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SPTC Newsletter

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Issue 90

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And yet another good idea!

Last time we passed on a member's suggestion for a PTA year-timetable of events to act as a reminder of what needs doing, when; this time we offer the idea of communication by T-shirt.

A PTA Secretary had set up a meeting to discuss how the PTA's funds should be spent. However, she was aware that, despite her best efforts with notes and emails, news of the meeting had not got through to most parents. Not daunted, she found a plain white T-shirt, wrote on it all the information about the meeting – time, place, venue and purpose – and then wore the T-shirt up to school when she went to collect her children.

Ignoring the fact that her son was mortified and did not want to be seen anywhere near her, the strategy proved very effective. Not only did parents come up to her in the playground offering both their apologies and suggestions, the evening of the meeting proved to be the best ever in terms of attendance.

The message is "if you want to communicate, get a T-shirt!" Think of the possibilities: you could have a squad of parents all kitted out in appropriately messaged shirts, distributing the PTA newsletter. Well done that PTA Secretary!



"Who's brave enough to ask Big Rab if he'll advertise the Summer Fete on his T-Shirt?"

Parental Involvement Bill

The Parental Involvement Bill is continuing its passage through Parliament. It is now at stage 2 when the Education Committee reviews it line by line and considers amendments. Some of these are technical amendments to correct drafting errors, and some are an attempt to make changes to the proposals.

At the time of writing, the first eleven sections of the Bill have been debated and approved. There are three main amendments. The first requires that the legislation is applied to nursery schools, and two others require that pupils are informed about the arrangements for setting up and the membership of the councils. Several amendments were rejected. These included one that would have required parent councils to co-opt

certain people, one that would have made a national parent body a statutory requirement and one that would have required all parent council members to undergo police checks.

The rest of the Bill, including the sections relating to the appointment of headteachers, will be subjected to similar detailed scrutiny on 19th April. Then in May the Bill will go back to the main Chamber for a final reading with one last chance for amendments before it is approved.

Headteacher Appointments

The Scottish Executive has put out its response to the consultation on parental involvement in the appointment of headteachers. Overall there were 295 responses, of which the majority (63%) came from school boards.

In general respondents supported the Executive's proposals that parents should have the chance to be involved at all stages of the appointment process from drawing up the job specification to being on the interview panel. There was no agreement on the size of the parental representation on the appointment panel, although there was agreement that there should be guidance on a minimum proportion. Many respondents spoke of the need for training. The Executive will now draw up guidelines based on these responses.

Only a third of respondents gave a view on the proposal for "expert" panels of parents with a majority in favour. The Executive will reflect further on this idea before issuing guidance.

International comparisons!

Whatever the state of parent-teacher relations in Scotland, **in Germany** they are on an entirely different level. There, it has recently been reported that a parent has written a book called *The Teacher-Hater Book* in which she criticises teachers for "having no idea about children", being "lazy" and having "unattractive feet". (We're not sure what the unattractive feet have to do with anything either!)

The author, a single mother of four children, argues that because most teachers in Germany cannot be dismissed, they can get away with anything and that most of them spend their time "playing tennis, going skiing, making false tax declarations and converting their attics rather than doing their jobs" (which offers an interesting insight into German leisure activities!)

The author originally wrote the book anonymously, but a back-view picture of her in a magazine was recognised by one of her sons' teachers and now the author has reached celebrity status whilst the book has shot to the top of the best-seller list.

Not surprisingly there has been a reaction. A teacher has lodged a complaint against the author in a Munich court for "incitement of the people" and for "incitement of hatred against a particular group" - charges normally reserved for neo-Nazi groups. The teacher lodging the complaint admits he has not read the book, but argues that the title alone justifies his action. The publishers say that the title was deliberately chosen to make the book controversial. It is likely to be several months before the court decides whether the case can be heard.

Meanwhile from America comes a report, backed by video evidence, of a teenager at a boot camp in Florida who was beaten until his limp body was put on a stretcher and taken away. The boy died the next day.

As the Executive is very quick to hold up Finland as an example of what Scotland might aspire to in education terms, it's worth bearing in mind that sometimes international comparisons are helpful in telling us what not to do!

Teachers' time in the classroom cut

Some of you may be aware of what is commonly called the McCrone deal. This was an agreement between teachers and their employers, the local authorities, to increase teachers' pay and make changes to their conditions of service.

On the pay side, the deal led to a 23.1% increase spread over 3 years. This has now been fully implemented and we are now into a "son of McCrone" agreement that determines teacher pay increases until 2008.

The agreements on conditions of service were complex and have taken longer to implement. Some changes do not have a direct/obvious impact on parents and pupils. For example, there were changes to the promoted staff structure. In secondary schools some posts (e.g. assistant principal teacher) were axed, whilst in primary schools the new post of Principal Teacher was introduced. However, a change which does impact directly on parents and pupils was the agreement to cut class contact time i.e. the length of time in a week that a teacher is actually in front of the class.

