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backchat

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Summer beckons ...

Fresh look, relevant content, same vital resource

The last few months of the session are always busy for everyone in education: we are renewing Parent Council memberships; parents organizing social and fundraising events; schools with exams, end of term activities and new timetables.

We've also been delivering Parent Council Essentials and PVG information sessions to parent groups, particularly in North Ayrshire and Inverclyde.

If you are interested in finding out more about the new PVG legislation, we have offered a free session to every local authority for their parent groups – so ask your parent officer to contact us.

Planning and organization are also now well underway for our conference on 12 November. Keynote speaker this year is David Cameron – one of the architects of Curriculum for Excellence – and the day will be focusing on the changing face of Scottish education: curriculum, assessment and reporting, qualifications, structures and management.

More details to follow but put the date in your diary for a great conference in Edinburgh.

As this is such a busy time for parents and carers, who in turn call us for information and advice, we have devoted much of this issue to answering your questions.

These are real questions, from real parents, so we hope this will be of interest to you. If **you** have questions you would like us to answer – whether about your membership, insurance, the workings of your PC or PTA, or education/school policy, make contact by email or phone.

If you are a Parent Council whose local authority does not pay for your SPTC membership, you should have received your renewal paperwork in the last few weeks.

Your membership – and therefore your insurance – expires at the end of July, so remember to return your paperwork and cheque before then!

If you are a PTA or if your local authority is a group member, you don't have to do anything.

As well as lots of Q&As in this issue, we also have a fresh update on progress with the new qualifications and the senior phase, news about rural schools, information about Mentor's work on drug abuse prevention and newly published information for young people thinking about leaving home.

With this issue is an advice leaflet on campaigning – your calls tell us you're looking for help!

We hope you have a great summer and Backchat will be back in the autumn. Till next time.

PS – now you can follow SPTC on twitter:parents_sptc

Questions and Answers for Parents

PC Matters

Do you have any information on how to set up a Parent Council?

Yes, the updated "Steps to a Parent Council" is now available on our website.

Can our Parent Council set up their own website which would be independent of the school?

In principle, yes you can but it would be good practice to involve the school so they know what you are planning and you take on board their comments.

We are currently organizing our AGM and notice that for the past few years the Headteacher has always given a report during the meeting. Is this necessary as I thought that the AGM was the chance for the Parent Council to report to the Parent Forum on our activities? Our Headteacher is very supportive but she does also take over our Parent Council meetings with her lengthy reports. Does she have to report to every meeting?

No, it is up to you whether you would like to invite the Headteacher to report – both at your meetings and at your AGM. The AGM is certainly the time of the year when you should report back on your activities to the Parent Forum.

As for your PC meetings, it might be a good idea to give an allotted time to the Headteacher – 5 to 10 minutes – in which she can cover the main issues from the school. Remember, it is your meeting not the Headteacher's.

We have two vacancies on our Parent Council. For the first time ever we have more parents putting themselves forward than spaces available. Our constitution limits us to ten parents on our PC and in this situation we should have a vote. What do you advise?

We would advise you to change your constitution. You certainly don't want to turn parents away and there are no limits in the legislation as to how many parents should be on a Parent Council.

In order to change your constitution you will need to let all the Parent Forum know what you intend to do and exactly what changes are proposed.

If your AGM is coming up then this change could be made then, before you elect your Parent Council members. Or you can hold an EGM. Our leaflets “Good Practice for AGMs” and “Constitutions Made Easy” are available to download on our website or you request paper copies from the office.

PVG

We have a number of parent helpers in school who need to leave the classroom if the teacher does, due to child protection issues. Is there a way the Parent Council can help volunteers in the school to get membership of the PVG Scheme?

If it is the school which is recruiting parents to help in the classroom, then it is the school which will have to consider whether the parents should be asked to join the PVG Membership Scheme. The school will have to pay for this as it is not a voluntary body; the school cannot ask the Parent Council to do this. Our leaflet “SPTC Guidance on the PVG Act for PCs and PTAs” is available on our website.

We find the PVG legislation very complicated. Isn't it easier just to get all our Parent Council to become members of the PVG Scheme?

