

# Backchat

SPTC Newsletter February 2010

Issue 113



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**Scottish Parent Teacher Council**, the independent voice for parents, is a national organisation. It has been serving parents' groups in schools for more than 60 years.

**Backchat is sent to all members. Would you like to save paper and receive yours by email only? Let us know!**

Write or email with your comments – contact details below.

## The Parents' Voice.....

Ever wanted to get more closely involved with SPTC but can't make a huge commitment of time? Since I took up my role here in January I've been mulling over the same question: how to get parents more involved with the body that represents your concerns to policy makers.

So....here is the proposition. We're calling it Parents' Voice.

We would like a pool of parents who are willing to respond to a maximum of one email a month from us, on just one topic that interests them. We need parents who are particularly interested in one of these areas:

- curriculum
- qualifications
- local authority matters
- child welfare
- parental involvement
- learning and teaching

We can't ever speak for all parents – simply because parental views vary so widely – but we can voice parents' concerns to policy makers and the media. If each member PTA or Parent Council put forward one person for each of these six topic areas, we would have a pool of almost 10,000 people – a pretty impressive figure, and a voice that is difficult to ignore.

**Please help by asking parents at your school to get involved.** We want parents who are passionate! Phone or email with contact details, or go to the website for more information. With enough interest, we will get this up and running during March and provide you with regular updates on the website and in Backchat.

The first six weeks has been exciting, if a little daunting, in this job! I have lots of ideas and look forward to working with you to see the best ones through. Till next time...

Eileen

## Literacy Commission

Former SPTC development manager Judith Gillespie chairs the Literacy Commission, which published its report in December (read the report on the website). Cabinet Secretary Mike Russell has committed to ensuring its findings are integrated into work on Curriculum for Excellence, so we watch with more than a little interest!

## ***Member Funding Survey – Results Reveal Massive Cash Injection from Parents***

**A survey of members carried out over the last month shows that parents of Scotland's school pupils are injecting almost £10 per child into the school system each year: when multiplied up for all children in Scottish state schools, this equates to more than £6.5M of additional funding from parents\*.**

Other key facts and figures from the survey:

- 97% of PTAs and Parent Councils organise fundraising activities
- An estimated £800,000 is expected to be raised by our survey participants this year
- The three top areas for spending by PTAs and Parent Councils are: activities & outings, computers & electronic goods and outdoor play equipment
- Decisions on spending were most likely to be made through discussion between parents and school

Not only are PTAs and Parent Councils raising phenomenal sums of money (in one case £143 per head): the money is being used to purchase items which would previously have been considered core rather than additional, particularly when it comes to computers and other electronic devices. We were also interested to see that the decision as to where money is spent generally rests with parents and school jointly. Our advice always to PTAs and Parent Councils is that this is best practice.

A total of 265 responses were received, some 15.6% of our membership, and they are still coming in. The data and graphs will be on our website.

### **School Budgets**

In the survey we also asked for feedback on school budgets – are they being cut and, if so, by how much?

The response demonstrated clearly that parents are unsure how to access accurate information about school budgets, as well as demonstrating that there is confusion about what element of the budget is and is not devolved. Many respondents said they knew there were cuts but didn't know how much. In all, the picture that emerged from the survey was unclear and gave us no firm steer about what is happening on the ground: we feel that very fact is sufficient to ring alarm bells about the level of real parental involvement and participation at school level.

\*based on estimated 665,000 state school pupils in 2009

## **Policy Update**

The early part of 2010 has been a busy time for SPTC, with three different consultations to respond to.

### Additional Support for Learning Act

This consultation was concerned with the supporting legislation for the 2009 Act. There is a lot of detail in the consultation, but the key elements we commented on were:

- referring LA's refusal to action a specific assessment to dispute resolution
- failure to provide the support in a CSP being referred to the ASN Tribunal
- time limits on local authorities to respond to a CSP request and to decide if a CSP is required
- the workings and timescales of the ASN Tribunals

More information on all of the above is on the website.

### Protection of Vulnerable Groups

Previous Backchats have covered this topic, and in January we commented on the consultation documents for supporting legislation. This continues to concern us a great deal and we hope to see many amendments in the legislation when it goes to Parliament later this year.

### National Approach to Anti-Bullying

We'll be preparing a response to this document by the end of February: more in the next issue of Backchat.

### Education Culture & Sports Committee

This year the Parliament's EC&S committee is looking into both funding for schools and alternative ways in which education services could be organised – watch this space!