In primary schools, the teacher's class contact time pre-McCrone was 25 hours and matched the pupils' school week. However, in August 2004 this was cut by 1.5 hours to 23.5 hours and next session it will be cut further to 22.5 hours. In terms of the primary school pupil's 25 hour week, this cut represents a complete half day. Authorities have made different arrangements to cover this time. In some areas, they have simply put in another teacher who uses his/her contact hours filling the gaps for the other teachers. On paper, one such teacher can fill the gaps for nine regular teachers, but things never work out quite that smoothly in practice. In some areas the authorities have brought in extra specialists to teach art, sport or music to the youngsters; and in some schools the senior management team occasionally have to fill the gap - they have often grouped classes together into a year-group singing practice or such like.

In the secondary school, teachers contact time was already limited to 23.5 hours so the cuts will come in for the first time in August 2006 when their class contact time is reduced, like that of their primary colleagues, to 22.5 hours. The impact will not be immediately obvious, as pupils move from one subject teacher to another and so won't suddenly lose a teacher for half a day a week, as in the primary sector. However, it will reduce the total amount of teaching-time available to the school. This will be cut by one hour multiplied by the number of teachers who are currently teaching the full 23.5 hours. Unless there are extra teachers, schools will have to reduce the number of classes to bring them into line with their reduced teaching capacity. This is why some secondary schools are looking at not allowing very small classes to go ahead.

Over and above these changes to the class contact time, teachers' total number of hours per week has been set at 35. The difference between this and the class contact time is partly allocated to teachers to use for preparation and marking (some 7.5 hours) and is partly available for whole school activities as agreed between teachers and management in each school. This whole school time has to be used for a range of activities from curriculum development to meetings with parents. It is up to individual schools how they decide to use the time and what they decide to prioritise. Some schools have decided to cut the number of parent-teacher interviews in order to free up time for something else.

We would like to find out from you if you are aware of changes in your schools and secondly what these are. We would be grateful if you would complete and return the enclosed questionnaire which is also available to download from our website at www.sptc.info

Child Protection – call for evidence

It is gradually dawning on officials that the child protection legislation is placing a huge burden on many small organisations like PTAs and is stopping some people from getting involved because they can't stand all the hassle. We've been asked to supply evidence to the Children's Commissioner. We already have quite a few examples, but we'd be very pleased to hear from anyone who has had difficulties

Your Questions Answered

We are organising our Summer Fete and want to include the following things: a bouncy castle, pony rides, a magician and a barbecue. Does our SPTC membership/insurance cover these events?

It's that time of year again; lots to organise and worry about – and we haven't mentioned the weather! I'll take your events one at a time.

Bouncy castles: your public liability insurance covers your PTA for anything that happens as a result of PTA decisions and/or actions. So, for example if you do not have enough supervision on the bouncy castle and a child is injured as a *result of this*, then you are covered. However, any bumps, bruises or injuries that result from normal "bouncy castle" activities are not covered as they are not due to your negligence. These are known as "risks of the activity" and children carry these risks themselves when they go on the bouncy castle. One other point - you are not covered for any material damage to the bouncy castle – check with the provider and if they don't have the appropriate insurance we can provide you with short-term all risks insurance.

Pony rides: if you are paying a stable to provide the ponies, then *they must have their own public liability insurance*. If someone is bringing ponies along free of charge, your public liability insurance will cover you for any incidents occurring as a result of your actions/decisions. However, the bottom line is you don't want any accidents so we always advise you to provide safety helmets, suitable supervision and to have the rides away from any noisy activities and on level ground.

Magicians: if you are paying the magician then you should check whether they have insurance. If not, you can apply to us for extended public liability insurance. This is the extra £6 that you can send when you pay your SPTC membership/insurance. With this EPL you can co-opt a hired-in entertainer, (e.g. a magician or a disco provider) onto your committee for the event. This will then bring the entertainer under the umbrella of your insurance.

Barbecue: SPTC membership/insurance covers you if someone falls ill as a result of your cooking/negligence. Of course, you don't want to give anyone food poisoning so sensible measures would include making sure that everyone takes appropriate hygiene precautions and that the food is cooked properly. Oh, and it's probably a good idea to avoid shellfish, raw eggs and cream!

Good luck and I hope it stays dry!

And finally - book early to avoid disappointment!

Do you want to give your school a treat? Why not get the theatre to come you? Hopscotch Theatre Company have just released their programme for 2006/07.

- § **"The Inside Story of the Loch Ness Monster!"** tours from 18th April – 30th June.
- § **"I Want to be an Inventor"** tours from 28th August to November 10th.
- § The panto **"Hansel and Gretel"** is available from 16th November to 19th January 2007.
- § **"What we did when the oil ran out!"** will take place from January to June 2007.

For further information and bookings contact

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