



Working together for children

Extracts of interest from the Scottish media

(taken from 'SEBDA News', Issue 15, Spring 2008)

Educational psychology services extended to 'post school' (from Scottish Government web-site, 19.2.08) Education Secretary Fiona Hyslop said that in building on their current nursery and school focus, educational psychological services would now cover the post school sector in all council areas (up to age 24). Post School Psychological Services are currently only delivered in 20 authorities. The move will ensure that all young people who need additional support, particularly at points of transition, are better served by effective partnership working with organisations such as colleges, Careers Scotland and training providers.

The roll-out across Scotland will extend the service to the remaining 12 council areas: Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Scottish Borders, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Argyll & Bute, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland. The Scotland-wide scheme will cost approximately £1.4 million next year and will be funded centrally from the Scottish Government until 2010-11.

Encouraging young people to stay in education and training post-16 is a key commitment in 'Skills for Scotland'. The roll-out of PSPS is a key action point in 'More Choices, More Chances', the Scottish Government's strategy for reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment and training.

PSPS provides consultation and assessment with young people who have additional support needs and, through multi-disciplinary working, supports and advises organisations such as colleges, the Enterprise Networks, training providers and Careers Scotland in their delivery of services to young people on the path towards work, further learning or training.

Continuing Government support for 'Schools of Ambition' (from Scottish Govt web-site, 7.3.08) Fiona Hyslop confirmed that the Schools of Ambition scheme, involving 52 schools, is to be supported with £11.5 million over the next three years. Under the scheme, schools are supported through a three-year transformational programme, each receiving around £300,000 funding and additional support and challenge throughout. The schools are a mix of 'already high performing schools wanting to reach even higher', those that need to improve after poor inspection reports, and those that recognise they can 'move their performance up several gears'. Participating schools are encouraged and supported to share emerging learning with their immediate colleagues and are committed to sharing with the wider community. A series of conferences, seminars and publications will be used to promote the lessons learned from this initiative.

'A Curriculum for Excellence' (ACfE) attacked by education directors and heads (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 14.3.08).

David Cameron, Vice-president of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, said the initiative required more decisiveness and leadership, calling for a shake-up of the management board (mainly peopled by civil servants). Larry

Flanagan, EIS, called it 'the least resourced curriculum development I have ever experienced' although billed as the 'the most fundamental curriculum development ever.' Brian Cooklin, president of the Headteachers' Association of Scotland said: 'It needs clear leadership. Who's in charge? No one knows. There are a number of agencies doing different jobs, but no national direction or leadership in terms of a communications strategy.' Teachers want to know of the Curriculum's content and how to timetable it: 'people are past the stage of wanting bland assertions and statements'. Warnings were also given that teachers and parents do not feel involved in the development and there have been delays in disseminating information about it. Professor Brian Boyd, in a later issue, defended the introduction of ACfE, saying bringing it in needed to take time

Standard grade to be axed? (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 21.3.08). TESS believes Fiona Hyslop, Education Secretary, and cabinet colleagues plan to bring in new qualifications to replace Standard grades at General and Credit levels and Intermediates 1 and 2 (levels 4 and 5 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework). Standard grade at Foundation level (level 3) would also disappear. The replacements will include what are felt to be the best features of the existing courses. they would be unit-based and aimed at those who cannot, or do not wish to, take a given subject at Higher. There will also be exams in literacy and numeracy for all pupils in the December of S4. These plans are likely to win the backing of the Labour opposition.

Ms Hyslop wants to see the first three secondary years used for a broad general education, before pupils start selecting their choice of exam subjects in S4. She wants flexible and personalised learning in a range of qualifications in S4 -S6, which could include schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh's award. Elsewhere in this issue, the TESS editor notes that there has been talk of axing standard grade for at least five years, without decisive action.

Exclusions from schools 22.6% higher in 2006/07 than in 2002/03 (from Scottish Govt web-site, 29.1.08).

About 23,000 different pupils (three per cent of pupils) were excluded during the year. Various factors such as deprivation, having additional support needs and being looked after by the local authority increase the likelihood that a pupil will be excluded.

59% of those excluded, were excluded once in the year; 18% twice ; 10% three times and 5% four times. 10 times more boys than girls were excluded from primary schools and 4 times more boys from secondary schools.