No. In fact it is against the law to ask someone to join the PVG Scheme if they do not come under the scope of the legislation. In order to find that out, you need to go through the process of establishing whether the person is doing regulated work, as outlined in our guidance leaflet. Our guidance leaflet gives you the information you need.

As a voluntary group we are aware that we can register with CRBS so that PVG Scheme membership is free of charge for helpers and PC members when necessary. However, we need to find someone to act as the lead person- the contact for CRBS and the person who will receive all the relevant information from applications. No-one on our Parent Council wants to take on this role; does the lead person have to be a PC member?

Yes they do. However, you could co-opt someone onto your Parent Council just to take the position of lead person. They wouldn't necessarily have to come to every meeting but could just report back when necessary.

Why not think of asking someone in your local community who is used to doing this kind of job – a local authority officer, a local minister, police officer or someone who works for a charity?

Insurance

One of our Parent Council members is an enthusiastic fundraiser and recently organised an event where she refused any help from other PC members. Is there any way that we can prevent parents doing this and if a parent holds an event without Parent Council involvement would they come under our SPTC membership insurance?

The first thing that you must make clear to this woman is that if anyone organizes events without the agreement of the Parent Council and without it being minuted at a meeting, then they do NOT come under the SPTC membership public liability insurance of the PC. She would be personally liable for any incidents that occur and could potentially end up in court being sued for damages. That may put her off doing this sort of thing in future.

We organizing a barbecue for our summer fete; do the people who have volunteered to do the cooking have to have a food hygiene certificate or any relevant qualifications?

It is not a requirement of your SPTC membership insurance to have any certificates/qualifications when handling food. However, we do issue some guidance on such events in our leaflet "Safety at Fundraising Events".

Education Issues

The parents at our school are very angry about the council's decision to remove the free school transport for children who don't qualify for it. They want the Parent Council to lobby the local authority to reinstate it. Do you have any advice?

The Parent Council is there to represent the Parent Forum and so, if parents have raised this as an issue, you are duty bound to follow it up. It might be useful to know that it is the parent's responsibility to ensure that their child gets to school; however, under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 local authorities have a duty to provide free transport or transport facilities for children who live outwith the statutory walking distance to school – two miles for any pupils under eight years old and three miles for any other.

With the current budget cuts many local authorities are making, they are now sticking to the letter of the law and are not providing free transport where it is not absolutely necessary.

Once this has been explained properly to parents then maybe they will be more understanding and realize that free school transport has actually been a gift of the local authority and something that they didn't have to provide.

You could suggest setting up a walking bus for those children who don't qualify for free transport and your SPTC membership insurance would cover you for this. Go to the Sustrans website to find out more: www.sustrans.org.uk

Our local authority has threatened to take away one of our teachers due to a falling school roll. It is a small school and we are afraid that parents will be put off sending their children to our school if this happens. It seems a very short-sighted idea when you consider that building is due to start on fifty new homes in the village. What do you advise?

In our leaflet "A Guide to Campaigning" there is advice to help. Remember there is strength in numbers. You should not only try to get the support of all the parents and carers within your school community but also other local groups.

Make a noise locally by planning a publicity campaign to include regular letters and articles in the local press; launch a petition and, if necessary organize events. Write to local councilors and contact your MSP and ask him/her to support you. A small school in East Lothian recently won their battle to retain a teacher by doing just this.

PARENTS' VOICE UPDATE

Parents' Voice keeps on growing! We now have nearly 300 members from all over Scotland. The latest surveys have focused on the new Curriculum and on the new qualifications.

We'll publish the report on your views on CfE before the end of term. Look out for it on the website.

The survey on qualifications is open at the moment – if you're interested in taking part in Parents' Voice, drop us an email on sptc@sptc.info You'll receive a maximum of one email a month and you choose whether to respond. So we promise not to deluge you with emails. And of course you information will be kept completely confidential.

