

Survey of Local Authorities about Provision of Additional Support for Primary P1-P3 Pupils as Alternatives to or in Addition to Class Size Reduction

Background

1. The Scottish Government is committed to reducing P1-P3 classes to a maximum of 18 pupils. The concordat signed with local government in 2007 indicated that year on year progress should be made but that the rate of progress would vary between local authorities according to local circumstances.

2, The 2009 Pupil Census indicated that not enough progress towards P1-P3 classes of 18 had been made, being only at 16.1% of P1-P3 pupils in classes of 18 or fewer. Following constructive discussions between the Scottish Government and CoSLA a Framework Agreement was entered into on the basis that, "by August 2010 the percentage of P1-P3 children educated in classes of 18 or less will increase to at least 20%". The 2010 census confirms that this target has been exceeded - 21.7% of P1-P3 pupils are now in small classes.

3. A number of local authorities pointed out that alternative approaches, such as the establishment of nurture groups, could improve teacher pupil interaction in much the same way as class size reduction could. The possibility of alternative approaches achieving similar outcomes as class size reduction has been recognised by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. At the Education and Culture Committee on 12 March 2010 he stated:

"I believe that what we are trying to do on class sizes is a bedrock activity that will produce results in attainment in the long term. However, I do not dispute the validity of the other work that is being done in addition to that, which will also help. I do not dispute that some local authorities - such as Glasgow with its nurture groups - are following other routes that might produce some of the same outcomes. That is the beauty of diversity in Scotland. Scotland is not a monolithic delivery vehicle in which one central view is delivered religiously in each school. That has never been the case".

4. It was recognised that the richness and diversity of the additional support that is being provided by local authorities would not be captured by the raw statistical data of the school census. Accordingly, to help provide a fuller picture of support being given to pupils in the early years, the Scottish Government carried out a brief survey of local authorities in September 2010. The survey sought primarily to glean as much as it could about the range of approaches being adopted rather than to measure in great detail the amount of resource being deployed.

5. Twenty three authorities responded and their responses are summarised below under the headings of the three questions asked.

Does your authority have a declared policy relating to the provision of additional teacher/adult support across P1-P3 classes in your schools? If so, what is it?

A range of policies, principles and practices were declared in response to this question. Most councils are targeting resources at schools in areas of deprivation and/or targeting resources at the early years.

Where councils talk of targeting 'resources', this relates to class teachers and/or probationer teachers (whether fully-funded or otherwise) and/or visiting specialists and/or classroom assistants and/or early years practitioners. Authorities that indicated they targeted additional teaching staff including fully funded probationers to P1-P3 were Argyll and Bute, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, Edinburgh, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Lothian. Aberdeenshire prioritised the distribution of support staff to the early years.

The methodologies used for determining the extent to which resources are targeted at particular schools or stages include, most frequently, staffing formulae that favour early years classes over upper-primary classes and/or a focus on the schools in the most deprived communities. In relation to the latter, some authorities focus on 20% of their schools, some on 20% of their pupils, whereas others were not explicit about this.

Some authorities have explicit class size reduction targets either for P1 classes only or for P1-P3 classes generally and these are being achieved either through the targeting of resources or through falling school rolls.

Beyond these general approaches, councils and schools are adopting flexible groupings of pupils across stages, and allocating 2 teachers to classes of, for example, 28 pupils.

Many councils stressed the autonomy of headteachers to adopt approaches appropriate to the particular circumstances of individual schools within overarching council-wide policies.

Please outline and quantify any approaches adopted by your authority to supplement the work of P1-P3 classroom teachers. These may include the deployment of EAL teachers, visiting specialists, ASL teachers and/or the formation of nurture groups/classes.

Authorities employ a wide range of professionals and para-professionals in their schools. Some councils quantified elements of the additional resources but this was far from comprehensive and makes it impossible to compare and contrast the level of provision among authorities quantitatively.

Teachers work in a range of capacities including:

English as an Additional Language teachers, Pupil Support teachers, Visual Impairment teachers, Hearing Impairment teachers, Speech and Language teachers, Dyslexia teachers, Support for Learning teachers, teachers involved with Looked after Children and gypsy/traveller children and Home link workers.

Teachers are also deployed in primary schools in a range of visiting specialist subjects/roles including:

PE, expressive arts (music, art, drama etc), science, modern languages,

Authorities using some of these approaches include Aberdeenshire, Clackmannanshire, Eilean Siar, Edinburgh, Midlothian and Stirling.

Support staff include:

Classroom assistants, SEBN (social emotional behavioural needs) outreach support, support for learning assistants and English as an Additional Language assistants (including bi-lingual assistants for whom English is an additional language).

Authorities using support staff in such a fashion include Dundee, Edinburgh and Stirling.

There were strong messages about the importance of recognising the role of other professionals and para-professionals in contributing to the educational outcomes of pupils and young children in our schools.

Fully-funded probationers, who free up experienced teachers, were referred to in many of the responses as providing the opportunity for additional teaching resource to be deployed where it is most needed.

A significant proportion of councils have created nurture groups. One authority refers to their nurture classes as Learning Centres. Nurture groups have a key contribution to make in enabling each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. More specifically, they help to create positive and peaceful learning environments by working in a targeted way with children to prevent disruption for them and their classmates. Authorities that have adopted nurture groups include Glasgow, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Midlothian, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling, and West Lothian.

Schools are also adopting a number of other bespoke interventions including:

Network support staff contributing to reading intervention in P2 and P3;

Places for 'vulnerable 2s' in early years centres; and

Buddy schemes.

Again, many authorities stressed that headteachers have considerable autonomy to ensure that the resources available to them are used to best effect to suit the particular circumstances of their schools.

To what extent are the resources referred to above spread evenly across your schools or targeted at specific schools?

All councils that responded are targeting resources on particular schools and/or classes and/or individuals. Many referred simply to matching resources to where the greatest need lies. Authorities that specifically indicated that they used a targeted approach include East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Lothian.

A range of approaches are adopted, as referred to above in the section dealing with council policies, including SIMD data, clothing grants and free school meals.

Other examples include targeting resources specifically at lower attainment, irrespective of other indicators related to deprivation. Another example was of putting in additional resources where the configuration of pupils at particular stages would result in relatively high class sizes.

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