

Education Committee  
2 December 1997

**Irvine, 2 December 1997** - 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, Samuel Gooding, Stef Holmer, Father Matthew McManus, David Munn, Alan Munro, Robert Rae, John Sillars, Gordon Smith, George Steven and Reverend John Taylor.

**In Attendance**

The Director of Education, B. Gardner, Head of Education Resources, J. Leckie and J. Tulips, Heads of Education Services, C. Laird, Adviser, R. Duncan, Head of Support for Bilingual Pupils (Education); D. Nibloe, Principal Officer, Accountancy (Financial Services); S. King, Corporate Policy Officer and J. Bannatyne, Administration Officer (Chief Executive).

**Chair**

Mr. Morris in the Chair.

**Apologies for Absence**

Thomas Dickie and Peter McNamara.

**1. Minutes Confirmed**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 28th October 1997, copies of which had previously been circulated, were confirmed.

**2. Bilingual Support Service**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the ongoing success of and recognition being gained by the Bilingual Support Service, fuller details of which were provided by the Service Head in a presentation to the Committee.

In the first instance the Service has been presented with the 1997 Silver Award for Equality Innovation in the UK Diversity Awards Competition in the face of stiff competition from a number of prestigious entries including Boots, Marks & Spencer, The Royal Navy and BBC Birmingham. This is the service's third award in the last year.

Additionally, a successful bid has now been made to the Comenius Project by a group of four European partners led by North Ayrshire Council and involving similar services in Norway, Denmark and Iceland whose representatives will visit North Ayrshire in January 1998.

The Committee agreed (a) to congratulate the Bilingual Support Service on its success in the UK Diversity Awards; and (b) to approve the involvement of the service in a European Comenius Project.

### **3. Setting Targets: A Strategy to Raise Standards**

Submitted report by the Director of Education setting out a proposed response to the Scottish Office Consultative document "Setting Targets: A Strategy to Raise Standards" which sets out the Government's proposals for the development of a framework of targets in key areas for national introduction in the school year 1998/99.

The response which takes account of extensive consultation within the Directorate itself and with Head Teachers makes the following conclusions:-

- the opportunity to work in partnership in the setting of targets is welcomed and there is agreement that this should be done within a consistent national framework
- the proposal to work within a 3 year framework complements the current work being implemented by schools in North Ayrshire in relation to development planning
- whilst the initial target setting covering literacy, numeracy and attainment will help schools make use of existing data, further targets must be developed at an early stage to reflect the whole range of educational goals. Care must, however, be taken to ensure that teaching does not concentrate narrowly on what is being assessed but takes account of other valuable work in schools which cannot be presented as quantifiable data
- the recognition that targets must take account of local circumstances is welcomed as a major step forward although considerable work is still required on how school ratings will be determined. It is essential, however, that such local variations should not undermine the need to achieve a consistent national framework
- the Government's intention to reconsider the means of reporting examination performance to parents is welcomed although a balance is required between making information available and the potential for drawing misleading conclusions
- the timetable for these proposals is demanding but achievable and it will be essential to make an early start to maintain the momentum of this initiative.

The Committee agreed to approve the proposed response attached to the report as Appendix 2.

### **4. Quality Assurance: Analysis of Examination Results**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the overall performance of secondary schools in North Ayrshire in national examinations in 1997 as contained in the Scottish Office annual publication of exam results which also provides information to allow comparisons between performance levels in North Ayrshire and the national performance at Standard and Higher Grade levels from 1995-1997.

In relation to Standard Grade, the number of presentations per pupil for 1995-1997 was above the national average as was the number of General awards per fourth year pupil. The number of Credit awards was, however, below that average. Additionally, although the percentage of fourth year pupils gaining five or more Credit awards has gradually increased over the 3 year period, it has remained below the national average.

