

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

2 February 2023

Report by Director of Education

EDUCATION RESPONSE TO 'LET'S TALK SCOTTISH EDUCATION'

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. The purpose of the report is to inform Education Committee on the Education Department's response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on the national curriculum.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. Education Committee is asked to note the contents of the Education Department's response to the Scottish Government Consultation on the national curriculum.

**BACKGROUND**

3. The Scottish Government and CoSLA launched a National Discussion on the vision for education in Scotland: "Let's Talk Scottish Education" on 21 September 2022.

4. The national discussion was a direct consequence of a recommendation in the [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education](#) publication; to create a compelling and consensual vision for the future of Scottish education.

5. Professor Carol Campbell and Professor Alma Harris were asked to act as independent facilitators for the National Discussion.

6. The discussion took place between 21 September and 5 December with a report timetabled for spring 2023.

7. Ten questions were set by the independent facilitators to prompt discussion and response.

8. The discussion presented an unprecedented opportunity for children, young people and all those who support them to have their voices heard in a debate to establish a compelling and consensual vision for Scottish education.

**REPORT**

9. East Renfrewshire Education Department created various opportunities to engage learners, parents and carers, staff, leaders and partners in this important and exciting discussion.

10. The engagement timetable (appendix 1) details the range of voices that contributed to the departmental response.

11. Senior leaders in establishments took responsibility for capturing the views of children, young people, staff and parents.

12. A pupil curriculum conference took place, highlighting the importance of the pupils' contribution and views.

13. Comments from all respondents were recorded, analysed and included in the final response which can be found as part of appendix 2.

## **CONSULTATION**

14. The response has been determined through formal consultation with a range of stakeholders including:

- Children and Young People
- Parents / Carers
- School Staff
- Head Teachers
- Quality Improvement Team
- Education Leadership Team
- Education Committee

## **FINANCIAL AND EFFICIENCY IMPLICATIONS**

15. The Education Department is well placed to implement any recommendations or improvements as a result of the national consultation and subsequent report.

16. A Curriculum, Learning, Teaching and Assessment group was established in September 2021, with a remit of leading departmental policy and guidance for schools.

17. Group membership is made up from Head Teachers, Depute Head Teachers, Principal Teachers and Quality Improvement Officers and chaired by the Head of Service (Quality Improvement).

18. This group would be tasked with responding to any recommendations arising from the national consultation and subsequent report.

19. The Education Department Local Improvement Plan would also reflect any national recommendations.

20. There are no financial or efficiency implication arising from this report.

21. Any significant changes as a result of this national consultation may lead to financial or efficiency implications in the future. If this was to be the case, a report providing detail would be shared at a future Education Committee.

## RECOMMENDATION

22. Education Committee is asked to note the contents of the Education Department response to the Scottish Government Consultation on the national curriculum.

Mark Ratter  
Director of Education  
2 February 2023

### **Convener Contact Details**

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### Appendices

1. Engagement Timeline
2. Education Department Response

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**‘Let’s Talk Scottish Education’ – National Discussion on the future of Education**  
**21 September and 5 December**  
**East Renfrewshire Council Education Department: Engagement Timeline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Host</b>	<b>Venue</b>
Ongoing	Raise Profile with all establishments	J. Collins	
17 November 2022	Parent Representatives	F. McDonald R. Ali	Cross Arthurlie Primary
12 October 2022	Parent Council Chairs	S. McColgan	Barrhead High
28 October 2022	Quality Improvement Team	J. Collins	Mearns Castle High
15 & 16 November 2022	Teachers inc. LNCT representatives	A Hutcheson G. Friel J. McGregor	St Marks Primary Braidbar Primary Carolside Primary
15 & 16 November 2022	Local Government Employees inc. LNCT representatives	A Hutcheson G. Friel J. McGregor	St Marks Primary Braidbar Primary Carolside Primary
8 November 2022	ELC Pupil Representatives	S. Hunter L. Matthews C. Morris	ONLINE
10 November 2022	Primary Pupil Representatives	S. Hunter L. Matthews C. Morris	Eastwood High School
10 November 2022	Secondary Pupil Representatives	S. Hunter L. Matthews C. Morris	Eastwood High School
7 November 2022	Education Leadership Team	J. Collins	Education Department, Barrhead Offices
9 November 2022	Secondary Head Teachers	J. Collins	Mearns Castle High
16 November 2022	ELC, Primary and Special Head Teachers	J. Collins	Eastwood House
16 November 2022	Education Committee	J. Collins M. Ratter	Online

