

PE1417/C



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Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
T3.40
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Dear Sir

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1417

Thank you for the opportunity to give our response to the above Petition.

SPTC is a membership organisation for parent groups in schools around Scotland, providing a range of membership benefits as well as information and advice to individual parents who contact us by telephone and email.

Prior to the current moratorium on the closure of rural schools, SPTC regularly had contact with parents in different parts of the country who were often frustrated with the consultation process but most of all felt passionately about the retention of their local school. This same passion is evidenced in the various other changes to the school estate which must be consulted upon under the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010.

Our perspective as a parents' organisation is that the focus in relation to schools should be around local decision making and, ultimately, local accountability. As it stands, the legislation enables call-in to Ministers only where there appear to be serious flaws in the consultation or the decision-making process: a situation we believe is correct.

It is our considered view that the petition before the Committee raises a number of significant issues:

1. If this proposal were adopted, it jeopardises local decision making and accountability in relation to management of the school estate.

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2. We are not convinced that consultations can be considered in terms of majorities, as many consultees may represent any number of individuals or organisations. Consultation responses must be considered in terms of the weight and relevance of the responses, not simply numbers. Local authorities undoubtedly have a significant challenge in this task but we do not believe weight of numbers alone (which could also be manipulated) represents a sound basis for decision making.
3. It also refers to the majority decision reached in the consultation. In fact the consultation harvests views on the proposals, views which the local authority must weigh up.
4. The Commission for Rural Education is currently actively reviewing the arrangement in relation to rural schools and the workings of the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act. We believe the matters raised in this petition logically rest with the Commission and, we can reasonably expect to be addressed in its deliberations.

Once again, we appreciate the opportunity to respond to this petition.

Please contact me should you need further information.

Yours sincerely

Eileen A Prior
Executive Director