



Promoting Partnership  
in Scottish Education

# backchat

SCOTTISH PARENT TEACHER COUNCIL

Issue No. 124, February 2012

## Rural Schools Commission - SPTC's submission

In January, SPTC was asked to give evidence to the Commission on Rural Education, which is looking at how rural education can bring the best results for young people in rural areas, while also looking at the link between rural schools and their communities. The Commission was set up by government on the back of its year-long moratorium on rural school closures announced last year.

The Commission is chaired by Sheriff David Sutherland from Tain and brings together a range of organisations and individuals with an interest in the area of rural schools including local authorities, parents, academics and others. It is also considering how well the legislation that governs how proposals for school closures – the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 – is actually working. SPTC's Eileen Prior and director David Chalmers gave evidence which focused on a small number of key issues:

1. **The Definition of 'Rural School'** which currently seems to make no sense and gives no insight into the nature of a school or the issues it is facing. We would argue that there is a world of difference between a small school located just beyond a large conurbation and one that services a community perhaps hours away from the nearest town, though they may both be classed as rural.
2. **Educational Benefits** – we argued that there needs to be research carried out into the issue of quality of education in rural schools to define what, if any, educational benefits there are. Until that is done then we are dealing simply with one set of opinions against another. We also highlighted that local authorities have an obligation to provide a good education to all children in their area - the educational benefits for one group of children or parents do not trump another's and so any assessment of impact or benefit must encompass all learners in the authority.
3. **Financial Transparency** – we have often highlighted the lack of transparency around local authority finance, specifically in relation to education. This is particularly true in the assessments produced by local authorities around proposed closure of rural schools. If a consultation is to be meaningful, there must be financial transparency which allows true comparisons to be made.
4. **Consultation** – under the current system, parents who have chosen not to send their children to the local school are excluded from the consultation. We believe this is inequitable.
5. **Impact Assessment** – there are a number of considerations we believe need to carry greater weight: the young people involved; the impact of any school closure on the community as a whole, and the total travel time and conditions of the entire journey which are acceptable for young people making their way to school. The legislation on this issue is 30 years old, when traffic conditions were very different.

You can read our submission at [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info)

## Scottish texts – soon to be compulsory in Higher English

From 2014 the Higher English exam is to include a specific element on Scottish texts, the government has announced. All young people taking the exam will be required to answer at least one question in this aspect of their study.

Scotland's Makar, Liz Lochhead is a supporter of the move: "I am delighted that Scotland seeks to ensure that some Scottish texts are included in the Literature taught in our schools. Remembering that such texts may be in English, Scots-English, Scots, or any mixture of these.... and are certainly not required to reflect a chauvinistic or uncritical view of Scottish Society, it can only benefit our future citizens to so engage with their own culture."

## Hopscotch Theatre - 2012 Programme

Many Parent Councils and PTAs have already raised money to give children this exciting experience and you can too!

Hopscotch Theatre Company have a fantastic programme for this year including a brand new version of the "side-splitting, drilling, oil-spilling" smash hit from 2007 – "When The Oil Ran Out".

All their productions are a great springboard for exploring various curriculum areas and are hugely popular. Have a look at their other 2012 productions at [www.hopscotchtheatre.com](http://www.hopscotchtheatre.com)

## Inspiration in Film

Visit the Grounds for Learning website for lots of ideas on how to improve the outdoor spaces at your school. Amongst the resources is a free opportunity to see some of the most exciting school playgrounds in Scotland.

Their new short film tells the story of three schools that have transformed their dull playgrounds into remarkable naturalistic play spaces with significant benefits for children, teachers and parents. It's all at <http://www.ltl.org.uk/scotland/about.php>

## The Children's Panel needs YOU!

The Children's Panel are currently recruiting for new panel members to sit on their independent lay tribunals dealing with children and young people who are in trouble or at risk.

Panel members are asked to take part in children's hearings which are a relatively informal way of addressing all kinds of situations where a youngster is in need of care and protection or if he/she has committed an offence.

To find out more and whether you "fit the bill" go to their website at <http://www.childrenspanelscotland.org> Get involved – it won't just change a child's life, it'll change yours too.

## Authors for Schools!

Working with your school on literacy? The Scottish Book Trust can help! You can apply for funding to get a real, live author to visit.

The Live Literature Funding Project at the Scottish Book Trust can help to increase children's enjoyment of reading and writing.

More information on the Book Trust website [www.scottishbooktrust.com](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com)

More news, views, resources.....

## Launching into 2012

Welcome to the February issue of Backchat.

**2012 shows no sign of being dull: there's a huge amount happening in the world of education, and we know this is the time of year Parent Councils and PTAs are busy planning events and campaigns to take them through the year. We've been busy too, not least because we have moved office.**

**Few parent groups in Scotland are registered charities**, but if this is something that interests you, we've been working with charity regulator OSCR to produce a new model constitution for parent groups which want to be charities. There are tax advantages for registered charities but it can also mean a lot of work, so we'd advise any PC or PTA to think carefully about the implications. Go to our website or call us for information.

