

Education Committee
3 December 1996

Irvine, 3 December 1996 - At a Meeting of the Education Committee of North Ayrshire Council at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Thomas Morris, Irene Oldfather, Margaret Highet, Thomas Barr, Patrick Browne, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, Thomas Dickie, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, Peter McNamara, David Munn, David O'Neill, Robert Rae, Evelyn Sillars, Gordon Smith, George Steven and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

The Director of Education, Brian Gardner, Head of Education Resources, Lesley Rowson, Jim Leckie and Jim Tulips, Heads of Education Services (Education) David Nibloe, Principal Officer, Accountancy and Budgeting (Financial Services) and Sandra Bale, Administration Officer (Chief Executive and Corporate Support Services).

Chair

Mr Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Alan Munro and John Sillars

1. Minutes Confirmed

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 October 1996 were confirmed.

2. Delineated Areas for Secondary Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the outcome of the consultation on delineated areas for secondary schools.

On 17 September 1996, the Committee agreed to consultation arrangements on the creation of delineated areas for all secondary schools and the issue of the report on each school as a consultative document to the various interested parties. The responses to the exercise have been positive and raised some issues affecting specific schools which will require further consultation. Reports on these issues will be submitted to the Committee early in the new year.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to the creation of delineated areas for each secondary school by the aggregation of the existing catchment areas of the associated primary schools; (b) in respect of Garnock Academy that the delineated area include the part of Dalry Primary School catchment area as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report; and in respect of Largs Academy that it include Skelmorlie Primary School; and (c) that the Director of Education submit a report on (i) transport arrangements for Roman Catholic children living in Skelmorlie; (ii) transfer arrangements for pupils attending Caledonia Primary School to Ardrossan Academy/Auchenharvie Academy; and (iii) transfer arrangements for pupils living in the Irvine area to Irvine Royal Academy/Greenwood Academy to future meetings of the Committee.

3. Nursery Education Initiative

Submitted report by the Director of Education on progress in the implementation of the Nursery Education Initiative.

As of 18 November 1996, Capita have issued 1725 sets of Nursery Vouchers to parents in North Ayrshire who have a child in their pre-school year. The estimated number of children in their pre-school year in North Ayrshire is 1734. There are 28 local authority nurseries providing a total of 1285 places. These are allocated through the Council's Nursery Admissions Policy, with 197 places being currently allocated to children in Bands 1 - 3. Children in this banding have been recommended for a place through the agreed referral procedures and have an identified special need. The majority of nursery places, 957, are allocated to children in band 4, being children in their pre-school year in North Ayrshire. There is a total of 1037 four year olds with a local authority nursery place and there are no four year olds on any local authority waiting lists at present. 131 places have also been allocated to three year old children who are not yet in their pre-school year. There are also 35 voluntary and private sector groups registered as nursery voucher providers.

At present those children in their pre-school year whose parents wish them to receive nursery education, are accommodated. The nature of the provision however may not be the parents' preferred choice.

The local evaluation group will distribute a questionnaire to all parents who have used their nursery vouchers in the local authority, voluntary and private sectors. The analysis of the results will form the main component of the local research findings.

Noted.

4. Children (Scotland) Act 1995

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the implications to the Council by the introduction of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 which rationalises existing legislation relating to children. The key issues affecting the Council as Education authority are:-

- a) the statement and thus clarification of the nature of parental rights and responsibilities;
- b) the enhancement of children's rights;
- c) amendments to the Children's Hearing Procedures;
- d) the need for corporate local authority planning for children with special needs; and
- e) to target the services to children in need and to ensure that these are widespread.

To meet the change effectively, there will require to be employee training, inter-agency co-operation in joint planning; and provision of new or increased services. The financial implications will be the subject of a detailed analysis and will be considered for revenue funding in financial year 1997/98.

The Committee noted that the Corporate Strategy Committee on 27 November 1996 had appointed a Member/Officer Working Group for the production of a Children's Services Plan by early 1998. After discussion the Committee agreed to approve the proposals to implement the legislation within the Education service, as detailed within the report.

5. Environment Week 1997

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed arrangements for schools involvement in Environment Week 1997.

Following the successful school involvement in Environment Week 1996 and after discussion with the Director of Planning, Roads and Environment, it is proposed that the Education Directorate organise the involvement of schools in Environment Week 1997.

The proposed competitions and events are a poetry competition for pupils from P1 to S6; a conference for pupils from P6 and P7; an environment debate for pupils from S1 to S3 and an art competition in all age categories from nursery up to S6.

The Committee stressed the importance of promoting the anti-litter message to children and the Director of Education confirmed that schools endeavour to teach pupils respect for the environment. The Council's anti-litter campaign will hopefully play a part in ensuring that this message is put across to children.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to promote the competitions and events as detailed within the report.

6. Surplus Accommodation

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a surplus janitorial house at Greenwood Academy.

On 6 August 1996, the Committee agreed to dispose of four vacant janitorial houses and that in the event of further janitorial houses falling vacant, the merits of retaining or disposing of them be considered on an individual basis.

The tenant of the janitorial house at Greenwood Academy has applied to purchase the house in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. The tenant carries out janitorial duties for Dreghorn Primary School. There is no interest in occupying the house from janitors assigned to Greenwood Academy.

