

THE PARENT COUNCIL OF ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT COUNCIL MEETING

11 DECEMBER 2023

Present: J. Stewart (Joint Chair) ("JS")
S. Reid (Joint Chair)
Dougie Wilson
Anne-Marie O'Brien
Lorna McIntosh
Mairead Brophy
Lynsey O'Dwyer
Samantha MacConnell
Katrina Adams
Joanne Logan
Christopher McLaughlin
Michela Pagliocca

Apologies: A. Wilmott (Vice-Chair)
Mo Wright
Elizabeth McHaffie
Helen Alagbe
Meenal Poddar
Multesh Poddar
Julie Flaherty
Iltaf Dean
Adeolu Alagbe
Jennifer Clare Abalo
Chimezie Umeh

School: G. O'Neil (Head Teacher) ("Mr O'Neil")
J. Cumming
T. Creighton

1. Welcome

The Office-Bearers ("OB") welcomed the Parent Council ("PC") Members in attendance. JS led the meeting in an opening prayer.

2. Apologies

A note was taken of the PC Members & School staff in attendance, and of intimated apologies.

3. **Adjustment/Approval of Previous Minutes**

The draft Minutes of the Parent Council Meeting on 9 October 2023 were proposed and approved, without adjustment.

4. **Brief Updates on Action Points from last Meeting**

The following updates were noted:

- (1) New Learning Base – The new Base is in operation and being well used. Mr O’Neil advised that he would arrange for Mrs McCallum to give a brief presentation to the PC on its operation (for one-to-one activities and “group-work”). He acknowledged that a more formal system needs to be put in place to identify the needs of those pupils who may benefit from it - and that exercise is ongoing.
- (2) Enforcing Attendance - At the September 2023 PC Meeting a number of PC members had expressed concern that statistics indicating decreasing attendance may be attributable in part to a perceived tendency to discontinue teaching in the days (and week) leading up to the end of the School terms.

Mr O’Neil has issued a letter to all parents, and has spoken to the S5 Assembly, reiterating that teaching will continue right up to the final day of the School terms – and that pupil attendance is mandatory up to the end of term.

Mr O’Neil reported a welcome increase in attendance (with the percentage of pupils who achieve more than 90% attendance being higher than at any time in the previous 8 years).

Mr O’Neil welcomed the increased national media coverage of the issue of attendance.

- (3) School Photographs – This remains outstanding. Mr O’Neil will aim to contact the external school photographers to discuss concerns previously raised by parents (regarding pricing structure, withdrawal of offered discounts, and quality).
- (4) Traffic congestion in car park – Mr O’Neil reported that he had written to certain directly affected parents to address the concerns. By coincidence, a local authority traffic warden had also recently attended, which happened to have the effect of improving driver behaviour (and compliance with parking restrictions).
- (5) Fair Access to University – The OB reported to the meeting on the substantial and positive responses received from MSPs, the Fair Access Commissioner, and the Education Secretary to the PC’s correspondence on fair access to university education. There is an ongoing review of the criteria to measure fair access.

The PC Members decided to take no further action meantime, pending publication of the next Report of the Fair Access Commissioner (due imminently).

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. Mr O'Neil will arrange for a staff member to give a brief presentation to the PC on the operation (and criteria for use) of the new Learning Base.**
- 2. Mr O' Neil will contact the external school photographers to discuss concerns previously raised by parents (regarding pricing structure, withdrawal of offered discounts, and quality).**
- 3. The OB will consider and report further following the publication of the Fair Access Commissioner's next Report.**

5. Relationships Sexual Health and Parenthood ("RSHP") Update

The OB reported to the meeting that, after the last PC Meeting on 9 October 2023, an urgent response required to be drafted to the Scottish Government's Consultation on its proposed amendments to statutory Guidance on the delivery of Relationships Sexual Health and Parenthood ("RSHP") education within Scottish schools.

Within a very short time-scale, the draft Response was circulated to, and approved by, the PC Members; views were sought from the wider Parent Forum; and the Response was then duly submitted to East Renfrewshire Council on 14 November 2023 and to the Scottish Government on 17 November 2023.

A significant amount of work went into the preparation of the PC Response, including liaising with other parent councils (primary and secondary) within ERC.

The OB reported that the Consultation raised very serious issues for Catholic education generally, not least the purported removal of the right of the Church to determine the content of the RSHP syllabus within Catholic schools. Concern was expressed at the lack of dissemination of the Consultation, and the initially slow pace of response from the Church's education advisers.

The outcome of the Consultation is awaited.

The OB extended their grateful thanks to all members of the PC and Mr O'Neil for their courageous stand on the issue, and to the Parent Forum for their valuable contributions in the drafting of the Response.

A copy of the PC's Response to the Scottish Government is attached at Annex 1.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. The OB will consider and report further, following publication of the data and conclusions from the Scottish Government Consultation.**

6. Review of PC Constitution

The OB reminded members of the draft proposed Amended Constitution which had been circulated for discussion.

There was some discussion on areas of difference between the existing and the proposed amended Constitution (notably, the proposed maximum number of PC members). Further time was sought by members to digest the proposed amendments, ideally by receipt by email of a Word version of the proposed amended Constitution (to aid review and revisal).