### Curriculum for Excellence Latest

There's lots of activity around Curriculum for Excellence. Key things to check out:

- The recently published Parent Toolkit, which is written for teachers to help them explain CfE to parents and carers – look on the Learning and Teaching Scotland CfE website: [www.ltscotland.org.uk](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk)
- Building the Curriculum 5 – on the same website – looks at the framework for assessment.
- Guidance is to be published this summer on how young people of all ages could be supported to access CfE – this will bring together different sectors (education, health, social work, voluntary sector) and highlight both policy and practice.

**The new qualifications** – National 4 & 5 – remain a mystery and a worry to most parents. Before she left, Judith Gillespie asked some pertinent questions of the government in an attempt to shed some light on the issues that most concern parents. You can read the questions and answers on the website. We know also that the Cabinet Secretary Mike Russell has promised further clarification to the Education Committee of the Parliament, so hopefully we will begin to gain a clearer picture of what our youngsters can expect in a few years' time as they head towards the new exams. It may be a few years away but we need greater clarity for the sake of those youngsters joining S1 later this year.

### **HMIE Inspection System Scrutinised**

Many of you will have seen the media coverage over recent weeks regarding HMIE inspection of schools and the debate over their value. All this follows the very sad case of a head teacher's suicide after an inspection.

There have been calls for HMIE to be removed and for local authorities to self regulate. The stresses and strains associated with the inspection process have been highlighted along with the collegiate approach being adopted by HMIE in the drive towards improved quality.

Receiving a good HMIE report is excellent for school morale and motivation, but what about inspection reports which are less than favourable? How involved do you as parents feel in the process?

If you have something to say about the inspection process, please drop us an email or letter – or join Parents' Voice. This is a discussion worth having and one we are continuing to have with HMIE and others over the coming months.

## **Your questions answered**

### **1. I've got some questions about insurance for equipment we've bought for the school.**

#### **a. My Parent Council has raised funds to buy some disco equipment and lights. Would this be covered by our SPTC membership insurance?**

The equipment is not covered by your ordinary insurance but you can take out additional all risks insurance to cover it. This costs £3.50 for every £100 of the insured item's value, and there is an excess of £100 on each claim. It is therefore sensible to only take out all risks for expensive items.

**b. What evidence would be required to prove the Parent Council bought the equipment? We transferred the money to the school account and the Headteacher bought the items.**

There should always be some evidence of what has been purchased for the school by the Parent Council/PTA, even if the school buys the equipment through their usual supplier. The school normally puts in a purchase order; there should also be a record of this in the Parent Council minutes. Also, there should be a report to all parents (usually once a year at the AGM) telling them what money has been spent on.

**c. Are there any specific requirements about security regarding equipment that is locked in the school building?**

No, as long as the items are kept inside a locked school and there is evidence of a break-in for any theft claim. You cannot claim where there is no evidence of a break-in.

**d. We have already had a couple of requests from other Parent Councils in our cluster asking if they could borrow the disco equipment. Would our all risks insurance cover others to use it?**

If you hire/loan equipment to another group then they would have to take out their own short-term all risks insurance to cover any damage. Neither your all risks insurance nor your public liability insurance (like your own house contents insurance) are transferable.

**2. We are organising a Spring Fayre and were thinking of having a parade of floats through the village. Does our public liability insurance cover this?**

If you were keeping the floats off public roads then, yes, your insurance will cover this. However, as the floats are going to be driven through the village then they come under the road traffic legislation and it is the vehicle insurance that comes into effect. All vehicles using public roads must have third-party cover.

**3. My Parent Council wants to do something to help parents of P7 children who are going to start at secondary school after the summer holidays. What do you suggest?**

I know that there is information on Parentzone but maybe other Parent Councils/PTA have some ideas .... LET US KNOW! Have you run workshops, organised events or produced leaflets for parents whose children are starting at primary and/or secondary school? Send us your suggestions.

## **OUT AND ABOUT**

### **Involving Parents in Children's Learning: Sharing Practice Event**

SATURDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 10am until 2pm (Lunch provided)  
RADISSON HOTEL, THE ROYAL MILE, EDINBURGH (Creche available)

This event is being organised by the Scottish Government and partners. As well as keynote speakers there will also be an opportunity to find out how parents and schools are working together in a series of workshops around parental involvement and Curriculum for Excellence. If you are interested in going to this event there are booking details on the Parentzone website at: [www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk](http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk)

### **NATIONAL SPRING CLEAN 2010, 1<sup>ST</sup> – 30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL**

Keep Scotland Tidy has launched an appeal for volunteers to sign up for the biggest volunteer clean-up event. Why not get your school involved – all you have to do is choose a location and sign up online for your FREE clean-up kit at [www.keepsotlandtidy.org/springclean](http://www.keepsotlandtidy.org/springclean)

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