

PE1486/A

COSLA Letter of 31 October 2013

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1486

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve national quality in the primary one academic year by reducing average class sizes to 18 with an upper limit of 20; direct additional funding to resource the measures taken with appropriate staff, accommodation and physical resources; protect the family unit through amendment to current policy to ensure that siblings are not refused placing requests to be schooled alongside family members, and proactively prepare for future upsurges in the population to avoid displacement of siblings in primary schools.

COSLA—

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

The evidence on class size reductions is contentious. There is evidence that smaller classes have an effect on pupil learning, particularly in early primary but there is less agreement on the magnitude of the effect, the exact ways in which it works, how the effect compares to other actions e.g. nurturing groups and whether investing in smaller class sizes is value for money.

In 2009/10 the Scottish Government established a working group to look at this issue. The Review of Class Size Control Mechanisms concluded that class size is only one amongst many mechanisms for improving learning and that it is difficult to make a strong case for there being a specific class size on the basis of educational research. Whilst regulation and teacher's terms and conditions have long set the national upper limits on the number of pupils taught in classes, it is important that local authorities and schools have flexibility over delivery and the ability to set locally appropriate policies for improving outcomes for children, including on how we support and organise the workforce.

In summary, measures such as class sizes are input measures. COSLA's preference is to establish the best ways of achieving educational outcomes.

COSLA—

To what extent do you agree that parents should have a statutory right to place siblings together in their chosen school?

Local Authorities work hard with parents to place siblings together at their chosen school wherever possible. Local authorities must retain the ability to place children to meet the needs of their local communities and deliver education for all. At a time of reducing financial budgets this task can prove to be even more difficult. Whilst Local Authorities do endeavour to meet the needs of parents this right risks putting further constraint on the system. If this policy was implemented it would need to be fully costed. Scottish Government would need to provide additional funding to Local Authorities to allow this right to met.