It was also acknowledged that attendance this evening was relatively low.

It was agreed to re-visit the matter at the next meeting.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. The OB will circulate (by email) to the PC members a copy of the existing Constitution and a Word copy of the proposed amended Constitution.**

7. Head Teacher's Report

Mr O'Neill reported the following to the PC Meeting:

- (i) The School would shortly receive a visit from the ERC Director of Education
- (ii) The School was also due to host a "Collaborative Improvement Visit"
- (iii) Multiple trips were presently underway
- (iv) Cluster visits were presently underway (with transition visits scheduled for May 2024)
- (v) Preparations for the Advent Service were well underway
- (vi) Mary's Meals Sponsorship was progressing well.
- (vii) Prelim Exams had commenced in a compressed timescale.

8. The PISA Report: 15 years of Declining Standards in Scottish Education

The OB reported to the PC on the content of the most recent PISA Report prepared by the OECD.

It discloses that the performance of Scotland's schools in maths, science and reading has been on a downward trend, consistently and significantly, for 15 years.

The Scottish results are close to the (declining) OECD average in maths and science. Reading was better but by no means exceptional, with Scotland hovering around the UK average.

The OECD has offered these general observations on Scotland's performance:-

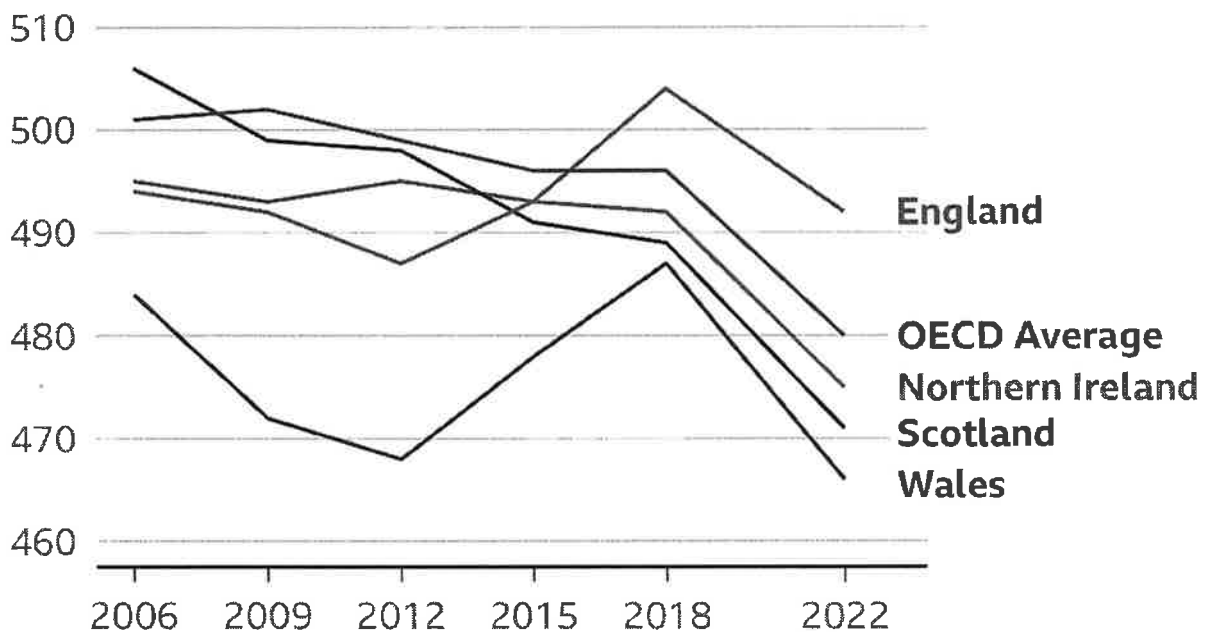
- (i) Scotland's declining performance pre-dates COVID - and some countries actually managed quite well during the pandemic, especially those which kept schools open for longer.
- (ii) Teacher shortages imperil learning - and the UK is suffering from teacher shortages

- (iii) Mobile phones are often a damaging distraction for students.
- (iv) Pupils need to feel safer and better supported by their teachers, while parents need to be more engaged in their children's schooling.
- (v) Learning is hard when you are hungry - and the relatively high level of poverty-related hunger in the UK surprised the OECD.

In graph format, Scotland's performance in maths is depicted as follows:

Average maths scores fall for all UK nations

Most countries across the OECD have seen similar falls



Source: OECD



Further detail on the OECD Pisa Report appears in Annex 2.

The Report prompted a lively discussion among the PC Members.

The OB suggested that a link can be drawn between the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence (with its controversial emphasis on “skills” and “well-being”, rather than “knowledge”) and the plummeting standards in Scottish education. This view was said to be supported research conducted by Professor Lindsay Paterson of the University of Edinburgh.

Mr O’Neil expressed the view that the PISA results do not reflect what is happening within East Renfrewshire. The quality of Higher passes within SNHS was said to have increased significantly over the same period.

The discussion moved on briefly to two issues not directly covered by this evening’s agenda, namely:

- (i) Whether the PISA Report supported the introduction of a more formal policy restricting the use of mobile phones by pupils in the School; and
- (ii) Whether an approach should be made to ERC to clarify its role in restricting pupil access to vapes.

