



# backchat

## Back to the future...

*New look, new content, same vital resource*

**It's three months since the last issue of Backchat, and there's been a lot of water (or snow) under the bridge since then!**

Back in November we held our annual conference in Dundee, focusing on getting the balance right in child protection. We also launched our new identity – see above – we hope you like it.

The feedback to the conference was very positive and we think it was a great day, with lots of quality discussion and issues explored, plus a great venue. Our thanks go to all contributors and delegates. A full report is on the website.

The extreme weather has created havoc in almost all parts of Scotland, with school closures, schools operating as impromptu hostels and many issues around school closures.

We gathered a lot of feedback from parents and carers on the impact and issues – check out our website – and have fed back to local authorities, which we hope will help in

communicating with families. Get in touch if you have a view or a story to share!

Members around the country are contacting us as local authorities plan and implement substantial budget cuts, often affecting schools directly.

We want to hear from you – what's happening in your area, have you been involved in setting priorities and what's the likely impact? We believe the challenge to local authorities is to find ways to do things differently, to reduce budgets without impacting on the essential front line service.

So phone or email with your stories and we'll gather them together to get a picture of what's really happening.

With this issue is a new leaflet on Devolved School Management – it should help you get to grips with this topic and find the right questions to ask to get a clear picture of your school's budget. Remember – we're here to help you. So don't hesitate to get in touch.

Till next time, keep warm!

### ASL Legislation

Additional Support for Learning (ASL) has been in place for quite a few years now – it replaced Special Education, which really applied only to children with disabilities. Additional Support for Learning is a much bigger idea and recognised that many – in fact most – children need some extra help at some time in their school career.

It could be because of personal or family circumstances (for example: illness, bereavement, drink or drug dependency), because of a disability or learning difficulty or because they have abilities which are not easily met in the typical classroom.

Whatever the reason, parents and carers have a right to ask for the help their child needs to achieve his or her potential and local authorities are obliged to take steps to provide the support they need.

The laws around Additional Support for Learning have recently changed – you can get a family-friendly guide, information and help from Enquire.

**[www.enquire.org.uk](http://www.enquire.org.uk)**  
Helpline: 0845 123 2303

We've just heard about Take Note, a new ASL advocacy service for families. More next issue.

## Parents' voice

The latest Parents' Voice survey was on the topic of outdoor learning and play. SPTC joined forces with charity Grounds for Learning (GfL), to find out what parents actually think about the outdoor element of their child's school.

We had around 50 responses so while this was not a statistically robust survey, it provided a revealing insight into the realities of outdoor learning and play in Scotland's schools.

Those who responded gave a strong endorsement of:

- the principle of outdoor learning and play as fundamental to childhood and school life
- the need for well designed and managed school playgrounds to make this possible
- the importance of risk and challenge in play at school
- the importance of all weather / all year round outdoor learning and play

The survey results also highlight parental willingness to support schools to develop their outdoor spaces, and the gap between parents' aspirations and actual provision by schools and local authorities.

The experience of GfL is that schools and authorities sometimes claim that parent attitudes hold them back from implementing policies which would support outdoor learning and play: the results of our survey would indicate that this may not be a particularly fair assessment of parental opinion on the matter.

**STOP PRESS: We're sponsoring three free places for parents at the GfL Adventures in Learning Conference on 11 March, in Perth, plus a further seven places are available at a reduced rate of £96 for parents (normally £125). See [http://www.ltl.org.uk/resources/results.php?id=281&dm\\_i=LJV,BMUZ,39UDO3,WTEF,1](http://www.ltl.org.uk/resources/results.php?id=281&dm_i=LJV,BMUZ,39UDO3,WTEF,1) for more information.**

*Parents' Voice is growing louder! We now have more than 200 participants – if you would like to join their number then simply drop us an email at [sptc@sptc.info](mailto:sptc@sptc.info). We want parents and carers from all over the country to take part. You'll receive no more than one email a month and you can opt out at any time. Your details will be kept completely confidential.*

## Parenting teenagers

**Families** has produced a review of research into parenting teenagers to help the voluntary and public sector design services that help families with relationship and behaviour issues at this critical point.

