



backchat

Springing Forth.....

New look, new content, same vital resource

Just a few weeks ago one of the Scottish Sunday newspapers identified 'school gate mums' as a key target for each of the political parties in the May elections to Holyrood.

We're wondering if many school gate mums (plus dads, and carers for that matter) realise just how important they are when it comes to choosing a government for the next few years?

The next issue of Backchat will be coming out around the time of the election so we're encouraging you now to use the power you have!

Without doubt the politicians will all be trying to find ways to win your votes. Without being party political, we believe parents should be thinking hard about what they want to see in the state education system over the next few years and making their feelings known through the ballot box.

Perhaps a group of parents in your school or cluster could get together to work out what's important in your area, and then ask each of the candidates for your constituency what they will do to tackle the issues that matter to you?

Or Parent Council chairs across your council area can get together to set out your stall and ask the difficult questions.

At SPTC we made a start by publishing our Manifesto – A Vision for the Future of Scottish Education – on March 2 and shared it with a group of invited guests at an event kindly hosted by Peter Peacock MSP in the Parliament.

In the Manifesto we highlighted key areas of concern for parents and set out our vision for the future – hopefully the broad themes we highlight will chime with your priorities, in your community.

You'll find a copy of the Manifesto with this copy of Backchat, or on the website.

As ever, we welcome your comments. Over the next few months we expect to be asked for the parental perspective on educational issues, so the more parents we hear from, the better.

In this issue of Backchat we give an update on one specific matter of keen interest to parents of any child in primary school or S1 – the new qualifications. Qualifications and the new curriculum will also be the subject of the next Parents' Voice survey later in March.

If you would like to be part of Parents' Voice, get in touch by email or phone. You'll receive a maximum of one email each month and of course we will keep your details completely confidential.

Till next time.

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Child Protection and Parent Councils/PTAs

The new Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) legislation came into force on February 28 bringing changes to the disclosure system. SPTC is now running information sessions to explain the impact this will have on Parent Councils and PTAs – our latest leaflet on PVG is also enclosed with this issue of Backchat.

We currently have evening meetings planned in West Lothian, East Renfrewshire and Midlothian and we would be pleased to organise a workshop in your local authority area. If you are interested please contact Eleanor on 0131 226 1917 or email eleanor@sptc.info

HMIe Announces Inspection Changes

You may remember that school inspectors HMIe consulted last year on proposed changes to the inspection regime. We've now seen the results of the consultation and HMIe has just published its firm plans for the way it will inspect in the future.

HMIe has been piloting different ways of carrying out inspections over recent months and they plan to keep that going, with the objective of finding the ways and means that work best. For instance, the size of the HMIe team going to small schools is being adjusted so that the staff don't feel swamped by people.

This is part of a move to an inspection process that aims to be more collaborative and positive.

There are a number of significant changes to be implemented in August 2011:

- The generational cycle of school inspections (ie every 7 years) will stop and be replaced by a mix of random sampling and selection depending on a number of criteria which are to be defined, though it seems parental concerns will be among them
- School self evaluation will play a more important role and set the agenda for the inspection. The plan is to discontinue use of pupil and parent

questionnaires by 2012

- Parent Councils will be given full information on the inspection (the RIF report) and play a major part in sharing its key findings with parents and carers
- The current report to parents will be replaced by a letter which HMIe says will be focused on telling the story of the particular school, its strengths and areas for development. HMIe has stated that it plans to move to everything being on-line only: we have argued strongly that that is not good enough
- The Quality Indicators will not appear on the letter that goes to parents, because HMIe feels they are a blunt instrument which give a very narrow view. While we understand this, we still feel this is a mistake and we hope HMIe may rethink this. They will still be in the RIF and available on-line

These are also significant changes which are partly an effort to save money (by reducing the number of inspections) but also to make the process one that is more about quality improvement and less about being under the scrutiny of external assessors.

We will continue to work closely with HMIe to give a parental perspective – let us know your experiences and concerns, so we can pass them on.

