



Promoting Partnership
in Scottish Education

backchat

SCOTTISH PARENT TEACHER COUNCIL

Issue No. 123, November 2011

More news, views, resources.....

Lots of news with this issue of Backchat – don't miss any of it!

As we go to press it seems very likely that schools will be closed across the country on 30 November as a result of strike action by the teaching unions. There's a short article in this edition explaining the background to the strike. While one day is difficult, the concern is that this is just the start, if an agreement is not reached between the UK government and the unions.

We're hearing both sides of the debate but generally parents seem quite unsympathetic to the teachers' cause. We're always interested to hear what you think – our contact details are below.

The good news is the success that was Making Sense of the Change, our 2011 annual conference. Read about it in this issue and on the website www.sptc.info

PTA members will receive their membership renewal paperwork with this issue of Backchat: your membership expires at the end of December, so to keep your membership-linked insurance up-to-date please complete and return as soon as possible.

You might also notice that we're moving house! As of 23 December you can reach us at our new office in the Mansfield Traquair Centre, just along the road from our existing office. Full contact details are elsewhere.

We have a number of surveys underway! The SPTC member survey is still out there and we're keen to hear your views about how we're doing.

Feel free to circulate it among all parents at your school – and if you've mislaid it, just phone or email and we'll get another to you.

Another survey – included with this issue of Backchat – is on the use of technology for learning. We're keen to hear from parents all over the country about their experiences. Again, please circulate the questionnaire – we can mail further copies or we can send them by email or post.

There are a number of consultations going on at the moment that will be of interest to many parents: Rural Schools (closing 12 January), Post 16 Education (closing 23 December), the Equality Act (closing 2 January) and Advocacy for Children (closing 29 February).

We plan to respond to all of these giving a parental perspective. You can respond in your own right or let us know your views to feed in. Find all the government's consultations on <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Consultations/Current>

SPTC is moving!

As of 23 December we are taking space in the offices of Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) just down the road from our current office. So if you are contacting us after 23 December, please use these details:

Telephone: 0131 474 6199

Mansfield Traquair Centre,
15 Mansfield Place
Edinburgh,
EH3 6BB

Our email and website addresses remain the same.

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Keep in touch....

Website

www.sptc.info

email

sptc@sptc.info

Twitter

parents_sptc

Sign up to SPTC e-updates on the website

SQA Launches Parent Section on Website



Did you know that the SQA has a section for parents on its website? (Scottish Qualifications Authority is the body responsible for assessment and qualifications in Scotland). For any parent with a child in secondary school due to take the new qualifications, this website provides a wealth of information including a mythbuster video, a jargon buster and a definitions page.

SQA Appeals News

Alongside more information on the new qualifications SQA has also announced that they intend to change the appeals system. In future appeals will only be eligible for exceptional circumstance, eg illness. Currently appeals can be made for candidates who do not reach a predicted grade in the exam. It's felt this can lead to candidates who do well in a prelim being rather complacent about the rest of the course and the exam, knowing they have a prelim pass to fall back on.

The SQA parent section is at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/41292.html>

New resources for Parent Councils

The Scottish Government has produced two new documents for Parent Councils which have been sent to all PC Chairs.

Parents as Partners – The purpose and role of Parent Councils provides background information about parent councils for parents and others in the school community.

Parents as Partners – Information for Parent Council Members helps parent council members understand their role and gives links to sources of information and support.

The documents are available via the Parentzone website at www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone

Teachers' Strike Latest

As we go to press it's looking very likely that most schools will be closed on 30 November as a result of strike action by members of the various teacher unions. Many other public sector workers are also going to be on strike on the same day.

The strike has been called because the unions feel the UK government is undermining their members' pension provision, that it has not negotiated in good faith and is ignoring peoples' worries.

The unions say that teachers in Scotland have agreed to a pay freeze and other changes to pay and conditions which amount to over £45m in savings, as a response to the difficult financial climate, as well as seeing schools squeezed on funding for staffing, equipment and materials. Their position is that the government is insisting teachers make 50% more in pension contributions, work until the age of 68 and have the value of their pensions reduced by 40%.

It's impossible to predict where this strike action will lead but feedback we have had from parents is that, while they generally support their child's teacher, they are not generally supportive of the strike action and are feeling very concerned about the impact it will have on family life and the learning of their children. The EiS has also announced that it would consider strike action again if the Government introduces some of the recommendations of the McCormac Review (see elsewhere in this newsletter).

