

Education Committee
29 October 1996

Irvine, 29 October 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, James Clements, Stewart Dewar, Thomas Dickie, John Donn, Samuel Gooding, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, Peter McNamara, David Munn, Alan Munro, Robert Rae, Evelyn Sillars, Gordon Smith, George Steven and Reverend John Taylor.

In Attendance

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

Chair

Mr Morris in the Chair.

Apologies for Absence

Patrick Browne and John Sillars

1. Minutes Confirmed

The Minute of the Meeting of the Committee held on 17 September 1996, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

2. Achievement for All

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the implications for early secondary education of the report by HMI Inspectors of Schools, "Achievement for All".

In January 1996, the Secretary of State for Scotland asked HM Inspectors of Schools to inquire into and report on good practice in the organisation and management of classes in primary and early secondary education with particular reference to the relative merits of organising classes by mixed ability, streaming and setting. In recent years there has been some debate on class organisation particularly in S1 and S2 secondary schools. The report by HM Inspectors of Schools entitled "Achievement for All" has now been published.

The HMI report sets out six key principles which should govern decisions about the organisation of pupils into classes and asks schools to review their current procedures against these principles. Whilst the key principles are accepted, many of the recommendations arising from these are, however, not accepted. In particular, there are concerns over the report's preference for setting of classes by ability and for its recommendation of whole class teaching. It is considered that there is an absence of any substantial research evidence to support the report's preference for setting and that whole class teaching is not always appropriate.

The current practice in North Ayrshire is a flexible approach allowing Head Teachers to consider the alternatives carefully and determine the most appropriate arrangements for class organisation and teaching in their schools.

After a full discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to note the contents of the report "Achievement for All"; (b) that secondary schools should review their organisational arrangements for S1 and S2 in the light of the key principles set out in the report; (c) that the Advisory Service should review current arrangements as part of the development planning process and should disseminate examples of good practice; and (d) that a further report on the implications for the primary schools be submitted to the Committee in due course.

3. Education (Scotland) Act 1996

Submitted report by the Director of Education on an overview of the Education (Scotland) Act 1996.

The main provisions of the Education (Scotland) Act 1996 came into force on 18 September 1996. These include the establishment of a single Scottish Qualifications Authority; the financing of education for children under school age providing the legislative basis for national implementation of the pre-school education voucher scheme in 1997; the authority to the Secretary of State to make regulations providing for testing and assessment of pupils in the first two years of secondary education; and a number of amendments to the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988. Also included is a new ground for refusal of placing requests, enabling education authorities under certain circumstances to refuse such requests in order to retain places for anticipated incomers to the catchment area. The only school within North Ayrshire likely to be affected in terms of placing requests is Largs Academy.

There are a number of implications arising from the legislation which will require to be considered, in particular the implications arising from the changed rights of elected members to attend and speak at School Board meetings. Previously only the Councillor for the electoral ward in which a school is situated was entitled to attend. Such rights are now extended to all those Councillors whose wards include part of the catchment area of the school.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to note the changes in education legislation as a result of the Education (Scotland) Act 1996; (b) that an implementation plan be drawn up to brief education staff and School Boards on the relevant areas of the legislation; (c) that a short-life working group comprising two elected members and two members of the Parental Executive Committee along with the appropriate Head of Service be appointed to draw up a code of practice to cover the relationship between School Boards and elected members, including guidelines on issues such as invitations, attendance and communication; (d) to nominate Councillors J Donn and D. Munn to serve on the working group; and (e) that a further report on the proposed Code of Practice on School Board/Elected Member relations be submitted to the Committee in due course.

4. Amalgamation of Argyle/Kyleshill Primary School: Name of New School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the outcome of the consultation to establish a name for the new school formed by the amalgamation of Argyle and Kyleshill Primary Schools, Saltcoats.

The Committee agreed the school be named Caledonia Primary School.

5. The Higher Still Development Programme

Submitted report by the Director of Education on current developments in preparing North Ayrshire Schools for the implementation of the Higher Still Programme.