Neither issue was explored in depth. No formal conclusions were reached.

However, the following preliminary observations were noted:

- (i) On the issue of a mobile phone policy, Mr O'Neil expressed the view that the benefits of mobile phone use by pupils in school outweigh the drawbacks; such use is not presently causing a problem within SNHS; and, on balance, the introduction of a more restrictive policy was thought to be "not worth the fight";
- (ii) On the issue of vaping, support was expressed among some Members to the PC approaching ERC and/or the Scottish Government to advocate for greater intervention to prevent/restrict vaping among children and young people (perhaps by way of a ban on single-use "disposable" vapes; or tighter policing of under-age sales).

It was suggested that the PC may have a locus on the basis that vaping in secondary schools is increasingly seen as problematic by teaching staff; it raises genuine health concerns for children; and can be seen as a gateway to other drug use.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

- 1. The OB will give further thought to whether representations should be made to ERC and/or the Scottish Government on the issue of vaping.**

9. Parent Questions

The following questions were raised by email by parents:

- (1) *Is it possible to change the current PE top to a "Dry Fit" option? It's a more comfortable option, durable and also easier to wash and dry especially if you have several children participating in multiple after-school clubs.*
- (2) *I would like to propose a choral music choir. The children could be presented for recognised choral awards (Bronze, Silver, Gold).*

On question (1), Mr O'Neil agreed to look into the matter

On question (2). Mr O'Neil advised that the School does have a choir. He will make enquiries of the principal music teacher to obtain more detail and feedback. Mr O'Neil also asked the PC to enquire of parents whether they may be prepared to assist.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action points were:

- 1. Mr O'Neil will make enquiries to ascertain whether a "Dry Fit" option is/can be made available for PE/sports.**
- 2. Mr O'Neil will make enquiries of the principal music teacher to determine the feasibility of creating a School Choir.**
- 3. Thereafter, the OB will make enquiries of parents to ascertain whether there would be scope to enlist parental assistance/support in the creation and running of a School Choir.**

10. AOCB

The OB expressed concern about reports of lengthy gaps, on occasion, between pupil assessments and feedback to pupils.

While the reported difficulties may have been isolated to particular Departments, it begged the question whether a universal "whole school" approach (to ensure timely feedback to parents) might be of assistance.

The business of the Parent Council Meeting was then concluded.

The next PC Meeting is on Monday 29 January 2024.

(Next Page: Summary of Action Points)

**SUMMARY
OF
ACTION POINTS**

<i>Ensuring fair access to University</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
1. The OB will consider and report further following the publication of the Fair Access Commissioner's next Report.	OB	Ongoing
<i>New Learning Base</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will arrange for a staff member to give a brief presentation to the PC on the operation (and criteria for use) of the new Learning Base.	HT	Jan 24
<i>Additional Learning Support</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will consider the feasibility of a Parent Workshop to disseminate information on available supports for pupils with ASL needs.	HT	Ongoing
<i>School Photographs</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will communicate with the external photographers regarding parental concerns surrounding pricing structure (including the withdrawal of discount offers) and product quality.	HT	Jan 24
<i>RSHP Education: Scottish Government Consultation</i>		
1. The OB will consider and report further, following publication of the data and conclusions from the Scottish Government Consultation.	OB	Ongoing

<i>Vaping</i>		
1. The OB will give further thought to whether representations should be made to ERC and/or the Scottish Government on the issue of vaping (and its impact on schools)	OB	Jan 24
<i>Review of the PC Constitution</i>		
1. The OB will circulate (by email) a Word copy of the proposed amended Constitution to the PC Members	OB	Dec 24
<i>PE/Sports Kit</i>		
1. Mr O’Neil will make enquiries to ascertain whether a “Dry Fit” option is/can be made available for PE/sports.	HT	Jan 24
<i>School Choir</i>		
1. Mr O’Neil will make enquiries of the principal music teacher to determine the feasibility of creating a School Choir.	HT	Jan 24
2. Thereafter, the OB will make enquiries of parents to ascertain whether there would be scope to enlist parental assistance/support in the creation and running of a School Choir.	OB	Ongoing

ANNEX 1

CONSULTATION ON RSHP EDUCATION

1. Copy Response of SNHS PC to the Scottish Government dated 17 November 2023

THE PARENT COUNCIL OF ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

c/o St Ninian's High School
Eastwood Park
Rouken Glen Road
Giffnock
Glasgow
Email: pestniniangiffnock@gmail.com

17th November 2023

Dear Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills,

We write in response to the Consultation on the revised Guidance on “*Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools*”.

Before addressing the specific questions raised in the Consultation, by way of preliminary comment we set out below our five key grounds of objection to this draft Guidance and the related consultative process:

KEY GROUNDS OF OBJECTION

1. Inadequate Consultation

The consultative process on the draft Guidance has been inadequate.

The draft Guidance seeks to introduce radical changes to the Scottish school curriculum.

The content is of significant public interest, and highly controversial.

Despite this:

- the Consultation has not been widely publicised by the Scottish Government;
- the Consultation has not been widely publicised by the local education authorities to local Parent Councils, parents or carers;
- no fair opportunity has been afforded to Parent Councils to canvass the views of their respective Parent Forums;
- no fair opportunity has been afforded to key stakeholders (namely, parents, carers, faith groups, and Parent Councils) to provide an informed response to the draft Guidance.