**The Scottish Education Awards** this year include a category for Parents as Parents in Learning, to recognise the important role that parents play in learning. Closing date 2 March – check out <http://www.scottisheducationawards.org.uk> for more information.

**Parents Voice** – our e-mail survey group – continues to go from strength to strength. We survey once every six weeks or so on many different issues of interest to parents and carers, from school toilets to the new qualifications – and we're happy to include any parent (not simply PC or PTA members). Parents Voice is

an easy way to do it!

So spread the word – if you want to feed in your views and help shape SPTC policy.

Our most recent surveys have been on the topics of school/college partnership and also supply teacher issues – the next is likely to be on latest developments in the national qualifications. Email [eleanor@sptc.info](mailto:eleanor@sptc.info) to sign up.

**Protection of Vulnerable Groups** is now one year old – how is it working for you? Please let us know about your experiences.

**Our PTA members** have been renewing in droves but there are still some we have not heard from. If your PTA hasn't renewed, remember your membership-linked insurance has now expired along with your SPTC membership, so if you are organising any events you don't have public liability insurance. It's easy and quick to get your membership in place – just contact the office.

**And just to show we're thinking ahead, work has started on planning for our conference in November.** We're looking for parent groups who want to share the best of what they've been doing, whether it's an after school activity, work with the school on the new curriculum or subject support, a great fundraising or campaigning success.

**If you've done some great work over the last year or two, we want to hear from you! Drop us a line or email with an outline and we'll get back in touch!**

**Till next issue!**

## In this issue...

- Introducing the Regional Advisors
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## LATEST NEWS

As we go to press, the East Renfrewshire Council's decision to delay introduction of the new National Qualifications for a year is still a major issue for parents. We're receiving phone calls and emails from parents and others who are concerned about the message this sends out, and the response of Government. We think it undermines confidence in the new qualifications and flies in the face of what we've been told up until now.

**Let us know what you think!**

## Enquire Publishes New Materials on Looked After Children's Rights

Enquire, the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning, have published a new briefing that aims to help parents, carers and professionals working with looked-after children understand their rights to extra support in school. The briefing includes information on why support might be needed, planning support and what happens if things aren't working.

You may also be interested in attending Enquire's annual conference, "Additional Support for Learning – sharing the lessons learned across Scotland" which will take place on 8 March in Musselburgh. Amongst other things the conference will be addressing how to engage effectively with children and families.

For more information on both these items, go to [www.enquire.org.uk](http://www.enquire.org.uk)

## Stonewall Survey Launched

Stonewall Scotland recently launched the *Speak Out* survey which is aimed at young people aged between 11 and 19 in Scotland, England and Wales. They would like any young person who is lesbian, gay or bisexual (or who thinks they are) to tell them about their experiences in school or college.

During its last survey Stonewall found that many LGB young people were being bullied and that many schools didn't do anything about it. The *Speak Out* survey, which is **completely confidential and anonymous** aims to find out whether things have changed and what still needs to be improved. For more information go to the website: [www.stonewallscotland.org.uk](http://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk)

## Education Consultations – Have Your Say

**There are a large number of consultations coming up in the next few months: SPTC will be submitting responses and we'd be pleased to hear your views if you would like to feed in your comments. Alternatively, you can take part as an individual or as a Parent Council or PTA.**

The General Teaching Council is consulting on their Professional Update scheme for teachers. The consultation outlines the proposals for a scheme that will oblige teachers to demonstrate how they are keeping their professional skills up-to-date, with the objective of maintaining and improving the quality of teachers and the impact that they have on pupils' learning, as well as supporting public confidence in the profession. The consultation closes on 7 March and you can find details on the GTCS website: [www.gtcs.org.uk](http://www.gtcs.org.uk)

Because of changes in UK regulations governing adventure activities, the Scottish government is consulting on what changes might be needed to ensure operators in Scotland are properly regulated. The consultation runs till 30 March and you can find it here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/01/04112146/0>

In addition to these, there is also work going on around the development of a national Parenting Strategy, and we have also been asked to keep an eye on a petition currently in front of Parliament on the issue of education provision for children absent from school through ill health. We'll try to keep you up to date with these but you can watch the government and the Parliament's websites too.

We have also been asked to provide evidence to the Commission on School Reform, which has been set up by a number of organisations to put forward proposals to the government. If you have any views you want to feed in, please get in touch.

## SQA - National Qualifications latest

The Scottish Qualifications Authority has recently published draft documents for over 225 new National Qualifications to allow parents and teachers to have a look at the proposals and give their feedback.

These documents include the draft course and unit support notes for National 4 and National 5 and draft Course Assessment Specifications for Higher. Although these are quite technical and are aimed at education professionals, the SQA is keen to hear from parents and welcomes feedback by Wednesday 29 February at [www.sqa.org.uk/yourfeedback](http://www.sqa.org.uk/yourfeedback) where you can also read feedback received in 2011.

## Tutoring – Your Experiences

Do you pay a tutor to support your child's learning? We've been contacted by the Sunday Post which is keen to hear from parents about their experiences in this area.