In relation to Higher Grade, the percentage of fourth year pupils returning for a fifth year is close to the national average and has remained fairly constant over the last 3 years but the percentage of fourth year pupils who stay on at Christmas has decreased and is below the national average. Presentations per pupil have improved slightly over the 3 year period but remain below the national average as does the percentage of pupils who gained 3 or more A to C awards. The number of pupils who gained no Higher awards remains well above the national average.

In October the Education Directorate held a Seminar for Head Teachers and representatives from senior management teams within Secondary Schools to provide staff development in the use of examination results and a forum for exchange of information about how schools can use the analysis as a means of school improvement. It is further proposed to seek a report on examination results from each Secondary School analysing the school's strengths and proposals for improvement and to continue to provide staff development and support for senior and middle

management in the use of examination results.

The Committee agreed to approve the action proposed.

## **5. School Exclusion Levels**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the degree and pattern of the use of school exclusions in North Ayrshire schools, statistics on which are compiled at school and Council level (figures available for 1995/96 and 1996/97) and at national level by the Scottish Office (figures published to date relate to 1995/96 only).

Primary school data gathered over the two year period indicate that exclusion is rare and that North Ayrshire levels are broadly consistent with the national figure available for 1995/96. Additionally, boys are very significantly more likely to be excluded than girls with exclusion rates rising throughout the primary stages. It is also evident that schools with relatively high exclusion rates are not necessarily those with the most deprived catchment areas as measured by levels of footwear and clothing grants. Overall, however, the small number of exclusions in primary schools makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about individual schools.

The findings for 1995/96 and 1996/97 indicate that exclusion is used much more frequently in secondary schools and in North Ayrshire the level was significantly higher than the national average in 1995/96. Approximately 1 in 11 secondary pupils were excluded at least once in the last session, a rate which is approximately 12 times higher than in the primary sector. It is also clear that boys continue to be over-represented but the imbalance is much less than at primary. Additionally, rates rise from S1 to S3 and fall off slightly in S4 with S3 being the peak stage for exclusion across the entire educational experience. Once again, deprivation alone does not predict the exclusion rate of secondary schools.

The early findings of the Council's data over the last 2 school sessions indicate that North Ayrshire has inherited a traditionally high level of the use of exclusion within its Secondary Schools but it will only be possible to draw a fairer comparison once the new policy implemented at the start of the 1997/98 session has been in operation over a longer period.

After discussion the Committee agreed that the Director of Education (i) continue to monitor and review school exclusion levels with Head Teachers; and (ii) submit a further report once the policy has been in operation for a year.

## **6. Theatre in Education: Drugs Awareness**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on a successful bid for external funding for the Theatre in Education Project on Drugs Awareness.

The project which has been used successfully in various parts of Scotland involves the Fablevision Theatre Company who have produced a package which addresses issues relating to the misuse of drugs. This consists of a teachers pack, the performance of a play, a post performance discussion and a video. It is considered particularly suitable for pupils in P7, S1 and S2.

The level of financial support provided by Scotland Against Drugs, ICI Explosives and local rotary clubs is such that this package costing £300 will be available to North Ayrshire schools at no charge.

The Committee agreed to approve the Theatre in Education Project on Drugs Awareness.

## **7. Anti-Bullying Strategy**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the proposed adoption of a North Ayrshire Policy designed to reduce the incidence of bullying among children in North Ayrshire schools.

As a result of increased awareness of the damaging long term emotional impact of serious exposure to bullying there has over the last 5 years been an increasing degree of attention given to this issue and numerous initiatives targeting bullying behaviour have been developed.

Despite these innovations bullying continues in schools and various factors have led the Minister for Education to review the situation in Scotland to determine what steps are required. Whilst numerous initiatives have already been established within North Ayrshire it is nonetheless clear that additional action is necessary and hence a clear anti-bullying policy has been framed incorporating 5 key principles of

- definition;
- acknowledgement;
- prevention;
- identification; and
- intervention.