In summary, the consultation process has been inadequate due to:

- (i) lack of adequate public dissemination of the draft Guidance, proportionate to its significance;
- (ii) lack of due prominence and transparency as to its content, import and effect;
- (iii) lack of intimation to specific key stakeholders (parents, carers, parent councils, & faith groups);
- (iv) lack of reasonable time for specific stakeholders to canvass views and respond.

We request that a proper consultative process be initiated, if the draft is insisted upon.

2. Removal of the right of the Catholic Church to determine the RHSP curriculum in Catholic schools

For many years now, the content of the RSHP curriculum in Catholic state schools has been determined by the Catholic Church (under the auspices of the Bishops Conference of Scotland, with assistance from the Scottish Catholic Education Service). The Church is responsible for preparing all sex education resources for Catholic Schools.

That system has worked well for our children.

It teaches sex education within a Catholic moral context.

Our children are not thereby exposed to the more extreme and graphic content that is available to children in non-denominational schools.

Our children are also not thereby exposed to teaching that is inconsistent with Catholic doctrine.

The Scottish Government's existing statutory Guidance (published in December 2014) explicitly acknowledges and supports the right of the Catholic Church to determine the content of the RSHP curriculum in Catholic schools.

The existing Guidance contains a whole Section entitled "Denominational Education" (paragraphs 38 to 41).

That Section expressly records the "right" of the Catholic Church to determine religious and sex education within Catholic state schools.

Indeed, this has been the established position in Scottish education for over a century.

However, the most striking aspect of the new draft Guidance is that, without warning or explanation, it REMOVES that entire Section about "Denominational Education" from the existing Guidance – and thereby purports to REMOVE the right of the Church to determine the RSHP curriculum in Catholic Schools.

That is a major subversion of the *status quo*.

We vigorously oppose it.

In recent years, the SNP Scottish Government has made unequivocal public statements of support for the distinctive nature of Catholic schools.

In 2018, when delivering the annual Cardinal Winning Lecture, the then First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon MSP) stated:

“... my main message in this morning's lecture is actually a very simple one. The Scottish Government is an unequivocal supporter of Catholic schools. We value the contribution that Catholic schools make to modern Scotland. We want that contribution to continue in the years ahead....”

... The Catholic community entrusted the state with running Catholic schools. The state in turn promised that religious education and religious observance in Catholic schools would continue, and that the church would have a say in the selection of teachers.”

In 2019, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney MSP) made the following statement to the Scottish Parliament:

“The First Minister and I have been absolutely clear on the value that we place on Catholic education and on the important role that Catholic schools have in building the society that we live in today...

... I want to emphasise a key characteristic of the contribution of the Catholic education system to Scottish education as a whole: the importance of the values-based education that lies at the heart of Catholic schools, which makes a vital contribution to building a diverse, tolerant and loving society.

It is vital that our support for Catholic education is expressed without equivocation; I do that positively and enthusiastically in the Parliament this evening.

The Scottish Government remains an unequivocal supporter of Catholic education.

We value the contribution that Catholic schools and faith schools make and we are determined to ensure that the tradition is maintained in Scotland as a vital element of the Scottish education system.”

Is the Scottish Government no longer an “unequivocal supporter” of Catholic education in Scottish schools?

If so, that major policy reversal requires much greater consultative prominence, electoral engagement, and Parliamentary debate.

It is not a policy reversal that should be slipped into draft statutory guidance unannounced.

On the other hand, if the Scottish Government remains an “unequivocal supporter” of Catholic education in Scottish schools, the existing explicit protections for Denominational Education should be reaffirmed in the new draft Guidance.

Accordingly, we submit that the existing protections for Denominational Education (presently found in paragraphs 38 to 41 of the 2014 Guidance) should be reinstated and reinforced.

3. ***The suppression of Catholic religious freedom by promoting RSHP (and LGBT Inclusive Education) as the mechanism to define the school “ethos”***

The draft Guidance states:

“RSHP education has a central role in promoting the ethos of a school by helping bring pupils together and creating a sense of community.”

This is referred to in the draft Guidance as a “whole school” approach.

As a core element of RSHP, the draft Guidance also explicitly embraces the active promotion of an “LGBT Inclusive Education” across the entire school curriculum. It states:

“To enable LGBT Inclusive Education across the curriculum, there should be an emphasis on the importance of inter-disciplinary learning including but not exclusively through Expressive Arts, Languages, Literacy, Health and Well Being, Numeracy, Religious and Moral Education, Sciences and Social Studies.”

However, in Catholic schools, our ethos, and therefore our “whole school” approach, is based upon Christ’s teaching and the virtues and values outlined in the scriptures.

It is our Catholic ethos that informs RSHP education - not the other way about.

The Catholic sector is very mindful of the importance of a pastoral approach to equality and inclusion issues in our schools. That pastoral approach is both sensitive to young people and faithful to Church teaching.

In the Catholic denominational sector, the Catholic Church must be allowed to retain the right to develop its own approach to RSHP and “Equalities” and “Inclusion”.