On 6 August 1996, the Committee agreed to set up a Higher Still Advisory Group comprising representative Head Teachers, Advisors and members of the Education Directorate. The remit of the group is to (i) develop a strategy for the Authority's delivery of the Higher Still Programme; (ii) provide a forum for discussion of general issues and concerns; and (iii) brief the Director of Education on local issues and concerns to be raised at the Scottish Office Higher Still

Development Strategy Group.

The Group has met on three occasions and covered a range of issues including curriculum guidelines for schools, Scottish Group Awards, consultation seminars and flexible approaches to assessment

Whilst it is agreed that reform of upper secondary courses and qualifications is necessary, there are still several areas of concern being expressed by teachers, including assessment procedures, the circumstances in which multi-level teaching is seen as acceptable, resources, staff development and management issues. Such concerns are being forwarded to the Higher Still Development Strategy Group.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the work of the Higher Still Advisory Group; and (b) to approve the ongoing programme for implementation of the Higher Still.

6. Home Tuition

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the establishment of a policy and procedures for the operation of a Home Tuition Service for North Ayrshire pupils absent from school for medical reasons.

When a child is ill at home for an extended period it is proposed that the responsibility for continuity of education should rest with the school normally attended by the child. The Head Teacher, in consultation with the parents should consider applying for home tuition funding to the appropriate Head of Service. The application should be supported by a submission from the School Doctor.. The Council will provide home tuition funding where there is supportive medical evidence and the anticipated absence period is greater than 4 weeks. Home tuition will normally be provided by volunteer teachers from the child's own school which will also be responsible for preparing a home tuition plan.

The Committee agreed that (a) the proposals as detailed within the report be adopted for the provision of a home tuition service for children absent from school on medical grounds; (b) the Director of Education to publicise the policy as appropriate, including the production of a leaflet to be issued to schools, parent organisations, medical agencies and making reference to the service within school handbooks; (c) the Director of Education develop an implementation plan based on the approved procedures in consultation with Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care Trust; and (d) that a report reviewing the operation of the policy be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

7. Pre 5 Voluntary Sector Grants 1996/97

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the award of Pre 5 Grants to voluntary organisations providing a service to children under 4 years of age.

On 5 March 1996, the Education Committee agreed to award Pre 5 Grants to a number of voluntary organisations. The Committee also recognised that the introduction of nursery vouchers and the resulting income to voluntary organisations would provide those bodies with the necessary funding, thus allowing the awarding of pre 5 grants to be discontinued. There are still, however, children under 4 years of age who are attending certain organisations and are not eligible to participate in the nursery voucher scheme. It is therefore proposed that the relevant groups providing places for children under 4 years of age continue to receive financial support. Assurances were given that the number of places being provided by groups are carefully monitored.

After discussion the Committee agreed to award grants to the voluntary organisations as follows:-

Beith Nursery

£ 7,708.00

East Irvine Nursery Action Group (Broomlands)	£ 13,462.00
East Irvine Nursery Action Group (Boutreehill)	£ 8,861.00

8. Musical Activities in North Ayrshire Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on arrangements for extra curricular musical activities in North Ayrshire Schools.

There is a high level of musical performance within North Ayrshire Schools and school groups have contributed to a number of recent Council events. North Ayrshire pupils also participate in the Ayrshire Schools Orchestra and in the West of Scotland Schools Orchestra, formerly the Strathclyde Schools Orchestra.

Following consultation with Head Teachers, Principal Teachers of Music and Music Instructors, it is proposed to set up a North Ayrshire Schools Band and North Ayrshire Schools Choir as "flagship" performance groups. Such groups would provide a valuable outlet for talented individuals in the music field. The Director of Education gave assurances that he would endeavour to involve the Arran schools in the proposed choir and band in as far as possible and indicated that the corporate image of the choir and band were being addressed in consultation with the Council's Marketing and Publicity Section.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to the establishment of a North Ayrshire Schools Choir and North Ayrshire Schools Band; and (b) to the continuation in principle of support for the Ayrshire Schools Orchestra up to the end of session 1997/98.

9. Electronic-Mail Pilot in Primary Schools

Submitted report by the Director of Education on arrangements for a joint project to pilot electronic-mail in primary schools.