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**Let's Talk Scottish Education**

**East Renfrewshire Council Education Department Response**

**5 December 2022**

**1. What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?**

Our elected members, school leaders, staff, parents, carers and pupils overwhelmingly agreed that although we cannot predict what the world or society is going to be like in the future, we must build an education system focused on equality, equity and children's rights. We need to focus on the skills, the abilities and the resilience to adapt to situations that children and young people may face in the future. Although knowledge is important, we must have an education system that teaches children how to access knowledge. A system that motivates and inspires learners and nurtures a love for learning and learning behaviour for life. Children and young people should be able to identify as learners and have an understanding of what that means. This is not at the expense of achievement, with all stakeholders emphasising the need for a world class system in terms of qualifications; however we want children and young people to have learned how to learn and have the capacity to continue to learn for the purpose of attaining qualifications and beyond.

High quality pedagogy from early years to senior phase is required, within a curriculum that is relevant, flexible and responsive. All of our stakeholders expressed a desire to maintain a weighting on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, however other areas must be decluttered, as although Curriculum for Excellence is set up as a skills based curriculum, the reality is it has become about coverage rather than creativity, curiosity, problem solving and other transferable skills. However some staff expressed a desire to balance knowledge and skills more evenly, especially in the secondary sector. They believed that this would support with transition at key stages across sectors. It was also felt that a predominately skills based broad general education and a knowledge based senior phase, leads to real disconnect across the secondary school sector. Our secondary pupils also highlighted that with knowledge comes high stake assessments, which often diminishes the enjoyment at school. Some of our elected members shared a concern that as children progress through school and across sectors the subjects become demarcated with young people's experiences narrowing too quickly and the application and relevance of skills achieved become limited.

Staff feel strongly that children and young people need space to slow down, be brave and to take on bold, important learning in relation to big questions about their world and the world beyond their classroom, for example real life contexts such as global issues. This has to be balanced with children and staff feeling an unhelpful sense of hyper responsibility for a range of issues that cannot be solved by children. Although schools can be very effective at identifying issues that may need addressed, this does not mean that the responsibility lies with schools to resolve the issues nor can schools solve this on their own.

Staff expressed a need to focus on continuity across 3-18 and for learning and teaching to be based on the curriculum - not the assessment criteria; in particular in the secondary sector.

This needs to be developed in partnership with higher and further education establishments and employers to ensure a child or young person's school experience leads to positive destinations and outcomes in the future and the development of skills and attributes which are sought by employers. All future pathways should be valued by children, young people, parents, employers and wider society.

Pupils and staff, highlighted the importance of digital skills for the future. Concerns were expressed that the skills children and young people are developing are not able to be enhanced or built upon due to staff and parent expertise and the lack of resources and support.

## **2. How do we make that a reality?**

Courageous and values based leadership at all levels within the education system.

Our children and young people shared that by making the curriculum more relevant it would instantly motivate and support progress. They provided examples such as learning more about changing our world for the better and their role in doing so, thinking about real life and real world issues such as cost of living, climate change, endangered species and wars and conflict.

Our parent and carers highlighted the need for the education system to be more inclusive and equitable with representation and relevance for all key equity groups. They suggested smaller class sizes, increased resources, including teachers and support staff; decolonising of the curriculum and increased training for all in mental health and wellbeing.