A partnership between the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh, Parenting Across Scotland and Capability Scotland, About Families is now looking to work with agencies to help them take forward the main themes of their findings.

There were a number of findings we thought would be of interest to parents:

- Conflict between parents and teens is not necessarily a bad thing and can play a useful role in the teen's development
- Parents agreeing about their approach to parenting is more important than who does what
- Parents are often anxious as teenagers become more independent. It helps if parents see it as a normal part of growing up
- Generally parents think teens should tell them more than the teens think they should – and generally parents overestimate how much they are told!

- The view of teenage years as problematic is over-represented in research, with not enough focus on ordinary parents and teenagers with everyday problems
- There is little or no research which addresses the issues for families affected by disability

One of the key messages for us is that many of the issues we think of as problems are, in fact, simply part of the process of young people growing up and asserting their independence. Communication and allowing relationships with teenagers to evolve is key.

If you want more information you can view the website:  
[www.aboutfamilies.org.uk](http://www.aboutfamilies.org.uk)

### Hothouse – Puppet Show and Workshop for P 6&7

Hothouse offers a package of both resources and performance covering sexual health and relationships education. The pack has been developed by Flotsam and Jetsam Theatre in consultation with teachers, pupils and NHS health promotion specialists, and uses a traditional puppet booth followed by a workshop. The gentle humour in the show makes it easier for children to discuss themes in more detail in the workshop. For more information contact Scott or Ailie at 0131 662 9834 or email [info@flotsamandjetsam.co.uk](mailto:info@flotsamandjetsam.co.uk)

## CfE – Parents voice their Concerns

We've been contacted by members at Banchory Academy Parent Council, who are worried about the impact of the new examination framework. Chair of the PC, Louise Christophersen, wrote:

"We (have) grave concerns about the qualifications and assessments that will be taken by children (currently in S1) who are following the new Curriculum for Excellence. The qualifications that will be taken in S4 have not yet been finalised, and we have reservations about the proposals.

"Our understanding is that, because of the teaching time required for each subject, children will be examined in a maximum of five subjects in S4. There will be no opportunity for early presentation, i.e. if a child is capable, they will not be able to be examined in a subject prior to S4.

"The proposal is that children will follow a broad curriculum until the end of S3, and will start their options in S4. Despite the fact that the Scottish Government informs us that the precise number and range of qualifications will be a decision for schools, the reality will be that schools will only be able to deliver a maximum of five."

Each National 4 course will take 160 hours, although we now believe that 40 of these hours are notional and may be completed as part of private study, for instance.

A youngster would therefore have the opportunity to complete six such programmes (with a little time left over) but still short of the eight courses potentially available at Standard Grade.

**SPTC has been asking these same questions for some time, too, but we are still in the dark...we think the Scottish Government and SQA have to address parents' concerns about this serious issue.**

## Rural Schools

The government has set up a working group to look again at guidance on how local authorities consult with communities, parents & carers, and children when they are proposing to close rural schools.

Existing legislation means ministers have the power to call in local authorities' plans for school closures if they believe the consultation process has not been conducted properly or there would be no educational benefit from the closure.

We have no timescale for a report by the working group but it's believed to be short.

## HMIE Latest

Mid October saw the announcement from the Government that HMIE and Learning Teaching Scotland are to be replaced by a new body, provisionally called the Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency.

Government says the new body will increase and improve the coordination of support available to schools. It seems likely that some other government functions to do with education – for instance statistics – will also move into this new organisation.

The fine detail of how the new body will work was due to be finalised by the end of December and – if the proposal is agreed by Parliament – will happen in summer 2011.

It's clear that the idea came out of the blue for both HMIE and LTS, and there was no consultation on the change. We are unclear as yet what this change would really mean for parents and children but will keep you posted as the detail becomes clear.

Meanwhile, we have been responding to the consultation from HMIE on proposed changes to the way it carries out school inspections. You can read our response made on your behalf on the SPTC website: [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info)

## INSPIRE Young Entrepreneurs

This is a FREE 6 to 9 month course for young people aged 16+ who want to develop their business and enterprise skills.