This proposal will allow each school to build on widespread good practices which already exist by formalising where necessary their current procedures, guidelines and policies in the form of an explicit written anti-bullying policy.

Significant factors in relation to the implementation stage which should be highlighted are

- the need to keep the policy "in the public eye";
- the need to advise school boards and parents on the policy and involve them in implementing it;
- the need for the Council to monitor the implementation of anti-bullying strategies within its schools which will in the first instance adhere to the key principles covered in the report and then to the schools' own anti bullying policies which are to be lodged with the Director of Education by the start of the 1998/99 session.

After discussion the Committee agreed (a) to approve the adoption of the Anti-Bullying Policy for North Ayrshire Schools in the terms indicated in the report; and (b) that the Director of Education take steps to implement and publicise the Policy in conjunction with schools, parents and School Boards.

## **8. Heating of Schools**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on proposals to convert the heating systems in 26 schools from coal fired to gas fired plants because their boilers are reaching the end of their useful life. It would be possible to phase the conversion over a maximum period of 5 years at a cost in the region of £400,000 per year allowing for inflation.

Greenwood Academy, Dreghorn and Largs Academy have already been provided with new gas fired plant and the change over to gas at St. Andrew's Academy, Saltcoats will be completed early in 1999. Gas is being selected as the best heating option because the maintenance costs associated with coal burning plant are high; the replacement costs of a new coal fired boiler, stoker, induced draught fan and associated equipment amount to approximately two and a half times the gas fired equivalent; the new gas fired plants which have been installed are proving efficient and effective, and it is believed the conversion to gas fired boilers will in almost every case result in savings on fuel costs.

The Committee discussed the priority which these proposals appeared to afford to the provision of new heating within schools in preference to other works which in some cases were viewed as more pressing. It was, however, acknowledged that the condition of the systems in question would dictate some action and hence expenditure in the foreseeable future. Provision for the upgradings proposed would, in any event, require future consideration of a bid for inclusion

within the Council's Capital Plan when other competing interests would also be considered.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) in principle to adopt a planned approach to the conversion from coal to gas heating in schools; (b) that a proposal for the requisite funding be included within future Education Directorate submissions; and (c) to instruct the Director of Education in the interim to provide members with information on comparative running costs between coal and gas fired systems.

## **9. Developments within the European Dimension in North Ayrshire Schools**

Submitted report by the Director of Education giving updated information on developments within the European dimension in schools within North Ayrshire.

Forming links with Education Authorities in European Union member states and comparing practice with them has been helpful in promoting the Council's European profile. The report provided information on a number of existing links which continue to be developed with Karmoy in Norway, Bordeaux in France, Galicia in Spain, Marburg in Germany and Helsinki in Finland and highlighted new initiatives with education authorities in Minho in Portugal, Florence in Italy, Corfu in Greece and Dusseldorf in Germany. Additionally, the Chair and Director of Education from Malmö in Sweden visited North Ayrshire in September 1997 and the Head Teacher of Fairlie Primary School and a Modern Languages Teacher from Largs Academy have been nominated to attend Comenius Seminars in Belgium and Germany respectively. A Comenius Information Seminar involving 20 Head Teachers was also held on Arran in June 1997.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to approve the continued development of the various projects outlined in the report; and (b) to recommend that the potential which might exist to expand such initiatives through links with Corporate activities should be explored through the Member/Officer Working Group on European Matters.

## **10. Modern Languages in North Ayrshire Schools**

Submitted report by the Director of Education confirming arrangements for the teaching of modern European languages in North Ayrshire schools, detailing a proposal to pursue the production of a Policy Document for Modern Languages in the Primary School and highlighting the benefits of learning languages.

French and at least one other language (predominantly German) is offered in all secondary schools with Spanish, Russian and Italian being available in selected schools. French is also offered as a core or compulsory curricular element from S1 to S4 but all languages are optional subjects in S5/6.