SQA Qualifications Latest

Qualifications are Changing – a Guide for Parents has been produced by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to answer questions about the upcoming changes, specifically the new National 4 and 5, including assessment, timing for introduction and sources of further information. You may have received it through school, but it is also to be available on www.sqa.uk/

In addition to the leaflet, the draft Course Rationale and Summary documents for the National 4 and National 5 qualifications are now on the SQA website at www.sqa.org.uk/rationales

Although not particularly parent-friendly, these outline the proposed content for the new qualifications, their aims and purposes.

The Course Rationales outline the skills and knowledge learners can expect to develop and the Course Summaries explain how courses will be structured. They give a description of each Unit in the course and what is required to pass.

SQA is looking for comments, so we'd encourage you to let them know your thoughts.

Parents will be particularly interested in some of the new courses such as environmental

science and practical maths, and the fact that schools will be able to design their own Units which will be internally assessed. While that level of flexibility will be welcomed by some, there must be a concern as to how these qualifications will be valued by employers, colleges or universities.

The number of Nationals students will be able to take continues to be a question we are asked regularly. The answer we get is that it is up to the school. We hear that Scottish Borders council is trialling a 33 period week to maintain wide subject choice and, also, to maximise teacher contact time.

Joining the Dots – a better start for Scotland's children

Professor Susan Deacon, former MSP, was asked by the Government last year to look at the supports in place for pre-school children and their families: the result of her six months of work was published on 2 March – a substantial report called *Joining the Dots*.

The key points to come out: parents should spend as much time as possible playing with their children; that those at risk of abuse should be moved out of homes sooner; that the disclosure system should be reviewed as it acts as a barrier, particularly for men working with children, and that more early years centres should be set up UK-wide.

In Brief

ASN Advocacy Service

Take Note is the new national advocacy service for additional support needs in Scotland. It's a partnership between Barnardo's Scotland and the Scottish Child Law Centre. Tel 0131 667 6333 or email enquiries@sclc.org.uk for more information.

Outdoor Learning

Grounds for Learning has published a report on some inspiring work done in Berlin on playgrounds. Check it out at <http://www.ltl.org.uk/pdf/lessons-from-Berlin1298886948.pdf>

Additional Support Review

The Government has asked Peter Dorran, Chief Executive of Harmeny Education Trust, to conduct a strategic review of learning provision for children and young people with complex additional support needs. You can find out more at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/DoranReview>

Wanted! Volunteers to spring clean Scotland

Scotland's biggest annual litter clean up is back and Keep Scotland Tidy needs your help. The National Spring Clean takes place March 14 - May 16. Why not get together and get tidying? It's easy to join in – just visit www.keepsotlandtidy.org/springclean to register.

A free clean up kit containing everything you need to spruce up your local area will then be sent to you. The kit includes black sacks, clear sacks for recyclable materials, tabards and information to support your event.

School Handbooks – have your say

You may remember that in the last Backchat we told you about the government consultation into school handbooks. There have been a number of events around the country to gather parents' views. The closing date for this consultation is March 14 and ministers are very keen to hear from parents about what they would like to see in the school handbook. If you haven't made it to one of the events, you can complete the online survey at <https://web.questback.com/scottishgovernment/schoolhandbookconsultation/>

Arts subject under threat?

We're picking up concerns from various quarters about the range of subjects available to youngsters, specifically at secondary school. We want to hear what you have to say from your experience – here's some information on two key arts areas:

HISTORY In January a Royal Society of Edinburgh working group published a paper on the teaching of history in Scottish schools. The group's primary concern was that history is in danger of being diluted under Curriculum for Excellence. Although they welcomed the active learning part of CfE, the group felt that unless teachers were supported and provided with quality resources there would be problems translating the CfE experiences and outcomes into a workable curriculum. Read the full report at www.royalsoced.org.uk

MODERN LANGUAGES There are growing concerns about the future of modern languages in schools. Many local authorities as part of their economies have reduced or removed language assistants. We have also been contacted by the German Consul in Scotland who is predicting that languages are further threatened as a result of the new qualifications and reduced subject choices. He's concerned about the long term economic impact of a generation with low levels of attainment in languages. Reduced numbers of language teachers in schools are also being cited as a serious issue. What are your thoughts and experiences? Let us know!