The course covers everything from marketing skills, preparing and presenting a business plan to customer care. The course is funded by the Scottish Government and is run by Young Enterprise Scotland and The Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust.

It is a great opportunity for a young person to improve their employability skills and to develop support networks with a range of organisations and entrepreneurs.

The courses are due to start soon throughout the Central Belt and public transport travelling expenses will be paid; EMA is also available. If your son/daughter would like to find out more then text 07951 438 151 or email: [muriel.jones@yes.org.uk](mailto:muriel.jones@yes.org.uk) with their name, address, telephone number and date of birth.

## Protection of vulnerable groups update

As you may be aware, the Scottish Government is introducing a new membership scheme that will replace the current disclosure arrangements. The PVG Scheme is designed to:

- help ensure those who have regular contact with children through paid/unpaid work do not have a known history of harmful behaviour
- be easier to use as members do not need a completely new disclosure check for each post
- hopefully strike a balance between proportionate protection and regulation

The Scheme was due to be introduced at the end of November 2010 however, due to technical problems, this has now been delayed until February 2011.

This year SPTC is going to offer workshops for Parent Councils and PTAs to each local authority, to explain the new scheme, how it will affect parents' groups and when/how disclosures should take place. We are also producing leaflets and factsheets.

If you are interested and would like us to let you know if there will be a workshop in your area please contact Eleanor at [eleanor@sptc.info](mailto:eleanor@sptc.info) or telephone 0131 226 4378.

## New tool for assessing dyslexia in schools

A new tool for assessing dyslexia has been provided to authorities across Scotland. The tool helps teachers to identify and assess literacy difficulties and dyslexia. The development of the tool has been supported by funding from the Scottish Government and managed by Dyslexia Scotland.

It has been a recognised concern of some parents that their worries are not taken seriously by schools, and when they are it is often too late to avoid the accompanying emotional and behavioural difficulties from emerging.

The resource can be found at  
[www.frameworkforinclusion.org.uk/assessingdyslexia](http://www.frameworkforinclusion.org.uk/assessingdyslexia)

It is designed for the use of teachers and early years workers, but is open to all.

## Manifesto

The Scottish parliamentary elections will take place next May and SPTC is working on its manifesto for Scottish education. We believe education is absolutely central in our society. Without doubt what we do in schools has a life-long influence on the lives of our children. Every adult carries with them the evidence of their personal experience at school, for good or ill. Certainly our schools have the potential to equip people with many of the skills and attributes they will need in later life.

As we step into possibly the most difficult economic times for a generation, SPTC wants to spell out how important the fundamentals of education are. While services will have to change and the resources available to spend on education are being reduced, there are some principles of access, equality and entitlement which cannot be compromised.

More on our manifesto in February but please get in touch if you have an idea to contribute.

## Every child should be able to swim

Despite the fact that swimming is the second most popular sport in Scotland after football, approximately **25% of children aged 8–16 years still cannot swim**. A high percentage of those children live in the more socially deprived areas of Scotland.

Scottish Swimming wants everyone to support their campaign to give every child in Scotland a swimming entitlement to address this significant safety, health and equality issue and to ensure that each child has this vital life skill before they leave primary school.

A swimming entitlement would ensure that every child will be able to swim a distance of 25m and achieve a number of water safety skills.

To pledge your support email [s.macdonald@scottishswimming.com](mailto:s.macdonald@scottishswimming.com) stating your name, postcode and subject as Swimming Entitlement. For further information visit: [www.scottishswimming.com/healthyliving/entitlement](http://www.scottishswimming.com/healthyliving/entitlement)

## Consultations Update

There is a large number of consultations underway at the moment – too many to list – but of particular interest to parents is the one on School Handbooks. The government is looking for your views on what should be in the handbook and how the information should be made available. Go to <https://web.questback.com/scottishgovernment/schoolhandbookconsultation/> for details.

There are also a number of events you can go to – see our website for details. Remember we put details of our responses on the website and we are always keen to hear from members about their views.