Latest News on Senior Phase

The Curriculum for Excellence Management Board published a statement in May about the Senior Phase (15 – 18 year olds) and specifically addressed some of the concerns parents have. You can find a copy on the web at www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/SeniorPhaseStatement_tcm4-662739.pdf or on the SPTC website www.sptc.info

There is a lot of information there, but key points for parents are:

- There may be some departments which are not ready to introduce the new examinations in 2013 – 14 and they can seek permission for students to take an Intermediate exam in 2014.
- There is a lot of emphasis on schools, colleges, universities and other providers working in partnership to develop and implement a programme of learning that is right for each pupil
- The option is open for some students to bypass National qualifications and go straight to Higher: the emphasis is on ensuring the qualifications and their timing are right for each student
- Schools will have freedom to design a senior phase which they feel meets the needs of their pupils, so numbers of courses in each year and presentation for qualifications will not be standard
- Early presentation will be the exception, not the rule, and will relate to individual students rather than classes or cohorts

SPTC will produce a leaflet on the new qualifications and let you know when it's ready.

New Qualifications Update

The SQA has published a range of information with up to date information on the new qualifications on its website – **and you are asked to comment.**

Draft course specifications for National 4 and National 5, giving more information about what the new National 4 and National 5 qualifications will look like, are now available. The site also gives details about the high-level skills and knowledge to be covered in the Course.

You'll also find the Course Specifications which outline the subject skills, knowledge and understanding that a learner will cover in the Course and which will be assessed at the end of the Course. In addition, they outline how it will be assessed, eg a question paper or an assignment. Further detail about the Course will come through later development stages.

Other documents published are the Overview of Qualifications Report for Access 1 and Access 2 and the Course Rationales and Summaries for Higher. The website gives more information about what each of these documents are and describes the stages each qualification goes through to be developed.

Moratorium on Rural School Closures

The government has asked Scottish local authorities not to progress or bring forward new proposals to close any rural school for one year.

The Education Cabinet Secretary will establish a Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education to look into how the Scottish (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 is working. Meanwhile, many local authorities have expressed their dissatisfaction that no more money is on the table to fund the moratorium.

Leaving Home Advice

The Scottish Council for Single Homeless has recently revised its leaving home and housing education website, www.leavinghome.info

It's specifically designed for young people to help them think through and plan for the consequences of leaving home, with the objective of reducing the numbers who find themselves homeless.

NEED HELP SPEAKING ABOUT ALCOHOL OR DRUGS?

Mentor UK is a drug prevention charity that focuses on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

The organization works with parents and carers across Scotland, advising them on how to speak to their kids about alcohol and drugs.

The information sessions have been very well received by parents and carers, and a number of parent councils have already accessed their services.

Mentor UK is offering this free, the only cost being travel.

If you would like further information about these sessions – drug and alcohol information, CBT, legal high, evaluation and fundraising – contact Heather McVeigh on heather.mcveigh@mentoruk.org The website is www.mentoruk.org

In Brief

Interested in outdoor learning? Then check out this great website: www.childrenandnature.org/ There's a recent piece on how parent volunteers can get involved and make a difference.

Are you in East Lothian? Are your children keen readers? www.edubuzz.org/blogs/booktastic/ is looking for more children to provide reviews. Go to the website and sign up!

HMIe has recently published *Count Us In: Mind Over Matter, Promoting and Supporting Mental and Emotional Wellbeing*. Find it at <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/Publications.aspx>

Hopscotch Theatre Company has just published details of its productions for the autumn. Parent groups can book the theatre to come to your school!

“Scottish Myths & Legends” (P1 – P7) Touring September – December. Written by Raymond Burke. This show is part storytelling, part theatre. The versatile actors will bring the tales to life with music and merriment, allowing pupils to explore their literary heritage and develop their sense of cultural identity. Features live acoustic music and song.

“Mother Goose” (P1 – P7 & nursery) Touring November to January 2012. Written by Ross Stenhouse. Poor Mother Goose is faced with having to leave her home when hit by the current recession! Traditional pantomime retold in the inimitable Hopscotch style with songs and jokes aplenty!

“What We Did When the Oil Ran Out” (P1 – P7) Touring February – April 2012. Written by Raymond Burke. Kevin is an average 21st century Scottish schoolchild. One day it is announced that oil is running out and the country is ravaged by extreme petrol shortages. Kevin decides to find out where all the power comes from and embarks on a journey out into the North Sea, down a coal mine and even a visit to a nuclear power station.

Contact Susan or Mari on 0141 440 2025 or email: info@hopscotchtheatre.com
Their website is on www.hopscotchtheatre.com