the education of children within Renfrewshire Council, much of the initial action taken to resolve the issue has been carried out at a local level.

A strong parent's campaign, led by Renfrewshire Parent Council Forum, was established. It opposed the Council's plan to replace teachers in primary schools with non-teaching staff for 2.5 hours a week. Hundreds of parents wrote to councillors asking them to stop the policy from being implemented. Parents approached their MSPs asking if the Scottish Parliament could allow such a major change to education. Many visited MSP and councillor surgeries to voice their concerns. A set of briefing papers written by the Acting Chair of the Forum detailed the many reasons why the policy did not stand up to scrutiny. Teachers and teaching regulatory bodies supported the campaign, as did a number of MSPs from across Scotland. Over 1,000 people attended a rally in Paisley to protest against the move, and 3,000 signed a petition. In response to the level of opposition, the Council decided to suspend the policy and on 2 March it agreed to completely withdraw it.

However, as the campaign has progressed, it has become very apparent that this is not a local issue but one that has far-reaching consequences for Scottish education as a whole. In a bid to look at its wider implications national bodies were asked their views on the policy.

The General Teaching Council deemed it 'highly unprofessional and potentially illegal'. The main teaching union in Scotland, the EIS, condemned it with 97% of teachers voting against the policy in an indicative ballot.

The National Parent Forum for Scotland discussed the issues affecting Renfrewshire in a national context at its annual meeting on 5 March. They also back the call for new legislation for which clearly states that children across Scotland require to be taught by qualified teachers for 25 hours a week.

Despite our success in resolving the issue in Renfrewshire for the immediate future, we have not resolved the issue for the future or in a national context. When this matter was

raised with the Scottish Government, its response was that the length of the school day and week “are matters for the discretion of the education authorities. However, no response was given regarding the issue of children being taught by qualified teachers for 25 hours a week.

Petition background information

The reason for lodging this petition is to protect, by law, ‘the widely accepted norm’, whereby, qualified teachers teach children for 25 hours in a normal school week. This is the current precedent in Scottish education but is not required by law. This petition is asking the Scottish Parliament to make this a legal requirement.

The Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975 states that education must be provided for 190 days per year (Regulation 5) but is silent about the numbers of hours in the school week or the number of hours defined as education time. This loophole allowed Renfrewshire Council to adopt a policy of cutting education time and replacing it with an ‘enrichment’ programme that did not require qualified teachers. The intention of the “Revised Model for the Delivery of Primary Education’, which the Council wanted to implement in primary schools from April 2011, was to replace teachers with non-teaching staff for 2.5 hours per week in order to save the Council £1.2m. In this time children would receive an ‘enrichment programme’. This effectively meant that primary school children in Renfrewshire would lose 2.5 hours per week of education and that in this time no teachers would be present in class. Non-teaching staff were to be paid less than half that of a qualified teacher in order to make the necessary savings.

This is not merely, or specifically, a Renfrewshire issue. It is a national issue. The Renfrewshire policy was abandoned because parents and teachers opposed it – not because it was proven illegal. Current legislation does not protect from a similar proposal being introduced in Renfrewshire or elsewhere in Scotland. The issues affecting Renfrewshire have highlighted the fact that current legislation does not protect against education hours being cut by individual local authorities.

Throughout Scotland, the education of children has been entrusted to professional teachers and children have received the same amount of teaching hours (apart from in some authorities where infants have a staggered introduction to the full school week). However, education legislation does not make this a requirement. Current law states that children must be educated for 190 days. It does not define the length of the individual school day or week for pupils. It also states that teachers can only deliver ‘teaching’, but does not protect against councils cutting ‘teaching time’.

The Scottish Government states that the length of the school day and week “are matters for the discretion of the education authorities. Authorities do, however, adhere to a widely accepted norm for the length of the pupil week in primary schools - 25 hours”

In the current financial climate, Councils are looking to make large reductions in spending. We are asking the Scottish Parliament to question whether the assumption ‘that local authorities will continue to deliver the widely accepted norm of 25 teaching hours’ is a good enough basis for the delivery of education. We are asking the Scottish Parliament to review current legislation and introduce new laws that require children to be taught by qualified teachers for 25 hours per week.

Without such legislation, core education will be left vulnerable to damaging cuts. Councils throughout Scotland are already looking at ways to take advantage of the lack of legislation on teaching hours and the wide interpretation of the Scotland’s new Curriculum for Excellence in order to change the structure and provision of education. Some proposals have looked at cutting the number of school days, others have looked at bringing in non-teaching staff to deliver ‘enrichment’. Without closing the loopholes in legislation, local authorities will be able to fundamentally change the very meaning and structure of education to suit their own budgetary requirements. This will lead to a fragmented Scottish education system, where quality will vary widely from region to

region.

The fundamental questions we ask:

- Should teaching time of 25 hours be protected by law?
- Should individual local authorities be able to define the number of hours in the teaching week? Again, current Education policy states that the length of the school day and week “are matters for the discretion of the education authorities.
- Is it acceptable that individual local 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)? The Scottish Government regarded this as a matter for local authorities to address. When asked about the issue in a national context the First Minister and the Education Secretary would not consider the wider implications.
- Should Scotland provide an education system that is equal in its provision for all?

Further information:

A set of briefing papers entitled ‘Save our Teachers’, details the many reasons why Renfrewshire Council’s policy on the ‘Revised Model for the Delivery of Primary Education’, did not stand up to public scrutiny. These were written by Renfrewshire Parent Council Forum’s Acting Chair and can be found under ‘resources’ at the Forum’s web site: <http://renfrewshireparents.schools.officelive.com/default.aspx>

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01391>

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NO

How many signatures have you collected so far?

1878

Closing date for collecting signatures online

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