If you are interested in taking part in their research (which will probably form the basis of a story on the topic in the newspaper) you can fill in a quick on-line survey: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/S7XGLKH>

## City of Glasgow College Open Day

The City of Glasgow College is holding its first open day on Thursday 29 March. The college is hoping that parents and pupils will attend on the day to take part in a wide range of activities including hair and make-up demonstrations, food tasting, fitness tests as well as some relaxing massage treatments.

The Open Day will also be an opportunity to obtain course information and find out more about learning support and funding. For more information contact [ann.brannan@cityofglasgowcollege.uk](mailto:ann.brannan@cityofglasgowcollege.uk)

## Parents' Voice – what you are telling us

Parents Voice, our e-mail survey group, is open to any parent in Scotland. We've surveyed on a range of topics – CfE, the new qualifications, outdoor learning, school/college partnerships and even the state of school toilets. If you sign up, you receive no more than one email a month and if you're not interested in the topic, just ignore the email!

The most recent Parents Voice survey asked about the issue of supply cover in schools. It seems to be that supply teachers (who provide cover for staff who are sick or otherwise out of school) are increasingly hard to find. The implications for children in school can be serious. We're also about to publish our report from the recent survey on School/College Partnerships.

It's important that we hear from parents all over the country about what's happening in your school. Signing up for Parents Voice is easy – just contact us at [eleanor@sptc.info](mailto:eleanor@sptc.info) – and we'll do the rest. We don't share your data with anyone and of course what we hold is completely private. Surveys are anonymous and you can unsubscribe at any time.

Hope to hear from you soon...

## Introducing the new Regional Advisor Team!

We may be based in Edinburgh, but our network is spreading! Three new regional advisors have now joined SPTC to help provide more on-the-ground support to members: Linda Grieve (covering the North East), Jennifer Lancaster (South West) and Marie Fitzpatrick (West central belt). All three have hands-on experience as involved parents and work closely with SPTC's main office. They'll also play a part in shaping what information sessions and other services we develop in the future. The team is co-ordinated by Eleanor Coner, who also leads on the design of information sessions and is our regional advisor in the South East.

We have sessions planned in a number of areas but if you are interested in organising an event with us, please get in touch. Some information sessions are already designed, some we're working towards: if you want us to address a particular need in your area, just let us know. Information sessions include:

**Parent Council Essentials** – looking at the roles of a Parent Council and office bearers, how to work effectively with your school and parent forum

**Next Steps for Parent Council** – in-depth breakdown of key PC roles around school issues, learning and teaching, communication...and more

**Roles of Office Bearers** – what does it mean to be a chairman, treasurer or secretary? Straight talking and practical guidelines, plus problem solving for those difficult situations

**PVG for Parent Groups** – practical guide to the new PVG legislation and how PCs and PTAs can work to the new rules on Disclosures

**Organising Social and Fundraising Events** – explore what your membership-linked public liability insurance covers; ideas for events; safety and hygiene; publicising your event; risk assessments; running your event on the day

We're hoping our new expanded team will help our members all over Scotland - we look forward to your feedback! Here's what the regional advisors say:

### Marie

"I've always regarded parental involvement as an important way to be connected with my children's education just as I would with other aspects of their lives. For me, the SPTC stands out as a great supporter of parents and I'm delighted to be joining them in their work."

### Jennifer

"SPTC appeals to me as an independent voice - one that is not afraid to ask sometimes difficult questions on behalf of parents, representing parents' views on educational issues. If I can play a part in sharing information/ideas with parents that supports them and their involvement in their children's education, I will be happy."

### Linda

"I found myself drawn to the SPTC for a number of reasons, not just because they are committed to children, young people and their parents. It was much more than that. As an organisation it strives to close a gap which exists in our communities: it increases the knowledge of and thereby, the confidence of many a parent, whose only experience of an education system may have consisted solely of their own days at school, for better or worse."

## Parent Network Scotland

Parent Network Scotland is a Scotland-wide organisation, which has operated for over 20 years. It is at the cutting edge of developing parenting support in local communities.

Parenting is the hardest job in the world and we all need support at some point. PNS runs courses, like "Getting on with Your Child" and "Parenting Matters" giving parents skills and confidence from which to address their own parenting, enabling them to build stronger and more resilient family relationships. Working in a group makes mutual support a reality.

SPTC is looking for ways to work with PNS, so families can become more involved with their children's learning and help outcomes for more kids.

Watch this space!

## SHARING SEXUAL HEALTH

SHARE is a sexual health and relationships education resource for schools aimed at youngsters aged between 12 and 15 years. We are delighted to have been invited to join the Advisory Group to look at a "refresh" of these materials.

SHARE has been well received by school staff but it was felt that the time is now right to have another look at the materials. The project will update the materials taking into account such things as the impact of new technologies on the behaviour of young people and the needs of certain youngsters which were not in the original resource.

## Have you signed up for SPTC e-updates?

If you'd like to receive periodic e-updates, just go to [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info) and subscribe on the home page.

**Check out the archive too!**