Our school leaders and staff believe that there needs to be more trust in the education community than there is at the moment. A frustration was evident from the level and volume of initiatives that have surfaced from central government, many contradicting the other. The pace of change has become counterproductive with a workforce who are motivated to improve, however with diminished capacity because of the number of national policies, initiatives or guidance.

Again school leaders and staff highlighted how the GTC Standards were reviewed and relaunched but there appears to be further disconnect between the narrative around professional autonomy and empowerment and the current system. They suggested for the system to improve and deliver there needs to be a review of the empowerment agenda and a move towards allowing local solutions to local issues by trusted professionals. Take forward the OECD recommendations about decluttering the system to ensure that any centralised agencies have a proper understanding about the realities of school life (not just through inspection) and are prepared to model solutions/ work in partnership with practitioners on the ground to add value, rather than continue to expect more from an overburdened schools system.

Children and young people need an education system that empowers families as the primary educators of their children and schools that foreground relationships and authentic partnerships to explore values, build emotional intelligence and allow children to patiently engage with and explore the skills they will need to navigate an uncertain future.

School Leaders and staff also asked for investment in their profession, from Initial Teacher Education, through to Career Long Professional Learning. Investment to ensure high quality teaching and learning, with a culture of collaborative and professional inquiry.



**3. How can every child and young person's individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?**

All stakeholders stated the importance of relationships across the system, where children and young people are listened to, and their views valued and acted upon by a skilled, confident and passionate workforce.

Parents and carers believed that fairer funding to local government to enable education to be appropriately resourced would support with inclusion and equity. School leaders echoed this but also asked for expectations and priorities to be managed more appropriately as we move into a period of less local government funding.

School leaders believe that Curriculum for Excellence's Four Capacities are very much relevant, and would only require some tweaking to make relevant for today's children and young people, however they stressed a deeper understanding of how to ensure these are part of the outcomes from the curriculum and not left to chance.

This was reinforced by children and young people who recalled the capacities but not in the context they were intended.

**4. What is one thing that needs to stay and why?**

All stakeholders made a plea for continued investment in education, both capital and revenue, with school leaders and staff stating career long professional learning opportunities are essential in an improving system. All teachers agreed that in Scotland, the profession should remain a qualified profession to maintain high quality.

Although specific funding in terms of Pupil Equity Funding and Strategic Equity Funding were recognised and appreciated, it was highlighted that this was against a backdrop where other services and resources were being cut.

Parents / carers and staff also strongly suggested that for the presumption of mainstream to be a reality in Scotland, investment is required to support inclusion, in particular recruitment and retention of teachers and pupil support staff.

School leaders and staff also stated that teachers in early years are pivotal to early intervention and prevention and would encourage further investment in this area at a national level.

The commitment to increased access to technology and the equitable roll out of this is key to meeting the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners however, this should be purposeful.

**5. What are the most important priorities for a future Scottish education system?**

All stakeholders highlighted the need for the curriculum to be the main focus in the classroom and not the exam system. There is a genuine plea that the National Discussion influences the Professor Louise Hayward review and not the other way about.

All value qualifications, and emphasise the need for a world class system, however how we assess progress and measure success should align to how we teach and how children learn.

There is a real commitment by all stakeholders to raise attainment for all children and young people and a desire to close the poverty related attainment gap. Although staff highlighted the key role they play in this, they believe the challenges with resources across services, often mean collaboration is not able to take place. Therefore a commitment to prioritise children's learning and wellbeing is needed.

Teachers believe choice within the education system should be a priority. Scotland meets the needs of young people and families by offering a broad spectrum of education at different ages and stages of life. This choice within our system, from rural schools, Gaelic medium, denominational schools, ASN etc, offers parents and pupils the best chance to have an education that will allow growth and development and success that will impact on the individual and the common good of society. The Catholic educators recorded that within that sector, the provision of Catholic schools needs to stay.