Just one sentence within the 29 page draft Guidance bears to concede any place for the Church in RSHP education. That sentence states:

“It is further recognised that religious authorities with a role in education provide additional and complementary guidance on RSHP for denominational schools.”

Again, that is a major subversion of the *status quo*.

We vigorously oppose it.

The “whole school approach” promulgated in the draft Guidance cannot be implemented within Catholic schools without the fundamental erosion of their integrity and Catholicity.

It necessarily involves a suppression of Catholic religious freedom.

The draft Guidance thereby disrespects the rights of parents and guardians to have their children educated in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions within a Catholic school setting.

Accordingly, we submit that the promotion of RSHP as a “whole school approach” (purportedly to define the “ethos” of denominational schools) is flawed and should be removed from the draft Guidance.

4. Legal Rights of Parents

The draft Guidance disregards (or at least fails to attach due weight to) the existing legal rights of parents who wish their children to be educated in a Catholic (or other denominational) setting.

Those existing legal rights include the following:

- (i) Pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents (*Education (Scotland) Act 1980, s. 28*)
- (iii) In the exercise of any functions in relation to education and teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions (*Article 2, First Protocol, ECHR; Human Rights Act 1998*)

The deletion of existing safeguards for Denominational Education - and the enforced promotion of concepts that are inconsistent with Catholic doctrine - constitute a *prima facie* breach of those existing parental legal rights.

It is striking that the draft Guidance focusses less on the (existing) rights of parents and more on the (supposed) “rights” of children.

That is a subtle, but significant, difference in emphasis.

First, it tends to weaken the strength of the familial bond between parent and child, by subordinating the views of the parent to the views of the child (as influenced by the State through the school curriculum). Second, it diminishes the cardinal principle that parents (not governments) are the “first educators” of children. Third, it perpetuates the lazy notion of a “rights-based” culture, without inculcating in children a sense of corresponding “duty”, “obligation” or “responsibility” (such as, for example, the duty to respect parents, the duty to help others, the duty to contribute positively to society).

In addition, while the draft Guidance makes fleeting reference to parental rights, the clear emphasis of the draft is on the supposed “rights” of the child set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (“UNCRC”) (which does not yet even form part of Scots law). This approach is unfairly selective and misleading. It ignores the “rights” of the parent, including those that appear in the UNCRC (Article 14).

Therefore, if reliance is to be placed on the UNCRC in the draft Guidance, it should, in fairness, also attach equal prominence and significance to the rights of the parent (under, for example, Article 14, UNCRC, and existing domestic law).

5. *“LGBT Inclusive Education” across the whole curriculum*

In any event, within both the denominational and non-denominational sectors, the enforced promotion of “LGBT Inclusive Education” across the entire school curriculum is unnecessary, disproportionate and divisive.

The draft Guidance states:

“To enable LGBT Inclusive Education across the curriculum, there should be an emphasis on the importance of inter-disciplinary learning including but not exclusively through Expressive Arts, Languages, Literacy, Health and Well Being, Numeracy, Religious and Moral Education, Sciences and Social Studies”

This represents an unprecedented elevation, within the school curriculum, of the interests of a minority political lobby, in circumstances where there is no clear consensus within wider civil society for any such preferential treatment.

The school curriculum ought to be ring-fenced from, and protected against, interference and influence by political activism.

Absent a clear consensus within wider civil society, issues of such entrenched political contention and dissent ought not to be “embedded” in school teaching as empirical truth.

At present, there is no consensus within our society as to the merits of “LGBT Inclusive Education”.

Indeed, there is no universal understanding as to what that term actually means.

There is no unanimity (even among the LGBT community) as to the respective rights and entitlements of its constituent members.

In truth, this is a subject that remains highly contentious in civil society.

In those circumstances:

- (i) It is divisive to embed “LGBT Inclusive Education” into the whole school curriculum when consensus on its meaning and merits has not yet emerged within civil society more generally.
- (ii) It is unnecessary to embed “LGBT Inclusive Education” into the whole school curriculum because the existing criminal and civil law adequately protects LGBT persons from harassment, bullying and discrimination.
- (iii) It is disproportionate to promote “LGBT Inclusive Education” within the whole school curriculum because, for no compelling reason, it confers an unprecedented primacy and preferential status upon one minority group, to the exclusion of multiple other minority groups who suffer equal or even greater prejudice or under-representation.

According to crime statistics, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and various racial minorities, are victimised, maligned or discriminated against to a similar or even greater extent than members of the LGBT community.

Yet, it would not be considered proportionate or reasonable to embed, within the “whole school curriculum”, a primary or preferential status upon any of those other victimised minority groups.

Likewise, the selection of the LGBT minority group for preferential status and primacy within the whole school curriculum is also disproportionate, illogical and unjustified.

DETAILED RESPONSES TO THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN THE CONSULTATION

We now set out below our detailed responses to the specific questions raised in the Consultation:

Question 1: Introduction

Is the draft introduction clear on the status and application of the guidance? Are there further additions required?

The introduction offers an overview of developments in education since 2014. It suggests that these are the reasons why the 2014 Guidance requires to be refreshed.

However, there is no explanation or justification as to why the new draft Guidance should have departed so far from the existing 2014 Guidance; why critical sections should be deleted; and why disproportionate emphasis should be given to certain aspects.