During 1995/96, the Education Business Partnership, in conjunction with British Telecommunications, supported the former Strathclyde Regional Council Education Department in introducing electronic-mail to Ayrshire schools. Within North Ayrshire, Dalry Primary School participated in a scheme to link schools in Ayrshire with schools in Georgia, USA. The pupils have the opportunity to use modern technology to exchange information and project work with pupils in the USA.

It is now proposed to expand the project to a further six schools in North Ayrshire who will build on the established links with Georgia. The schools nominated for this pilot project take into account the school clusters across North Ayrshire and existing staff expertise in information technology.

The Committee agreed (a) to note the involvement of North Ayrshire schools in this joint project; and (b) to approve the inclusion of the following schools in the project:-

Abbey Primary School, Kilwinning

Dykesmains Primary School, Saltcoats

Glebe Primary School, Irvine

Lamlash Primary School, Arran

St. John Ogilvie Primary School, Irvine

St. Mary's Primary School, Largs.

10. Investors in People (IIP) Award

Submitted report by the Director of Education on current developments in North Ayrshire Schools in relation to Investors in People (IIP).

Investors in People is a national standard whereby an organisation can judge the quality of its staff development and training. During 1995/96, a pilot initiative involving four Ayrshire secondary schools and four associated primary schools was set up to assist schools in gaining an Investors in People Award and to allow the former Strathclyde Regional Council Education Department to gain experience in a national initiative with potential for future work in relation to school improvement. The pilot was funded jointly by the former Strathclyde Regional Council and Enterprise Ayrshire.

Following reorganisation, agreement was reached by the respective Directors of Education in Ayrshire to continue with the pilot initiative. Within North Ayrshire the schools involved are Largs Academy, Cumbrae Primary School, Auchenhavie Academy and Hayocks Primary School, Stevenston. The schools are progressing well with the work associated with the award in preparation for the assessment.

It is proposed that meetings of the pilot initiative schools continue to take place so that schools may share information about staff development systems and that the information from the pilot initiative be evaluated.

The Committee (a) noted the current developments in relation to the Investors in People pilot initiative; and (b) agreed that a further report be submitted to the Committee at the evaluation stage of the pilot initiative.

11. Education/Industry Links in North Ayrshire

Submitted report by the Director of Education on existing arrangements for education/industry links within North Ayrshire.

Education/industry links are organised in North Ayrshire with a number of partners including the Ayrshire Careers Partnership Ltd, Ayrshire Education Business Partnership, Understanding Industry and local and national industrial organisations. In addition, the majority of pupils undertake up to two weeks work experience in their fourth year of secondary school.

It is important that schools are able to evaluate the effectiveness of existing education/industry link activities in meeting national targets for education and training. It is also considered necessary, in order to ensure the effectiveness of work experience, that a review is undertaken covering issues such as health and safety, vetting of places, insurance, use of technology and marketing.

The Committee agreed that (a) procedures be introduced to monitor, evaluate and review education/industry link activities; and (b) that a review of work experience be undertaken.

12. Irvine: Woodlands Primary School

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a decision of the Corporate Strategy Committee to allocate funds to allow a new extension to be built at Woodlands Primary School, Irvine to replace that part of the school destroyed by a fire.

On 27 September 1996 following the fire steps were taken to ensure the prompt return of all pupils to the school with the children at the nursery being relocated to John Galt Primary School, Irvine. Due to the combined efforts and cooperation of the Education Directorate, Commercial Services Directorate and the Architectural Services Department, Woodlands Primary School was operational again within a short period of time. Strathclyde Fire Brigade is also to be

commended for its prompt action.

The Corporate Strategy Committee on 22 October 1996, agreed to allocate £300,000 in the capital budget for 1996/97 for a new extension to be built to replace the area destroyed by the fire.. It was further agreed that this should be the first phase of a programme to replace the school, subject to capital funding becoming available.

Noted.

Arising from the discussion on this item, in relation to school security, the Committee was advised that the appropriate type of hardware for security access doors to primary, special and nursery schools has now been agreed in conjunction with the Architectural Services Department and the implementation of the security access doors will be proceeding, as agreed by the Committee on 17 September 1996.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 2.45 p.m.