The Committee agreed (a) to declare the janitor's house at Greenwood Academy, Dreghorn surplus to the Education Directorate requirements; (b) to authorise the Legal Services Manager to dispose of the house to the tenant; and (c) to refer the disposal to the Support Services Committee for their information.

7. Pre-School Literacy Development Project

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed Pre-School Literacy Development Pilot Project.

The proposed project is aimed at laying the foundation for literacy skills in pre-school children, many of whom have little literacy enhancing experience in their pre-school years. The project will involve six local authority nurseries in North Ayrshire. A package of materials involving activities, techniques and resource suggestions will be prepared in consultation with the nurseries. The Education Directorate will seek to balance the nurseries involved across the geographical areas of North Ayrshire.

The Committee agreed (a) to approve the proposals for the pre-school literacy development project as detailed in the report and (b) that the Director of Education report on the outcome of the project to a future meeting.

8. Achievement for All

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the implications for primary schools of the report by HM Inspectors of Schools "Achievement for All".

On 29 October 1996, the Committee considered a report on the implications for secondary schools following the publication of the report "Achievement for All" by HM Inspectors of Schools. They agreed that a further report on the implications for the primary schools be submitted to the Committee in due course.

"Achievement for All" has given valuable guidance notably the rejection of streaming and the setting out of key principles for the organisation of classes although there are some reservations over certain aspects of the report. Within North Ayrshire, all primary schools have mixed ability classes, but operate attainment groups within classes where appropriate. With regard to setting, there is no sound educational basis for this and setting is seldom found as a basis for class organisation in primary schools in North Ayrshire. Doubts also surround the report's support of whole class teaching. In practice, teachers consider the alternatives and judge the most appropriate organisational arrangements to suit the particular task which the pupils are carrying out.

It was confirmed that a meeting had been held with secondary school head teachers making clear the authority's position on the "Achievement for All" report and that a similar meeting would be held with primary head teachers.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) that primary schools should review their organisational arrangements for all stages in the light of the key principles set out in the report; and (b) that the Advisory Service should support schools in this review and disseminate examples of good practice.

9. Educational Links between North Ayrshire and Bordeaux

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposed educational links between North Ayrshire and Bordeaux.

On 16 April 1996, the Committee approved the development of educational links with Karmoy in Norway. At a joint meeting with officials and members from Karmoy in September, it was agreed to seek third partners for further developments in order to gain access to European funding. Initial contacts have been made with Bordeaux with a view to establishing school to school links with Arran High School, college Alienor d'Aquitaine in Bordeaux and Vormedal Ungdomsskole in Karmoy. It is intended that an application for funding be submitted under Comenius Action I of the SOCRATES Programme which deals with European educational projects.

The Committee (a) agreed (i) to the further development of educational links with Bordeaux; and (ii) to the submission of an application for funding under the SOCRATES Programme; and (b) to nominate the Chair to lead the proposed planning visit by Scottish and Norwegian co-ordinators to Bordeaux in April 1997.

10. Children Educated at Home

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposed procedures for children being educated at home.

Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 30, parents have a duty to ensure that their children of compulsory school age receive full time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and according to any special educational needs they may have either by regular attendance at public school, or "by other means". A small number of parents decide to exercise their right to educate their children at home.

Within North Ayrshire there are ten children being educated at home at present. It is proposed

that procedures be adopted to cover this including the Director of Education or delegated officer creating a file to be maintained throughout the period of education at home. The file will contain all relevant details of the child, the provision made and the nature of the Directorate's responses and assessments. Regular home visits will be undertaken to carry out these assessments.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to the procedures to be adopted in relation to children being educated at home, as detailed in the report; and (b) that the Director of Education submits a report detailing by area the numbers and ages of children being educated at home to the Committee on a six monthly basis.

11. Policy Reviews

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the progress of the Policy Review Groups.

On 23 January 1996, the Education Committee agreed to initiate a phased programme of review of specific policies, with regular reports back to the Committee. A number of working groups involving senior management, head teachers, other staff and on certain issues elected members have been set up to progress the various policy reviews. On 17 September 1996, the Committee considered a progress report on the policy review process and agreed to approve the continuation of the phased programme of policy review.

Details of the current position in relation to each of the established review groups were included within the report. The issues being considered are discussed on a regular basis with the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Education Committee. Assurances were given that where there are politically sensitive issues being addressed, members will be consulted.

A further two review groups are proposed, one on reporting pupils' progress to parents and, in the case of nursery and P7 pupils, to the next school which the pupil will attend; and one on the issue of general information to parents through school handbooks.

Arising from the discussion on this item, assurances were given that the Education Directorate is in consultation with the Architectural Services Department at present over a planned maintenance programme for schools for the next five years, which will include maintenance of school windows where appropriate.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to note the progress to date of the policy review groups as detailed in the report; (b) to approve the establishment of review groups on (i) reporting on pupil progress to parents and, in the case of nursery and P7 pupils, to the next school which the pupil will attend; and (ii) the issue of general information to parents through school handbooks; and (c) to invite the Teachers Side of the JCC to nominate two members, one primary and one secondary, to the Review Group at (b)(i); and (d) to establish a review group on the involvement of young people in schools in their educational process.

The meeting ended at 2.50 p.m.