Staff believe that children's rights should be embedded into pedagogy and practice, with mental and emotional wellbeing and resilience being nurtured and developed in all pupils from an early age.

Parents believe the variety of curriculum pathways, linked to labour market information, in the senior phase should continue to be prioritised, however they believe that these should be considered in all Scottish Government measures (i.e. Scottish Attainment Challenge).

**6. How can we ensure that everyone involved in education in Scotland has a say in future decisions and actions?**

All stakeholders believe that the Scottish Government needs to listen more to local authorities, school staff, parents / carers and children and young people. There is a concern amongst all that many decisions are removed from what happens in the ELC setting or school.

Staff also emphasised the importance that if you're asked for your opinion that people listen. It was noted that this has not been the experience of many stakeholders during recent national consultations.

**7. How can children and young people be cared for and supported in the future? (i.e. physical and mental wellbeing)?**

All believe there is genuine motivation and willingness by all partners to collaborate to bring about improvement and support for children and young people, however diminishing resources and lack of funding from government mean that planning commitments are often not realised.

Although some ring fenced money is available it is often felt that there is no strategic discussion between Scottish Government Directorates or Education Scotland so many policy initiatives are disjointed or misaligned in terms of single agency priorities.

All stakeholders agreed that ensuring children and young people's voices are heard in relation to their physical and mental health and wellbeing is key. However parents, staff and school leaders highlighted the need for effective signposting and available support to respond.

Children and young people also expressed a desire to have clear signposting to mitigate against isolation and loneliness. They also talked about opportunities to exercise, play and take part in hobbies and clubs as crucial.

Parents and carers agreed and suggested free at the point of access opportunities for children and young people to exercise their mental and physical health.

Children and young people also talked about the structure of the school day and opportunities for mindfulness and relaxation to be included. They also shared that in their experience adults are fantastic role models for emotional and mental health.

#### **8. How can the right of every child and young person to have opportunities to develop their full potential be achieved in future?**

Staff believe that more work needs to be done with all stakeholders around understanding what each individual's full potential is. They believe it is about having a curriculum rationale that meets the needs of children and young people within the context of the school and the community. To do so there needs to be enough autonomy within the curriculum to enable flexibility and different curriculum pathways to ensure children are on the appropriate path. All pathways should be ambitious, challenging but achievable. We want to ensure that we do have high attaining and achieving young people who realise success with their choices.

Inclusion and the recommendations of the Morgan Review are vitally important to ensuring the right pathway for all children and that there are key opportunities to develop potential and achievement.

Staff and parents stated the need for investment in order to do so. Investment in smaller class sizes, more teachers and support staff and high quality professional learning.

Parents / carers supported this view.

#### **9. How can children and young people be helped to learn about our changing world, so they feel able to positively contribute?**

It is a fine balance between a prescriptive and non-prescriptive curriculum. At the moment staff in our secondary schools believe the senior phase it is too prescriptive, leaving no capacity to engage children and young people about the changing world. There is a real commitment to developing children and young people prepared for the future, however the SQA exam system is in direct conflict with this. At the moment the focus is on knowledge to pass exams, rather than developing skills they will need for learning, life and work. Staff therefore state that while the SQA exams are still used as a narrow measure of accountability, they will not be able to provide a curriculum that fully equips young people for the world we live in or indeed develop the four capacities.

They call for brave leadership when reviewing a very well established system and suggest looking towards other systems such as the international baccalaureate. They cited this as being far more relevant and also providing young people with opportunities for pupil leadership, pupil voice, Rights Respecting agenda, community partnership, learning for sustainability and meaningful engagement as change makers and campaigners.

Staff requested a curriculum that allows more opportunities to work in partnership with the local community (including parents) on real life projects.

**10. Do you have any other comments that you would like to provide about a vision for the future of Scottish Education?**

There was a word of caution by some stakeholders not to ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’ and ensure we have capacity in the system (especially the workforce) before any systemic change.