March and the Tenner Tycoon

Under 19s in school, college or a youth group can apply to borrow a tenner during March, with the intention of growing it through enterprise and innovation. Participants are encouraged to give something back through the activities they organise or by giving some of their profits to a good cause. There's not much time but you can find out more at <http://www.tenner-tycoon.org/>

Bullying Research – Volunteers Needed

The University of Strathclyde is carrying out research into the assessment of traditional and cyber bullying and would like to recruit parents and their children aged between 12 and 16 to take part in small group discussions. Volunteers will be asked to go to the University and all travel expenses will be reimbursed.

If you are interested please contact Josie Booth – Tel 0141 548 4756 or email Josephine.n.booth@strath.ac.uk

Cycling Scotland pushing for multi-level cycle training

Cycling Scotland, the national cycle promotion organisation, is pushing for a major increase in the number of children doing multi-level cycle training in schools and has relaunched cycle training in Scotland as Bikeability Scotland.

Bikeability Scotland is designed to be delivered in 3 stages: Level 1 (P5) basic skills in the playground; Level 2 (P6) skills for basic on-road journeys and Level 3 - skills for more advanced on-road journeys. Cycling Scotland is working with local authorities to ensure levels 2 and 3 are actually delivered in an on-road environment. Currently, only around a third of children receive on-road training in Scotland, meaning the majority of children receive no instruction on how to deal with the traffic and road situations they will encounter every time they cycle to a friend's house or to school.

The organisation is also calling for parents to volunteer to help deliver cycle training in their local schools and can provide training, support and resources. Email info@cyclingscotland.org to find out more.

Members' Questions Answered

Q We are holding a Spring Fete in April and would like to have pony rides for the children. A mum has offered to bring her pony along with some of her safety equipment. Is this covered by the insurance we have through our SPTC membership?

A If the parent is doing this as a favour and you are not paying her then this would come under your SPTC membership insurance. If you were paying a stable to bring in a pony then you would have to make sure they have their own public liability insurance. Although there are no further rules about pony rides in the membership insurance, we give the following guidance:

- Make sure that safety helmets and other appropriate equipment is worn
- Make sure that the pony is away from any noisy activity and/or traffic
- Make sure that the ride takes place on a reasonably even patch of ground and, if possible, cordon off the area
- Make sure that there is adequate supervision, e.g. one person to take money and keep an eye on the queue and at least one other person to walk with the pony.

Q Our headteacher is concerned that donations for our home baking stall at school events are not made by people with proper food hygiene certificates.

A If you are an SPTC member there is no need to be worried as there is no requirement for food hygiene qualifications in your membership insurance. You are covered for home baking stalls and most "food events" that you will organise. However, we do advise you to avoid things like fresh cream, unpasteurised cheese and raw eggs.

Q Could you please advise me as to whether we can still "co-opt" people for our new Parent Council as we did before for our school board? We had a very valuable person before who is willing to be on the new Parent Council but he believes this is no longer possible. Also, would they actually be a MEMBER of the Parent Council or not and what would their voting position be?

A Depending on what is written in your constitution your Parent Council can co-opt who they wish onto the committee. This could include representatives from community groups, the local church and other parents/grandparents. The position of the co-opted person with regards to voting rights would also depend on your constitution.

It is a good idea to keep constitutions as flexible as possible and write something like "the Parent Council may co-opt up to *** people (this figure should be agreed by the Parent Forum at an AGM) to help carry out its functions".

Grants for schools

Hilton in the Community (HCF) aims to support young people worldwide. They award grants to schools and registered charities working with disadvantaged young people and those with additional support needs.

Small grants awarded in 2010 included £2,000 to a special primary school to support the refurbishment of an outside play area and £700 to a primary school to provide support for disadvantaged pupils. The next deadline for applications is 3 May 2011 so, if you would like to find out more, go to the HCF website at www.hilton-foundation.org.uk

Teaching Council News

The legislation that will make the General Teaching Council for Scotland an independent body was passed in the last few weeks.

Under the rules to come in next year, teachers will no longer be able to avoid a Competence hearing at the GTCS by simply moving to a different council area.

Bookbugs Programme Continues

The Scottish Government is to provide more than £1 million to the Scottish Booktrust to help support its Bookbug Programme.

This initiative provides free books to all children at age six weeks, 18 months, three years and in Primary 1.

There are also Bookbug sessions in libraries and communities across the country. For more information go to www.scottishbooktrust.com