School Handbooks Consultation - Next Steps

Earlier this year there was a government consultation on the School Handbook. The feedback from the consultation – published in June – shows that communication with parents (above and beyond the Handbook) is a significant issue where there remains a good deal of room for improvement.

Cabinet Secretary Mike Russell announced in September that the government is going to bring forward proposals to improve communication between school, local authority and parents – hopefully we'll be able to give you more on that soon.

Additional Funding for Dyslexia Teaching

Dyslexia Scotland will receive a funding boost of £40,000 from the Scottish Government for its existing dyslexia toolkit for teachers.

The toolkit is on their online site and is a resource for the assessment of literacy difficulties and dyslexia. The additional funding will be used to update the materials on how to support pupils with dyslexia. More information at www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk

UCAS launches consultation

UCAS, the body that manages applications for colleges and universities around the UK, has just launched a consultation on proposed changes to the way the admissions process will work, with the major proposal being that applications would be made only after results are known.

The plans are currently out for consultation and can be found at <http://www.ucas.ac.uk/reviews/admissionsprocessreview/updates/>

Welcome to City of Glasgow College

Scotland's largest college joins SPTC

City of Glasgow College (CGC) is the first College in Scotland to join SPTC: the two organisations signed a partnership agreement on 23 November.

Patricia Beattie, Curriculum Support Manager at the College, is enthusiastic about the benefits SPTC membership will bring. She sees it as a way to help facilitate CGC's efforts to reach out to parents and carers: "We feel it is important to involve parents in the direction and future planning of school/college partnerships so both the pupil and the parent are aware of the learning journey.

"We have planned a Parents Voice survey with SPTC on school/college partnerships, which is now live, so we can capture parents' views and concerns then address them. We also hope to learn from the expertise available from SPTC as they understand the needs of parents and are up-to-date with all the issues surrounding education. It is important to us that parents understand that support is available from our Student Services team as they are a great source of information and advice."

City of Glasgow College provides a wide range of courses and programmes from access level where no formal entry qualifications are needed through to NQ, HNC, HND and degrees. The college also works closely with schools throughout the West of Scotland. All full-time courses lead to national qualifications recognised by universities, employers and other professional bodies. Many students choose to progress to university after completing their studies at City – gaining direct access to second or third year of a range of degree courses.

CGC is Scotland's newest and largest college, formed by the merger of three institutions. Students are supported by practical facilities, including TV, radio, photography and design studios to a training restaurant, bakery, hair and beauty salon and ship simulator. These practical training environments ensure students are prepared for the demands of industry and combine with links to employers throughout the city involving work placements and partnerships.

The Parents Voice survey on colleges is active now – see below for contact details to sign up.

SCHOOL TOILETS – WHAT YOU THINK

We recently ran a Parents Voice survey on school toilet provision, which provoked some worrying statistics and comments. 107 parents took part in the survey and we believe the results show some significant problems in some of our schools.

Only 54% of respondents thought their child's school toilets were well maintained and, although 30% of the Parent Councils had taken up the issue (with many more saying they would be after taking part in the survey), many respondents commented that they had been put off taking the matter further by their head teacher or local authority.

A significant group of parents said that, due to the state of school toilets, their child would not use them. We even had stories of children not drinking all day, accidents at school and medical conditions being caused as a result.

On the plus side only 25% said there was any evidence of bullying or antisocial behaviour centred on the toilets and 95% of the schools represented provided drinking water for the children.

If you would like to know more about this survey or wish to join Parents' Voice then please contact Eleanor Coner on eleanor@sptc.info

SPTC Members – Important info re Employers Liability

Does your Parent Council or PTA employ a staff member? If so, you need to know about this...

From April 2012, new legislation comes in to effect that will see the creation of a new national database, set up to collect the Employers Reference Number (ERN) of all those in the UK who have Employers Liability.

The information must be provided to the insurance company providing your Employers Liability insurance. This is being done so that all employers' details are available for years to come, in case of an employee claiming compensation for industrial injury.

This affects only those groups which operate a PAYE system and where payment to an employee is above the threshold limit of £503 per month.

If your group falls into this category, please make contact with us at sptc@sptc.info and we will give you contact details for the insurer. The number(s) should be forwarded to the insurer before April 2012.

IT Survey – Take Part!

