I read with interest the information regarding the maths and numeracy skills of primary teachers. Finally, this really important issue is getting some attention. There is an opportunity here I believe.

In my view the urgent, key question that needs to be asked of the GTC and the universities offering initial teacher training is, are the maths entry requirements for primary education in particular high enough? (Currently a 'C' pass in lifeskills maths is sufficient for entry to Primary education in some institutions - not even the more rigorous level 5 mathematics qualification is currently required).

The GTC requirement is for all Scottish teachers to have a level 5 mathematics qualification but there is actually a clear distinction between the requirement for secondary teachers (for whom Lifeskills maths may be sufficient as they are specialists in their own discipline) and for primary teachers who are required to teach maths up to Primary 7. For the latter I strongly believe the requirement should be at least N5 Mathematics at 'A' and ideally, Higher. Having an adequate level of numeracy for life as an individual is NOT sufficient - in fact, is a far cry from, having the knowledge, understanding and facility with numbers to enable you to teach it to children.

A 'C' grade pass at level 5 in Lifeskills mathematics, the lowest externally assessed level of high school mathematics, is currently considered sufficient for trainee primary teachers in some institutions e.g. Glasgow University, Strathclyde University and UHI. It is acceptable at B in Dundee and now I believe, at Aberdeen. UWS and Edinburgh universities however, do not accept Lifeskills Maths for any ITT course and in fact Edinburgh require N5 Mathematics at B.

I am an FE lecturer and for 8 years I have taught maths to prospective applicants for primary and secondary education. Many of those individuals are graduates already but this does not necessarily correlate with their capability in mathematics. We are currently experiencing demand like never before for N5 maths, largely from people who want to become primary teachers.

Based on my experience I have long held the view that the level of maths ability required to be a PRIMARY teacher in Scotland (currently a national 5 qualification, equivalent to a standard grade, o-grade or intermediate 2 at B or C) is not nearly high enough. On a personal level I have witnessed shocking examples of mathematical incompetence by teachers in my own children’s primary years. People are responsible for teaching fundamental numeracy skills to children at the most vital stage of their education when they don't themselves have more than the most basic of high school maths.
qualifications and sometimes barely that. That might be perfectly adequate if you are a secondary French or History teacher but it definitely is not adequate to TEACH numeracy to children.

The most common counter argument is that most people 'don't need maths' in everyday life. While that may be true on a superficial level, teaching young children is NOT an everyday life skill. It DOES require a level of understanding beyond being able to 'do' basic everyday maths yourself.

Many people find the national 5 maths course a challenge. It is a demanding course and does give people a good grounding in maths. However even a pass at grade C in National 5 maths does not, in my opinion, come close to demonstrating the fundamental understanding of how numbers work at a level sufficient to enable people to TEACH numeracy to children at the key stage of their literacy and numeracy education. I see people going into primary teacher training who meet the requirements on paper but still can't add two simple fractions easily or do basic arithmetic. Those are the skills they will be teaching to children and they don't have them themselves.

There is enormous demand and competition for primary ed places in particular, so there is little danger of reducing the pool of well qualified applicants significantly by increasing the entry requirement for maths, but every chance you will substantially improve the mathematics ability of the primary teaching profession as a whole by insisting that applicants for primary teaching have, as an absolute minimum, an A pass in mathematics at level 5, but ideally a Higher Maths qualification.

There has been talk for a number of years of increasing the entry requirement to higher maths and in my view that can't come soon enough for our children. A similar conclusion was reached in England in 2015 but I feel that Scottish education is lagging far behind in tackling the issue.

As a final comment, I would add that these opinions and observations are entirely my own, based solely on my experience as a lecturer and as a parent.