In relation to the teaching of languages outwith Secondary schools North Ayrshire Council is among the first of the Scottish Authorities to include all of its Primary Schools in a programme which currently allows French to be taught by specially trained staff to all Primary 6 and 7 classes and to several classes in James Reid Special School. Additionally, five Primary teachers are now being trained in German with a view to teaching the language in their own schools from October 1998. Consideration is also being given at the present time to the extension of modern languages to the pre-five sector on a pilot basis.

An analysis of the performance of candidates in modern language examinations in North Ayrshire suggests that, despite the negative view of modern languages nationally, the numbers of presentations in North Ayrshire showed an increase in all modern language examinations except Standard Grade French. Some less positive trends in modern language provision do however include concern over the predominance of French at the expense of German and Spanish, and the fact that Italian is virtually extinct in the Council's schools. The uptake levels in languages other than French are not high. In an effort to address these issues it is proposed to consult schools on a draft Policy Statement on Modern Languages in the Primary School, full details of which had been appended to the report.

The Committee discussed the importance of European languages particularly insofar as they enable people to compete more favourably within the European Jobs Market and some doubt was expressed about the continued prominence being given to French language in schools over e.g. German or Spanish which were felt to be of more value now than they had been in the past.

In these circumstances, the Committee agreed to approve the issue of a draft Policy Statement on Modern Languages in Primary Schools in the terms indicated in the report.

### **11. Central Technician Service: Stand Alone Service**

In June, the Committee considered a report outlining the positive aspects and the cost effective nature of the existing joint arrangement for the provision of a Central Technician Service funded jointly by the 3 Ayrshire Councils. Fears were, however, expressed that the future stability of the service was subject to uncertainty as a result of the financial pressures being experienced by the Councils participating in the joint arrangement. Consequently a further report was requested on the requirements for the creation of a stand alone Central Technician Service within North Ayrshire.

Submitted report by the Director of Education presenting a possible exit strategy which would create minimum disruption to the service and allow North Ayrshire Council to operate independently should this prove necessary.

In essence the creation of a stand alone service for North Ayrshire would involve:-

- increased costs of between £95,000 and to £118,000 in the first year of operation and of at least £33,000 per annum from year 2 onwards (provided it does not prove necessary to acquire accommodation);
- staff retraining and possible multi-skilling to fill the gaps which would arise across key elements of the service particularly in the technical and computing areas where no staff would transfer to North Ayrshire;
- a perceived reduction at least in the first instance in the quality of service, given that it will take some time for newly trained technicians to attain the level of expertise currently available, particularly within computing; and
- the loss of benefits which current economies of scale permit.

The Committee expressed their preference for the existing arrangement which in their view constitutes best value but acknowledged the need to formulate a contingency plan to ensure minimum disruption to the established service within North Ayrshire's schools.

After discussion, the Committee agreed (a) to reaffirm its commitment to the current joint arrangements for the Central Technician Service; (b) to seek undertakings from South and East Ayrshire Councils regarding the consolidation of the existing Central Technician Service; and (c) in the event that no undertaking to maintain the existing service is forthcoming, to approve the creation of a stand alone Central Technician Service within North Ayrshire and remit the financial implications of establishing such a service to the Corporate Strategy Committee.

### **12. Christmas Arts Activities**

Submitted report by the Director of Education on the following Christmas Arts Activities involving North Ayrshire Schools:-

- The recording of a CD by the North Ayrshire Schools Choir and Concert Band which will be on sale within schools, libraries and the Education Directorate.
- The staging of a large scale concert entitled "Carolling Christmas" in the Magnum on Thursday 18th December 1997 involving 1,000 local school children.
- The promotion of a schools calendar which was sponsored by ICI Explosives, who also donated prizes to the 12 young artists whose work is featured.
- The transformation of Cunninghame House on 18 December 1997 into a site specific artwork designed by local artists and produced by pupils from a number of North Ayrshire Primary Schools.

The Committee agreed to approve these activities.

The Meeting ended at 3.35 p.m.