The figures showed a 14 per cent rise, compared to the previous year, in exclusions due to physical assault, though numbers are a very small proportion of the total exclusion figures.

New guidance being written: The government is currently preparing best practice guidance on exclusions and will consult on this later this year. Guidance on exclusions was last issued by the previous administration in November 2003. This marked the end of the national target to reduce exclusions by a third, removing pressure from teachers to artificially reduce exclusions.

Schools Minister Maureen Watt (on 29.1.08) said exclusion must always be a last resort. During a visit to Tulliallan Primary in Fife, where exclusions have been

eradicated by promoting positive behaviour, Ms Watt said: "This government is extremely concerned about increasing exclusion rates and the further increase in violence as a reason for exclusion. We need comprehensive and reliable evidence to inform policy making. That's why we are consulting CoSLA about the best way to achieve this."

Praise for Tulliallan Primary, Fife: During the latest HMIE inspection of Tulliallan Primary, inspectors said: "Pupils' behaviour and manners were exemplary. The school used a highly effective system for managing pupils' behaviour and pupils promoted and demonstrated respect and tolerance towards each other."

Single national body to improve services for vulnerable children (from government web-site, 18.1.08) A single national body is to be established bringing together the various bodies involved in supporting, organising and delivering the Children's Hearings system, to improve the support given to vulnerable young people across Scotland.

Minister for Children and Early Years Adam Ingram said: "Bringing together the work of the Children's Reporter service, the delivery and administration of Children's Hearings and the recruitment, training and support provided to Panel members into one body will ensure a stronger, more consistent service and better delivery across the country." He will work with CoSLA and other key interests on the detail of the changes. Isobel Hutton, CoSLA spokesperson on Education, Children and Young People welcomed the proposed national body.

Note on history of children's hearings: The Children's Hearings system is Scotland's unique approach to dealing with children and young people in trouble or at risk. The system was created in the 1960s after it was recognised that young people appearing before the juvenile courts, whether they had committed offences or were in need of care and protection, had common needs.

The system is founded on the principle of local people from the children's own communities making decisions about how best to address children's needs. There are 2,700 volunteer panel members who are recruited through an annual national campaign supported by local campaigns. Panel members are carefully selected and undergo continuous training.

'Year of the tightened belt' says TESS (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 22.2.08) A TESS survey found that at first glance there seemed to be a generous deal for education for the coming year - with increases up to 16% in some LAs. However, much of the extra cash will be eaten up by pay and price rises and additional costs of transport, energy and special needs. In practice, according to John Stodtr, general secretary of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, school spending is being squeezed and education authorities are being forced to make efficiency savings of 2%. Councils are also facing major new burdens such as implementing single status and equal pay agreements.

Teachers' jobs at risk in some LAs (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 28.3.08) A combination of falling rolls and tight staffing allocations are leading to possible job reductions in Aberdeen, Renfrewshire, Highland, Borders and Glasgow. Some schools have apparently been 'overstaffed', a situation that will be less likely to continue. LAs seeking 2% efficiency savings appears to be common. Harlaw Academy, Aberdeen, is thought to be about to lose seven or eight teaching positions.

North Lanarkshire - 'reading scores soar when worksheets thrown out' (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 4.4.08). TESS reports in detail the encouraging results from North Lanarkshire's Active Literacy programme. The proportion of struggling readers was significantly reduced after three years of the intervention in primary schools. Traditional tales, magnetic boards and other tools are part of an active literacy programme that is making reading fun and is raising standards.

New guidance on disclosure checks could reduce community use of/ parental involvement in schools (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 8.2.08). New Scottish Government advice means that anyone working or meeting regularly in a school - even when no children are on the premises - is legally obliged to have a disclosure check. The U-turn on this issue follows a re-examination of recent child protection legislation by officials and the terms of the 2003 Protection of Children (Scotland) Act. Before, the advice only required police checks when someone was appointed to a post or position where normal duties included childcare. The U-turn was criticised by the manager of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, which has led a long-term campaign to make the disclosure system less restrictive, warning that there would be a huge impact on parental involvement.

