

PE1391/B

Renfrewshire Council

Consideration of Petition PE1391

16 August 2011

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

The education policy board of Renfrewshire Council approved the "Revised Model for the Delivery of Primary Education" at its meeting of 13 January 2011.

The proposal with the revised model sought to develop primary school provision in Renfrewshire to meet the aims of Curriculum for Excellence and address the financial pressures faced by the council.

The proposal redesigned the existing 25 hour pupil week within Renfrewshire primary schools into two components of: a teaching week of 22.5 hours; and a further 2.5 hours during which children would work on a range of cultural, citizenship and sporting learning activities.

Children would have continued to be taught by teachers, registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), during the 22.5 hour teaching week. In the remaining 2.5 hours children would have worked with other council employed staff on an enrichment programme of learning activities designed to support the delivery of the experiences and outcomes as set out within Curriculum for Excellence documentation.

It is recognised within Curriculum for Excellence that there are a range of different professionals who contribute to the learning of children and young people. The council proposal sought to ensure that these opportunities became an integral part of the curriculum entitlement for all children in Renfrewshire.

The current terms and conditions of teachers mean that there is a requirement to provide a teaching staff allocation of 1.1 fte for every class due to the disparity between teacher class contact time (22.5hrs per week) and the traditional length of the pupil week (25 hrs per week). The cost of this additional staffing compliment for primary schools in Renfrewshire is approximately £2.5m. Through the delivery of the enrichment programme of 2.5 hours, within the overall pupil week of 25 hours, by staff who were not teachers the council would have realised an annual saving of £1.2m.

Renfrewshire Council did not seek to exploit 'a loophole in the law'. The length of the pupil week has always been determined locally to suit local needs. It has become 25 hours for most schools through custom and practice. There are, however, a variety of models in existence across

Scotland. These relate to when P1 children attend school for a full day and the length of the school day for P1-P3 pupils. Any legislative change to existing arrangements would limit the scope for flexibility in the models utilised across the country.

The discussion from the petition notes that current practice relies on the covering of non class contact time in schools in Renfrewshire by classroom assistants. This is not the case. Each school is allocated the full amount of teacher staffing to ensure all classes are covered by a teacher for the full pupil week of 25 hours. It is not the case that parents were told that the practice in Renfrewshire schools was to use classroom assistants to cover this time.

The experience of children in schools extends beyond a narrow definition of the curriculum. Getting it Right for Every Child seeks to ensure the needs and aspirations of the whole child are catered for. This often relies on staff other than teachers having a key role in the work of a school. As a result a range of professionals are routinely involved in the learning experience of children and young people in and out of schools across Scotland. They provide an extremely valuable resource and learning would be much poorer without their contribution. They bring a different range of experience and professionalism to the classroom and to activities beyond the school day which is highly valued and of very high quality. For example children learn from sports coaches, drama tutors, artists and through attendance at clubs and other organised groups such as Guides, Scouts and the Boys Brigade.

Current practice would not usually involve teachers in directing sports coaches and other similar professionals in school. It would be more accurate to describe the role as supervision. The staff that Renfrewshire Council intended to use would have been 'differently qualified' to teachers. They would have had different areas of specialism, and may not have been 'less qualified than teachers'. The experiences/activities offered by specialist staff in the council proposal would have been part of the 25 hour per week educational provision and not just an add-on. The experiences would have been well planned to enrich and enhance learning. The programmes were in the process of being developed prior to the proposed implementation date. They would have been appropriate and relevant to the age and stage of pupils.

As a responsible employer the council would have ensured that, as is the case currently, anyone who has an input to the life of a school would have been subject to the appropriate disclosure checks. The council proposal made clear that the responsibility for the school would have remained with each school's senior management team.

The implementation of the revised primary model in Renfrewshire would not have led to the curriculum being skewed. The balance of the curriculum would not have changed. For example, there was no intention to provide 4.5 hours of physical education within the revised model. The core elements of literacy and numeracy would have continued to be taught by fully qualified GTC registered teachers. The revised model would have ensured that

quality assurance processes would be embedded into the enrichment programme to measure progress, outcomes and impact on pupils' learning.

Why did the Council step back from making the final decision?

Following the decision of the education policy board in January 2011 to approve the "Revised Model for the Delivery of Primary Education", representation was made to the council by parents and the teachers' unions that opposed the decision taken in January to implement the revised model.

In addition, the council was invited to make a submission to the McCormac Review - "The Review of Teacher Employment in Scotland". The council recognised that the issue of teachers' non class contact time was of national significance and was likely to be considered by the McCormac Review.

At a special meeting on 2 March 2011 Renfrewshire Council agreed not to proceed with the implementation of the revised model; to respond to the call for evidence to "The Review of Teacher Employment in Scotland"; and to consider the findings of this review when these are published.