The existing 2014 Guidance could readily have been adapted and enhanced to include necessary developments while maintaining the previous content and ensuring that it remained high-level guidance. In any event, we repeat the five key grounds of objection referred to above.

Two omissions are also notable:

1. Paragraph 1.9 focusses on the “rights” of the child under UNCRC; it fails to mention or give equal prominence to the rights of parents under UNCRC.
2. Paragraph 1.11 refers to the Equality Act – but fails to disclose that the content of the school curriculum is expressly exempted from Equality Act provisions (both in schools with a religious character and in single-sex schools).

Question 2: Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education

How clear is the purpose of the RSHP education section?

The Consultation document begins with defining the principles and aims of relationships and sex education. However, the draft Guidance does not refer to these again. This creates a fundamental lack of clarity as to its principles and aims.

The draft Guidance references a “whole school approach” to the delivery of RSHP, including a link to the school ethos and the fact that learning and teaching may take place in RME-RERC.

At no point in the document is there ANY reference to denominational schools, specifically Catholic schools, or the distinctive Catholic pathway to Religious & Moral Education.

Furthermore, it is recognised that, since the Education (Scotland) Act 1918, the content of religious education in Catholic schools is determined by the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland.

Therefore, this Section should make explicit that, where planned learning, teaching and assessment of RSHP happens within the context of RERC, it is the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland that determines its content.

Question 3: Parental engagement and ability to withdraw from RSHP learning

Is the guidance sufficiently clear in relation to the rights of parents and carers; is the process for withdrawing a pupil sufficiently clear?

We welcome the acknowledgment that parents are indeed the primary educators of their children.

While there is guidance on parents’ rights, schools may need further detail on implementation of section 2.12. This section is ambiguous. Terms such as ‘due weight’ and ‘capable of forming their own views’ and ‘ensuring their views are taken into account’ could result in very different approaches, and thereby undermine the rights of parents and carers.

Question 4: Embedding RSHP Education as a Whole School Approach**How effective is the guidance in explaining the key issues to be highlighted to teachers in delivering RSHP education? How does this help bring consistency to learning?**

This section again refers to the central role of school ethos. It states that RSHP is delivered “within a framework of sound values”.

The 4th Aim of RSHP, according to the Consultation document, is to enable children and young people to develop and reflect upon their beliefs, attitudes and values in relation to themselves and others within a moral, ethical and multi-cultural framework.

The Principles also state that sex education should contribute to the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual development of all children and young people and should reflect the cultural, ethnic and religious influences within the home, school and community.

We therefore welcome the fact that this Guidance recognises that, within Catholic schools the “Whole School Approach” will be defined by the ethos and values of those Catholic schools.

Within a Catholic school, the ethos and values are defined by Church teaching and Gospel values. The moral, ethical and multi-cultural framework is defined by our heritage, culture, traditions and teachings as a Church; and the delivery of RSHP, and all other curricular areas, reflects this.

Question 5: Consent and healthy relationships**Is the guidance sufficiently clear in supporting consent and healthy relationships having a greater focus in RSHP education?**

There is a conflation here between “consent” and “healthy relationships”.

There is also reference to online relationships and digital consent which is ambiguous and concerning, as it does not have any real definition.

Higher priority should be given to Section 3.6 on confidentiality. This should be separated from the section on consent. This is a very different area from consent in a relationship. This impacts on the capacity of staff, especially teaching staff, to have clear parameters within the classroom and to act when concerned, especially in child protection matters.

We would expect much greater clarity regarding the statement that “children have the same right to confidentiality as adults”. There also needs to be much greater clarity as to how that statement interacts with, and relates to, parents’ rights.

The inclusion of Whole School Guidance tables and links for websites from this point on in the draft Guidance is unhelpful. It clutters the Guidance and suggests that these websites are being promoted or endorsed by Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government could not conceivably have fact-checked each of these websites and cannot know what content may be added to them in the future.

It is unclear which parts of this document are the actual guidance, and which parts are merely embedded appendices for reference purposes only.

In contrast, the existing 2014 Guidance offered clear, high-level guidance enabling local authorities and schools to work towards policy and practice.

Question 6: Faith Belief & Education

Is the guidance sufficiently clear in ensuring faith and belief is accurately captured in RSHP education?

The answer to this question is: No.

As representatives of the Parent Forum of a Catholic School, we have grave concerns that the paragraphs in the existing 2014 Guidance that are dedicated to preserving Denominational Education (paragraphs 38-41) have been deleted in the new draft Guidance.

We ask that these paragraphs be fully reinstated, and reinforced.

We request that the Scottish Government:

- (i) reiterates its support for Denominational Education;
- (ii) reaffirms that the Religious Authorities with a role in denominational education (in our case, the Bishops' Conference of Scotland), continue to have the right to provide the RSHP curriculum for their schools; and
- (iii) reiterates that Scottish Government Guidance is complementary to that of the relevant Religious Authority – not, as paragraph 4.11 of the draft Guidance states, that the content/guidance from Religious Authorities is merely ‘additional and complementary’ to the governmental Guidance.

It is striking that the term “Catholic School” is not used within the draft Guidance and that the term “denominational schools” appears only once.

