

Save Our Teachers

Why Renfrewshire Council's
proposals don't support
Curriculum for Excellence

A brief discussion paper

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A revised model?

Renfrewshire Council's SNP/LibDem administration, with the support of its Director of Education, claims that its proposal to revise the model for Primary Education will enhance the education of our children. This is highly questionable.

The proposal aims to reduce the number of primary teachers in Renfrewshire by 60 and to replace them with around 120 part-time sessional staff, including sports coaches, drama workers and leisure staff. The subsequent generation of a potential annual budget saving of around £1.1m appears to be the main driver for the proposal. The Council argues that this will enhance the learning experiences of children and supports the type of 'fresh approach' which Curriculum for Excellence is keen to encourage.

On the contrary, reference to the Learning Teaching Scotland website on Curriculum for Excellence demonstrates that the Council's proposed changes in how the curriculum is delivered (i.e. by non-teaching staff for 2.5 hours per week for all children) runs contrary to the central aspects of Curriculum for Excellence.

This is considered below (with my emphasis throughout).

One Size Doesn't Fit All

Curriculum for Excellence says...

To ensure that Curriculum for Excellence is a curriculum for all children and young people, it is essential that **support is provided to remove barriers that might restrict their access to the curriculum because of their circumstances or short- or longer-term needs.**

For children who need additional support for their learning, **this may involve interpretation of the curriculum in ways which address their particular needs** and enable them to achieve to the highest levels of which they are capable.

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatcanlearnersexpect/support.asp>

Comment:

There are serious, unanswered questions as to whether part-time sessional workers will be experienced enough to provide adequate additional support to individual children.

In simple terms, Curriculum for Excellence recognises that children have different needs – this can include children with learning disabilities, behavioural problems, social and family issues, and also those who are high-achievers and require additional challenges. It takes teachers many years to build up the requisite experience and practice to manage the different needs of a class of children.

The Council has proposed a "one size fits all" activities planner for the delivery of the 2.5 hours of non-teaching time. Will sessional workers possess the skills and experience to interpret the curriculum differently for key children?

Personalisation and choice for pupils

Curriculum for Excellence says...

All children and young people should experience personalisation and choice within their curriculum, including identifying and planning for opportunities for personal achievement in a range of different contexts. This implies taking an interest in learners as individuals, with their own talents and interests.

All establishments will work with a range of partners to address the needs of all children and young people and provide motivating and challenging opportunities, particularly for those who may require more choices and more chances. Action to address the needs of learners requires an integrated approach across children's and young people's services with strong links to community learning and development and community regeneration.

Wherever a child or young person of compulsory school age may be undertaking learning activities, **the school retains the responsibility for planning, with its partners, the most appropriate educational provision for that child or young person and for ensuring that their development and progress are regularly reviewed. Partner organisations will need to share an understanding of the experiences and outcomes to which they are contributing.**

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatcanlearnersexpect/support.asp>

Comment:

How much personalisation and choice will be offered to pupils when it is planned, for the first year at least, to deliver the exact same content to every stage at every school of the proposed 'enrichment programme'?

Much of the 'subject matter' to be delivered in the proposed non-teaching time will already have been covered by pupils. So what will the non-teaching staff be doing to ensure that the pupils continue to be challenged educationally? In the absence of clarity around this, the clear danger is that the programme becomes essentially an exercise in 'baby-sitting' for 2.5 hours each week.

The Council appears to be proposing to remove responsibility for planning these 2.5 hours from each school, for the first year at least; as the content is to be the same across all schools. What power will a school have to change aspects of the programme if it feels it is not suitable (challenging, stretching, previous content has been repeated from the past)? If a school is finding it difficult to change aspects of the proposed curriculum delivery, will the Parent Council have any route to take to address their concerns for their children?

What educational training will be given to sessional workers on the outcomes and experiences? Due to the enormity of the changes in the curriculum, the Scottish Government phased these in over a two-year period for teaching staff. How do

Renfrewshire Council plan to ensure sessional workers are equipped with the necessary understanding in a matter of only weeks?

Coherent and meaningful

Curriculum for Excellence says...

Revisiting a concept or skill from different perspectives deepens understanding, and can also **make the curriculum more coherent and meaningful** from the learner's point of view.

Interdisciplinary studies can also take advantage of opportunities **to work with partners who are able to offer and support enriched learning experiences** and opportunities for young people's wider involvement in society.

Effective interdisciplinary learning:

- can take the form of individual one-off projects or longer courses of study
- **is planned around clear purposes**
- is based upon experiences and outcomes drawn from different curriculum areas or subjects within them
- **ensures progression in skills and in knowledge and understanding**
- can provide opportunities for mixed-stage learning which is interest-based.

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/learningacrossthecurriculum/interdisciplinarylearning/about/contextforlearning.asp>

Comment:

Individual class teachers do not appear to be involved in the planning of this proposed part of the school week. Is the "learning" during the 2.5 hours intended to be discrete from everything else the child is doing? This reduces the remaining teaching time for integrated and interdisciplinary work. If what is to be delivered is to be regarded as extra-curricular, then school staff will have to teach the 100% of the curriculum, but now in 90% of the time.

How meaningful will community staff "dropping in" be to the pupils, particularly as it is difficult to see how this could be linked to current class topics and themes? The employment patterns of part-time sessional staff are notoriously transitory. High staff turnover figures are very likely and this will, in turn, reduce continuity and make meaningful planning more difficult.

The Council's proposed "blanket" approach will serve to prevent the "learning" during the 2.5 hours being coherent and meaningful.

The McCrone agreement (*A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*, <http://www.snct.org.uk/library/278/2001%20Teachers%20Agreement.pdf>) states that a teacher's class contact time was to be reduced from 25 hours per week to 22.5 hours per week (p.5). There does not appear to be any reference elsewhere in the documentation that would suggest that pupils will have curriculum time reduced by this amount too.

It is unclear which aspect of Curriculum for Excellence (and/or McCrone) supports the Council's view that such a reduction can be legally introduced.

Since the introduction of McCrone, pupils have always had 100% of the 25 learning hours devoted to the curriculum, albeit not delivered by the same teacher. All teaching staff delivering any of the 25 hours have been registered with the General Teaching Council (i.e. either fully qualified teachers or in training under strict supervision). On those occasions where any community/sports workers or other non-teachers are invited into the school to work with children, the teacher has always been present in order to support learning, support positive behaviour and to make links to the learning in other areas of the curriculum; hence increasing the relevance of the activity. This will no longer be the case under the Council's proposal.

The Council's proposal that all teaching staff receive their 2.5 hours non-contact time simultaneously is likely to create serious space issues in many schools. The McCrone agreement also states that a staff member can leave the premises during non-contact time (p.5). In theory this could mean for those 2.5 hours the only qualified staff in school would be the Senior Management Team, plus the part-time sessional workers delivering the 'enrichment programme' to up to 200+ children. This is a scenario which parents (and teachers) would consider unacceptable on both educational and child safety grounds.