PE1409/H

Learning Directorate
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Anne Peat
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
Public Petitions Committee
TG.01
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

26 January 2012

Dear Ms Peat,

Consideration of Petition PE1409

1. The Scottish Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the issues raised in the petition by Linda Whitmore on behalf of ENABLE Scotland. I will respond to each question in turn.

(1) What are your views on the issues raised in the petition and in the Committee’s subsequent discussion?

2. Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended, education authorities are required to identify, meet and keep under review the additional support needs of all pupils for whose education they are responsible and to tailor provision according to their individual circumstances. This is largely achieved through teachers, other education staff and supporting professionals meeting the needs of the pupil.

3. Education authorities are accountable for ensuring that all their teachers have an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of additional support needs. Teachers should know where to go when they need additional help, such as specialist support and advice where required to ensure that the appropriate assessments, interventions and strategies can be put in place as early as possible to best meet the needs of the individual pupil.

4. The Scottish Government acknowledges that the quality of learning and teaching in our schools is dependent upon the quality of our teachers. That is why Graham Donaldson was commissioned to conduct a review of teacher education and why we are committing considerable time and energy, through the National Partnership Group (NPG) and its three sub-groups, to ensuring that the recommendations of that review are given thorough and co-ordinated consideration. We are also ensuring that relevant
stakeholders are represented and that the NPG’s consideration of the recommendations is tempered and influenced by the strategic reference group that has been established to ensure that all relevant interests are taken into account in deciding the way forward.

(2) From the perspective of your organisation, what work is planned or underway to ensure that all new teachers are confident in their abilities to firstly identify and then secondly address additional support needs (especially dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorders)?

5. Expectations of new teachers are set out in the Standard for Initial Teacher Education. All courses of initial teacher education are required to be accredited by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and approved by the Scottish Ministers to ensure that they will indeed imbue teachers with the skills, knowledge and values required of them by the Standard.

6. One of the requirements of the Standard is that new teachers are expected to:

   - have knowledge and understanding of, for example, sustainable development, equal opportunities, additional support needs, citizenship, international education, education for work, enterprise.

7. The phrase ‘additional support needs’ includes dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorders and, accordingly, it can reasonably be expected that all new teachers have some knowledge and understanding in these areas. It would, however, be unrealistic to expect that training in dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorders should be given more prominence than other additional support needs.

8. The GTCS will become fully independent on 2 April (it is currently an advisory non-departmental public body) and, thereafter, will have sole responsibility for determining what constitutes a recognised teaching qualification and the nature and content of courses leading to such qualifications.

9. While the Standard for Initial Teacher Education already addresses the issues raised in the petition, Graham Donaldson’s review of teacher education, TSF, contains a related recommendation:

   - The professional component in programmes of initial teacher education should address more directly areas where teachers experience greatest difficulty and where we know that Scottish education needs to improve. That will require a radical reappraisal of present courses and of the guidelines provided by the GTCS. - (recommendation 14).

10. TSF identifies a number of areas in which ‘teachers experience greatest difficulty’, including additional support needs. The NPG has been established to take forward the recommendations of TSF. Detailed work is currently being carried out by three sub-groups, including one that is focusing on the early phase of teacher education. They will report to the NPG within the next few months with a view to enabling the NPG to report to Ministers by the summer on how the recommendations, including recommendation 14, should be implemented.

11. In relation to the training of teachers, the Scottish Government funded the development of the National Framework for Inclusion, £240,000 from 2008-2010, within initial teacher education. This identified the values and beliefs, professional knowledge and
understanding, in terms of inclusive education to be expected of both student and qualified teachers. The aim being to help ensure all teachers are appropriately supported to meet the increasingly diverse needs of all pupils in Scotland’s schools.

12. The Scottish Government also funded the Inclusive Practice Project (IPP) at the University of Aberdeen, £1.4m from 2006-2010, specifically to develop and embed new approaches to training teachers in inclusive practice in programme courses informed by research. Social and educational inclusion was addressed within the core programme rather than as an elective selected by a few students. As new teachers complete the course and enter the probationary year of teaching, follow-up visits were undertaken to explore the links between project objectives and actual classroom practice. The Project was externally evaluated in 2010, followed by dissemination of findings to Teacher Education Institutes.

13. The First Minister and the Minister for Children and Young People met with representatives from the Teacher Education Institutes and Graham Donaldson on 17 November 2011. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss how we can better help teachers to support children and young people with additional support needs by making connections between previous nationally funded projects such as the National Framework for Inclusion and the Inclusive Practice Project, the implementation of TSF and the plans of the Teacher Education Institutes.

14. With regard to dyslexia, the ‘Assessing Dyslexia’ Toolkit was launched, on 1 June 2010, by Michael Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, and Sir Jackie Stewart, OBE. The Toolkit was produced by a working group managed by Dyslexia Scotland with the support of the Scottish Government. This comprehensive online toolkit helps all teachers and early years workers to identify literacy difficulties and dyslexia. Dyslexia Scotland has been provided with a grant of £40,000 to add further resources to the Toolkit on how to support pupils with dyslexia, so that it would become an ‘Assessing and Supporting Dyslexia’ Toolkit.

15. The Scottish Government also developed the Autism Toolbox to help schools meet the needs of children and young people with autism spectrum disorders. This was written by a multi-professional writing team and overseen by a Working Group which included local authority, school and voluntary sector representatives, service users and academics. The Toolbox includes information about research and practical experience with the aim of providing a practical resource for teachers who have a child with autism in their class and to support education authorities in planning services to facilitate the successful inclusion and education of children with autism. This also provides advice on transitions and in developing positive relationships with parents and carers.

(3) (to the Scottish Government only) Is the Donaldson Review working group considering the issue of training to ensure that all teaching and support staff have a basic level of awareness of the needs of pupils who have additional support needs and an understanding of some practical strategies that can be employed?

16. Graham Donaldson’s review of teacher education, TSF, contained 50 recommendations which were accepted by the Scottish Government in full, in part or in principle. The NPG was given the task of taking forward recommendations from the Donaldson report. The group’s work plan sets out the priorities that the NPG and its partners’ organisations are working towards, including:
• The systematic identification of priority areas for continuing professional development, including areas such as subject content knowledge, assessment and supporting learners (for example those with additional support needs such as dyslexia or autism).

17. The sub-groups are currently working to develop their proposals which they are due to submit to the NPG by June 2012. More information about the full remits and membership of the sub-groups is available on the NPG’s webpage www.NPGTeacherEducation.org.

18. I trust this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Scott Johnston