This section of the draft Guidance gives no recognition to the fact that approximately 20% of the school estate in Scotland is formed of Catholic schools, chosen by parents and families, of all faiths and none. A distinction must be made between schools with a

distinctive faith character (i.e. denominational schools) and children raised in a religion or with religious belief.

Therefore, a separate section should be included within the main text of the draft Guidance to reflect the place of denominational schools within the state system – as per the existing 2014 Guidance.

The new draft Guidance does not fully explain the legal protection and right of denominational schools, nor does it fully express the role of the denominational body in whose interests such schools are managed.

As it is recognised that schools with a religious character have a distinctive approach across the whole school, and in all areas of the curriculum, this should be reflected in this new draft Guidance.

Faith and belief influence all aspects of teaching and learning, and are not limited, for example, to the Catholic children and families in a Catholic school. They are the foundation for the mission, aims and values of the whole school community, including those families, not of the Catholic tradition, who actively choose Catholic education. (The same would be true for those who choose a Jewish or Episcopalian school.)

This distinctive nature is recognised in the Equality Act and was coherently presented in the “Denominational Education” Section of the existing 2014 Guidance (in particular, paragraphs 39 to 41 thereof).

It should be noted that the National Census data from 2011 shows that 56% of Scottish people belong to a faith. Relationships and sexual behaviour are part of the key teachings of all of the major world religions, and particularly so for the five largest in Scotland (Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism and Judaism).

It may be helpful to have an indication about what each Religion teaches on sexual relationships, so as to better equip teachers in their preparation for lessons, and to ensure that all pupils are fully included in learning. See the link below:

https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/rel2A_Religion_detailed_Scotland.pdf

Religiously-aggravated hate crime remains a source of concern within Scotland. The majority of these hate crimes are directed at Roman Catholics. See the link below:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/religiously-aggravated-offending-scotland-2017-18/>).

Families, young people, schools and parishes, continue to raise concerns regarding the intolerance and prejudice shown to young people who openly practice their faith and maintain the teachings of their religion on relationships and life issues. For example, at Universities, young people who support the right to life of unborn children have been discriminated against. Muslim families have raised concern that their religious beliefs are being contradicted in RSHP lessons. Christian families are anxious that matters relating to sexual health and sexuality are being taught to their children at too early an age.

Christian teachers have noted that they feel increasingly coerced to teach against their conscience in matters relating to sexual relationships. They report that pupils are hiding their faith belief in school for fear of bullying and intimidation.

Further, with reference to the “Protection of Teachers with Religious Belief”, the existing 2014 Guidance mentions specifically the process through which teachers, who felt unable to teach aspects of RSHP due to their religious belief, can raise concerns. It is significant that this valuable protection has been removed in the new draft Guidance. This suggests that the Scottish Government has no concern for the beliefs of those tasked with delivering RSHP.

Lastly, as mentioned above, the inclusion of Whole School Guidance tables and links for websites from this point on in the Guidance is unhelpful.

It clutters the Guidance and suggests that these sites are being promoted or endorsed by Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government could not conceivably have fact-checked each of these sites and cannot know what content may be added to them in the future. This is to be contrasted with the clarity of the existing 2014 Guidance.

Question 7: Gender Inclusive Education

Is the guidance sufficiently clear in ensuring gender inclusive language is used to deliver RSHP education?
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While this section goes some way to considering approaches to redressing societal stereotypes, it does not address the complexity of difference between genders.

There is a need to be informed of, and sensitively to consider, the individual needs of each pupils at different points in their development (for example at puberty), and for staff to be able to address behaviours that may be linked to gender and sex. For example, schools are reporting an increase in misogyny, sexism and prejudice towards girls. This needs to be named and addressed in a manner that recognises the connection to a perception of masculinity.

Again, the draft Guidance is cluttered here with links to websites which cannot conceivably have been fact-checked by the Scottish Government.

Question 8: Understanding of Variations in Sex Characteristics (VSC) sometimes referred to as or Differences in Sex Development (DSD) or Intersex

Is the guidance sufficiently clear in explaining and including VSC/DSD/intersex people in RSHP education?

It is a departure from the rest of the Guidance to include a quote from the UN at this point. It is our understanding that when the Scottish Government LGBTI Inclusive Education Working Group was convened, those representing Intersex young people asked NOT to have their needs addressed by this Group. Therefore, it seems incongruent to use a UN quote linked to a campaign against homophobia and transphobia.

Again, this section is cluttered with tables and links for websites that have not been fact-checked.

Question 9: LGBT Inclusive RSHP education

Is the guidance sufficiently clear in ensuring RSHP education is LGBT inclusive?

This section appears to go beyond the intended parameters of this Guidance. Paragraph 3.19 is about general curriculum and bears no relevance to RSHP.

The enforced promotion of “LGBT Inclusive Education” across the entire school curriculum is unnecessary, disproportionate and divisive. At present, there is no consensus within our society as to the merits or meaning of “LGBT Inclusive Education”. It represents an unprecedented elevation, within the school curriculum, of the interests of a minority political lobby, in circumstances where there is no clear consensus within wider civil society for any such preferential treatment (as explained more fully above).

Besides, Catholic schools in Scotland have been advised by the Equality and Human Rights Commission that they may “continue to teach the position of their particular faith on marriage and same-sex relationships, provided that this is done in an appropriate, reasonable and professional way and provided that they also teach the facts, where relevant, about the law concerning marriage in Scotland” (*Equality & Human Rights Commission, Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014: Provision of School Education, April 2016*).

