Submission from VOICE

This response is from Voice the Union to the consultation about Ministers proposals to place the National Improvement Framework on a statutory footing through a series of Stage 2 amendments to the Education (Scotland) Bill.

While the idea of uniformity of approach appears logical on the face of it, Voice have serious concerns that the national collection and publication of data on attainment could lead to the exact opposite of what is intended, as schools would look to performing well in tests rather than focussing on individual pupil achievement. We do not believe that these amendments will ensure education in our schools is improving. It is only better learning and teaching that will ensure that. We consider that we should be concentrating on pupils achieving and working to their potential and we should be removing barriers that stop them doing that. There will always be a gap in attainment between learners because they are all different. If the system supports the additional needs of learners whatever they might be then it can help them all achieve and work towards that potential.

We also think it is inevitable that as soon as data was collected nationally then FOI legislation would allow 'interested parties' to compile comparisons or 'league tables' at authority and national level, which we think may prove counter-productive in terms of closing any attainment gap. Schools will be compared on results only rather than whether pupils are happy and working to potential.

There is also the question of additional burdens on teachers and increased workload which would arise as a result of the new requirement. At a time when teachers are already feeling the strain as local authorities trim budgets and schools find themselves with little or no room to absorb additional tasks. Where will the time come from for these assessments to be completed, marked and diagnostic results evaluated? We believe classroom teachers, support for learning teachers and school management can provide better evidence and support for pupils than national standardised assessments.

Finally, it seems odd at a time when all Scottish local authorities are under considerable financial constraints and many are shedding jobs, that Scottish Government consider it reasonable to place any additional statutory requirements on them.

Regards

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