Response to the National Improvement Framework Paper from Lorna Perriss

**Key Priorities**

The Key Priorities are very clear and on the surface appear to be child/young person centred which is excellent.

**Standardised tests**

The paper also states “that we need to know much more, on a consistent and systematic basis about the performance of the education system. The National improvement Framework will allow us to see where we are succeeding and where we need to do more”. This implies that the Scottish Government is concerned with how the Education System is hopefully improving rather than how individual pupil’s attainment is increasing.

Obviously, the use of Standardised tests at P1, 4, 7 and S3 should provide evidence for the pupil, teacher, parent and Government.

My concerns about these tests are:

a) Who will produce them and ensure that they are of a suitable standard? The few assessments which were prepared as Key Area tests for NAT3 upwards were awful as many of them contained glaring errors and looked as though they had come from the SQA rejected question papers.

b) I assume that all pupils will sit these tests at the same time perhaps towards the end of the appropriate academic year. This would differ greatly from the 5-14 tests which were given only when the teacher thought that the pupil was ready to achieve that level. What happens if a pupil really is not able to access the test? A few pupils in the present S1 and 2 in the school where I taught are unable to write their name or read words which have more than 3 letters. Yet at present, there is only one SfL teacher with at most three pupil support assistants. How can secondary trained teachers help these pupils to attain at the appropriate level in CfE when these pupils cannot read?

c) What will happen if a pupil does not achieve the cut-off pass score for a particular test? In Secondary schools, many pupils used to come into S1 with levels A/B in reading, writing and mathematics. These pupils were certainly not achieving the required level and yet in many cases, 7 years of primary education had not been able to improve that level. What are these “rich tools and resources” which are suddenly going to help teachers raise attainment? The focus on the inclusion of measures in the early years seems very important to me and it is at this stage where the gap between attainment in the most and least disadvantaged is starting to show but likely to be more easily rectified.

d) The paper states “A detailed cost assessment will form part of the on-going work to develop and implement the Framework”. I would think it would be a good idea to know exactly how much this is going to cost as experience with CfE in schools shows that individual educational establishments do not have enough money to resource it.
Consistency to Curriculum for Excellence

The nature of CfE was to give flexibility to teachers to be able to teach using different methods. The experiences and outcomes are woolly and left very much to a teacher, department or school to interpret. Management in schools has been allowed to build the curriculum in the way they want. All of the above have resulted in schools working very differently even from their close neighbours! In secondary schools, there are some working to the Broad General Education in S1-3 while some are starting NAT5 courses in S3. This means that some pupils are taught a NAT5 course in one year while others have two. This is hardly consistent or fair.

If subjects are not being taught in schools for whatever reason, the pupils are not being allowed to have the experiences and outcomes which CfE suggests. In cities, very often the pupils in schools with smaller numbers have less chance of taking subjects they choose as there are not enough staff to teach them while these schools often have larger numbers of pupils who are more disadvantaged. This again causes huge inconsistencies and increases the attainment gap.

Since I retired in June, I believe that the school where I taught does not have an FHTT department any longer as the members of staff are both absent due to illness. This means that pupils in S1-3 are no longer able to take part in practical food activities or prepare healthy foods to meet identified needs – one of the third level experiences. In a school which does not have a high academic achievement, previously many pupils were able to pass the practical exams in this subject with high grades. This increased their self-esteem and taught them valuable life skills. Achievement in this subject should also have promoted improvement in children’s health and wellbeing.