Question 10: Key Learning Points for RSHP Education

Are these key learning points sufficiently clear in explaining the requirements for RSHP education?

This section should offer clarity through a comprehensive summary of what is contained elsewhere.

It does not do so.

There is also no mention of parents in this section; it parachutes in various references to children requiring additional support; and it follows a different pattern to the rest of the document, giving some sections significantly more weight than others.

Question 11: Pupils with Additional Support Needs

Is the guidance sufficiently clear in explaining the requirement for pupils with Additional Support Needs to have RSHP education?

There should be a comprehensive section within the main text relating to pupils with Additional Support Needs.

This appears, at best, to have been annexed; at worst, forgotten; and should be redressed in any re-draft of the Guidance.

Question 12: RSHP Policy Guidance & Resources

Does the guidance provide sufficient resources and signposts to support teachers in delivery of RSHP education. If not, which resources do you think are missing?

This section would be more helpful if it were limited to current Policy and Guidance for Scottish schools that is promoted, endorsed or required by Scottish Government and local authorities.

A separate section on resources could be hosted on the funded Scottish Government webpage for RSHP and would ensure that there was no suggestion that these resources, reports, research or other items had any particular weighting.

Yours faithfully,

Joint Chairs on behalf of
The Parent Council of St Ninian's High School

Date: 17 November 2023

ANNEX 2

THE PISA REPORT: 15 YEARS OF DECLINING STANDARDS IN SCOTTISH EDUCATION

1. Summary of PISA Report

SUMMARY OF PISA REPORT

Scotland's performance in maths, science and reading has been on a downward trend for 15 years, according to the OECD'S latest PISA Report (2023).

What is Pisa?

The Pisa report measures education standards among nearly 700,000 15-year-olds worldwide

Pisa stand for "Programme for International Student Assessment".

It is run by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It is just one way of comparing education systems in different countries.

The OECD reported an "unprecedented drop" in performance, on average, across the participating countries when comparing the 2022 study to 2018.

Nearly 700,000 students from 81 countries took part in the latest study, including 3,300 pupils across 117 schools in Scotland.

Pupils sitting the test are asked to use their skills of reasoning, interpretation and problem solving - rather than simply remembering facts.

The questions in the research are designed to be "culturally neutral" so pupils in particular countries are not at an unfair advantage or disadvantage.

How did Scotland perform?

Badly.

The report shows a long-term decline in Scotland's performance in reading, maths and science.

Within the UK's four devolved education systems, England was the highest achiever in all three subjects.

Wales was the lowest performing within the UK for all subjects, with Northern Ireland doing better than Scotland in maths and science, and Scotland outperforming Northern Ireland in reading.

The research also showed teenagers in the UK reported a high level of food poverty, with 11% of 15-year-olds skipping a meal at least once a week because of a lack of money.

Scotland's score in the 2022 Pisa assessment for reading was 493, down from 504 in 2018 and 526 in 2000 when the Pisa study started.

The reading performance was above the OECD average of 476 points and higher than 24 other countries.

Scotland's reading score is ahead of Wales (466) and Northern Ireland (485) but behind England (496).

For maths the score in 2022 was 471, which is just below the OECD average of 472 points.

However, Scotland's score is down from 489 in 2018 and 491 in 2015.

This is ahead of Wales (466), but behind Northern Ireland (475) and England (492).

In science, Scotland's score was 483 points, below the 490 result in 2018 and 497 in 2015.

This is better than Wales (473) but behind Northern Ireland (488) and England (503).

The OECD spokesperson said that disruption caused by Covid "made a difference", but should not be overplayed, and that other issues such as parental support and the use of mobile phones need to be considered.

He said:

"We can see that students' use of smart phones was quite clearly linked in Scotland, but also in other countries, to greater student anxiety, to more disruption, to less concentration.

"Even many students in Scotland said 'my neighbour is using their smart phone during a lesson and I can't concentrate'.

"So clearly the use of technology for leisure may have played an equal role as the pandemic, but we can't disentangle - we just see the overall results."

The OECD study also picked up on a decline in parental support and engagement in Scotland.

Lindsay Paterson, Professor Emeritus of Education Policy at Edinburgh University, said the decline in Scottish performance in the Pisa study corresponds with the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence schools model.

He said:

"The longer-term decline may be seen clearly for Scotland if we go back a full decade to 2012.

"2012 is around the time that the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence was beginning to impinge significantly on children's learning."

What about the rest of the UK?

England is the highest-performing nation across all three disciplines.

Wales remained the lowest performing within the UK for all subjects, with Northern Ireland doing better than Scotland in maths and science, and Scotland outperforming Northern Ireland in reading.

In the UK as a whole, in maths and reading, all gains observed in the previous cycle in 2018 were reversed as the scores dropped from 502 to 489 and from 504 to 494 respectively.

The UK's score in science confirmed a decade-long decline in performance, dropping to 500 in 2022 from 505 in 2018.

The OECD also found that 11% of 15-year-olds in the UK reported skipping a meal at least once a week because there was not enough money to buy food, compared to an OECD average of 8%.