Have you ever used GLOW? Do you know what it is? Do your children use GLOW or other on-line resources at home or school? If so, why not answer our survey?

We're trying to find out how SPTC members and their children use the internet and technology to help learning, and to find out if there are concerns. The government is reviewing how we use the technology to best advantage and make sure our children are all equipped with the skills they need in an increasingly technological world.

A paper copy of the survey is included with this issue of Backchat (please copy it if you want to distribute it), it is available on our website www.sptc.info, or by email on sptc@sptc.info.

Missed the conference – catch up here!

This year SPTC's conference focused on the changes we're experiencing in our education system and the role of parents. The day was chaired by that well-known figure in Scottish education, David Cameron, who has played a significant role in the development of Curriculum for Excellence. Around 60 delegates attended – both parents and education professionals – from all over Scotland.

David talked about the need to be courageous and to shift our focus from attainment on to building capacity within our children so they are prepared to face the uncertainty and ambiguity of the future. That means starting with our children's gifts, not weaknesses, giving them a reason to engage with learning, helping them to understand the importance of relationships and giving them the skills to make use of their qualifications.

Denis Mongon was the other keynote speaker. Denis is a visiting professorial fellow at the University of London and is particularly interested in the role of parents in re-shaping our education system. Denis talked about the tremendous momentum of our established systems (and so the challenge of making real change) and the commonality of parents' issues – almost without exception we want our children to be happy and to have a sound group of friends. Our values and aspirations are broadly similar whether we live in a leafy suburb or a city scheme.

In the afternoon we had three discussion group threads; assessment/reporting and qualifications; CfE in the secondary sector/senior school; teacher education and education structures. The discussion groups were designed to stimulate debate on these different areas and we'll produce a detailed report on the discussions held. A full report and copies of the speakers' PowerPoint presentations will soon be on the website.



IMPROVING SLEEP – TEACHING PACK

Earlier this year the charity Sleep Scotland launched a teaching pack to raise awareness in schools of the importance of sleep for the emotional and physical wellbeing of children and particularly teenagers. Did you know that less than five hours sleep can cause 71% teenagers to be depressed or anxious; or that a lack of sleep can affect their ability to assess risk? In fact, research has also linked poor sleep quality and lack of sleep to obesity and impaired learning.

The Sound Sleep resource pack contains lots of information and research on teenagers and sleep, including training materials for staff, support materials for parents, sleep diaries and advice on how to sleep better. For more information phone Sleep Scotland on 0131 651 1392 or go to their website:

www.sleepscotland.org

Prizes from the Church of Scotland

The Moderator's Medal is a great new competition for young people between the ages of 10 and 18. This year's theme is "The Olympics" and is open to any young person connected with any faith and from schools, youth clubs, etc and entries can be sent in any format including artwork, written work or multimedia. The work should illustrate what faith has to say about sport, achievement, dedication and teamwork and must be submitted by March 31st 2012.

The annual Stevenson Prize encourages excellence within the fields of Religious Observance and Religious Education. The competition is for work by pupils and a prize of £500 will be awarded to one primary, one secondary and one special needs school.

For more information on both these competitions, go to the website at www.churchofscotland.org.uk

Language teaching under pressure

One of the areas we hear is coming under particular strain in schools is language teaching. There has been a significant drop in the number of young people going forward for Standard Grade and Higher German, for instance, over the last eight years.

Recent reports of widespread cuts in the employment of language assistants (native speakers who work in both primary and secondary schools to support language learning) suggests these falls are likely to continue.

It's feared a drop in foreign language teaching will have a major impact on the opportunities open to young people.

The government has made a commitment to 1 + 2 (mother tongue plus two languages).

What do you feel about language teaching in schools? Let us know by telephone (0131 226 4378) or email sptc@sptc.info

McCormac Review – what's it about?

2011 has been a year of important reviews in education. The latest is the McCormac Review of Teacher Employment. This review was set up to look at the 2001 teachers' agreement of terms and conditions (often called the McCrone agreement) and to bring it up to date.

The review was chaired by Prof Gerry McCormac, Principal of the University of Stirling. He made a number of recommendations which the government is now considering. These include: more flexibility in non-contact time; reworking teachers' performance/development review system; use of external experts in the classroom.

Do you have a view? If so we would like to hear it on sptc@sptc.info. The full report is available on the web at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resour ce/Doc/920/0120902.pdf>