Half children in care 'pushed out' at 16 (BBC News, 26.3.08 and TESS, 28.3.08) The report 'Sweet 16?' by Kathleen Marshall, children's Commissioner, says many youngsters vulnerable to homelessness, drugs, drink and unemployment, are being "pushed out" of the care system at aged 16 before they are ready. Ms Marshall claimed that, in many cases, children were being seen as a "troublesome burden" rather than "a vulnerable person to be nurtured, cared for and listened to". She added: "At just 16 years old - the very time that they need help to cope, adjust and find their place in the world - many are all but completely abandoned with little, if any, aftercare." The commissioner warned that leaving care early could bring children into "highly inappropriate settings" such as bed and breakfast accommodation or homeless hostels.

The report made 23 recommendations, including a call for "strong action" to change the culture that assumes 16 is the age for leaving care. It also recommended workers be trained and informed about young people's rights, so they can pass this information on to youngsters. The report also called for more semi-independent living units to be provided and for a ban on the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and homeless hostels to house those leaving care.

Figures showed that in 2007 there were more than 14,000 children in care in Scotland - 26% more than in 1999 and the highest number since 1982. Children should remain in care until 18 if it is in their best interests.

Similar worries about children in care being 'pushed out' at 16 became big news in England in mid-April (BBC news, 17.4.08).

Abolish setting and narrow the attainment gap (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 14.3.08) - so argues Brian Boyd, Professor at University of Strathclyde and member of the ACfE review group.

Independent research needed on value of restorative practice (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 7.3.08). Chris Holligan, education lecturer at the University of West of Scotland writes: 'We simply do not know if restorative practice will deliver what it claims. The jury of the research community is out on that; what is needed is

not research funded by government directly (that is the route of conflict-of-interest, especially when the work is conducted by organisations depending upon a regular flow of external money), but truly independent research. until that is produced, this initiative may be doing more damage - to the victims of bullying and violence.' He later writes that the practice could be 'deeply disabling for individuals, while claiming to be inclusive.'

Teachers rather than buildings are the key (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 7.3.08). St Ninians, Kirkintilloch, E. Dunbartonshire, has received one of the best inspection reports on a secondary school, despite being visited while staff and pupils were in temporary accommodation during construction of their new school. Staff were praised particularly for their implementation of the Schools of Ambition initiative.

The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 7.3.08). Ewan Aitken talked to Susan McVie, Senior research Fellow at Edinburgh University and co-director of this longitudinal study of youth offending. This project is tracking an entire year group who entered Edinburgh's secondary schools in 1998. Susan has been interviewing these young people for ten years now, trying to make sense of their life-choices, why they have chosen to break or not to break the law. Labelling is thought to be a key issue: those labelled as white males from poorer areas are more likely to be seen as potential criminals and so are picked up more by the police. Mrs McVie advises schools: avoid using pejorative labelling comments such as 'you are just like your brother' or 'I knew your sister'. School exclusion is the strongest indicator of conviction by the age of 19. Her findings suggest that 'really good teachers who can manage difficult kids end up in management, far away from the kids who need them.' Schools are often the one place stability in a young person's life. She is critical of ASBOs as another form of unhelpful labelling.

Youth work has huge amount to offer schools, in support of 'A Curriculum for Excellence' (TES Scotland, 7.3.08) Anne Gibson (seconded from HMIE for 2 years), is the newly appointed national development officer for schools and youth work. TESS reports her concerns about cultural challenges getting in the way: teachers have to recognise that informal learning has a key role to play and youth workers possess skills worth tapping into: 'We often give up too easily on young people when the going gets tough. Youth workers can get in there and target groups with low self-esteem who lack confidence, who have relationship issues and who are experiencing difficulties at home. They know the drug misuse families, and they can provide advice, support, counselling and just be there for them.' Her first task as national development officer will be 'mapping' what is happening and then making good practice public knowledge. She wants inspirational examples flagged up in HMIE's Journey to Excellence programme and on the LTS website. These would include Alva Academy in Clackmannanshire, which funds a full time youth worker.

Ten years are needed to deliver SNP pledge on class sizes Scottish Government officials warn (Times Ed Supplement Scotland, 22.2.08). This revelation was seized on by Rhona Brankin, Labour's shadow education secretary, who noted that Labour had pointed out at the time of last year's election that SNP promises on class size were undeliverable and disingenuous (the phrase 'as quickly as possible' had been used).