

# THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

## Closing the Attainment Gap

### Introduction

The 2016 AGM adopted the following Resolution:

**“That this AGM instruct Council to investigate and report on the ways in which education authorities will mitigate the demands on teachers to continually improve Scottish education and to close the attainment gap at a time of cuts to school budgets.”**

The Resolution was passed to the Education Committee for action. It decided to send an FOI to all Directors of Education seeking information on the actions taken to ensure that all improvement and closing the attainment gap activity is managed within the terms of the 35-hour working week. 29 local authorities replied; Clackmannanshire, Dundee and Western Isles did not.

The Committee then sent the replies to the appropriate Local Association Secretaries seeking comment on the information provided by local authorities. Glasgow, Inverclyde, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, and Perth and Kinross Local Associations provided responses.

### Responses from Local Authorities

Replies from local authorities provided information on a range of measures which, it was stated, were being put into practice, to a greater or lesser extent by individual local authorities, to control teacher workload. Workload control measures cited were as follows:

- **Working Time Agreements:** collegiate working with trade unions to provide commentary to, guidance for, sample scrutiny of, joint-training of EIS members and Headteachers in, and ongoing monitoring of, Working Time Agreements (WTAs).

One local authority indicated that joint secretaries are soon to reach a Workload Control Agreement which details how any workload associated with the National Improvement Framework (NIF) and the Scottish Attainment Challenge will be managed to ensure that it does not exceed the 35 hours within the WTA.

Another local authority has established a Managing Teacher Workload Short-Life Working Group to address the potential workload implications of new developments.

- **School Improvement Plans (SIPs):** communication by local authorities to schools on the need to align SIPs with WTAs; guidance provided to schools on limiting the number of SIP priorities; training of Headteachers on SIPs and alignment to WTAs; alignment of the SIP and School Standards and Quality Report; streamlining of SIP and school self-evaluation

documentation; avoidance of additional projects related to closing the attainment gap, this regarded to be the within the core business of learning and teaching; prioritising of NIF aims within SIPS; development of curriculum guidance and planning frameworks.

- **Tackling Bureaucracy Working Group Recommendations:** agreements with teacher unions on how recommendations will be taken forward; establishment/ reconvening of Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) Tackling Bureaucracy (TB) Subgroups; tackling bureaucracy included in the remits of Quality Improvement Officers who advise HTs and schools on workload and bureaucracy control; standardised approaches to planning, assessment and reporting agreed with unions; poster created for distribution in schools as reminder of the TB Working Group recommendations; inclusion of TB in local authority CPD delivery; manageable ICT systems to simplify recording systems; all new authority documentation and processes checked for over-bureaucracy and feedback sought from schools following roll-out.
- **Liaison with Teacher Unions:** LNCT workload agreements; collegiate working within working groups whose focus is to progress the improvement agenda while taking due cognisance of teacher workload; formal and informal discussion and collaboration between trade unions and senior staff to address incidences of overly bureaucratic practice; joint working on national government policy implementation.
- **Streamlining of processes:** planning, self-evaluation and reporting templates provided to minimise the workload impact of overly burdensome paperwork; removal or modification of burdensome tracking approaches; streamlining of data input to avoid duplication.
- **Provision of guidance and support on improvement initiatives:** to avoid duplication of effort, working groups set up to provide support and appropriate documentation, for example, on Literacy, Numeracy, reporting and planning.
- **Teacher Workload Surveys:** surveys of the workload of teachers generally and of Primary Headteachers in particular.
- **Additional Advice to Schools:** briefings on workload control provided for HTs and DHTs at the appropriate meetings; SMTs reminded of the learning and teaching focus of forward planning meetings; HTs reminded of the importance of engaging all staff in discussions of any new initiatives.
- **Sharing of Good Practice:** pooling of resources and sharing of good practice across learning communities to avoid duplication.
- **Additional staffing:** additional staffing allocations within secondary school timetables to cover both supply and development work; use of Attainment Challenge Funding to appoint additional nursery workers, speech and language therapists, mental health and family support workers, and to create additional PT management time.

## **Replies from Local Association Secretaries**

Replies received from five Local Associations confirmed the detail provided by their respective local authorities. The following additional points were raised:

Glasgow has an Attainment Challenge Strategy Group on which the EIS is represented by the Local Association Secretary who has frequently raised the issue of teacher workload during meetings of the Group.

Featuring in relevant discussion has been the tension between the additional demand for teachers in order to deliver the NIF priorities and the national shortage of qualified teachers.

This concern was echoed by the Local Association Secretary for Perth and Kinross who confirmed that the endeavour by the local authority to recruit additional staff, is undermined at times by teacher shortage.

Finally, it was reported by the East Dunbartonshire Local Association Secretary, and by other sources thereafter, that Headteachers were giving consideration to how allocations of the Pupil Equity Fund may be spent to close the gap.

## **Review by Education Scotland of Local Authorities' Actions to Tackle Unnecessary Bureaucracy and Undue Workload in Schools**

In August 2016, directed by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Education Scotland undertook a review of the demands placed on schools by local authorities in relation to the implementation of CfE. While not specifically focused on the workload potentially generated by the closing the attainment gap agenda, the review which had focused primarily on forward and curriculum planning, assessment, self-evaluation and improvement planning, tracking, monitoring and reporting and IT systems, uncovered some useful findings.

Education Scotland concluded that while

'all local authorities were committed strongly, in principle, to tackling bureaucracy and reducing unnecessary workload for their staff...the extent to which they are taking action to achieve this varies significantly.'

The review found that just under half of local authorities had been 'proactive' in reducing unnecessary workload. In a range of other authorities, while some steps had been taken to supply relevant guidance to schools and to create effective systems of support, more of such action was required and needed to be done to address poor practice. In a small number of authorities, there was insufficient evidence of steps having been taken to address the issue of teacher workload.

It could be reasonable to assume that the picture may be similar in relation to school-based activity associated with NIF and closing the attainment gap.

## **Conclusion**

The vast majority of local authorities in Scotland provided detail of their activity aimed at mitigation of the demands on teacher workload potentially generated by the drive for improvement in schools and the goal of reducing the poverty-related attainment gap.

All Local Associations were provided with the information supplied by their local authorities; however only a small number of Local Associations confirmed the veracity of the details provided. It is therefore not possible to conclude that the actions detailed by local authorities are having the desired practical impact in controlling teacher workload.

This view is further supported by the findings of the Education Scotland review of CfE-related workload and bureaucracy within local authorities, which judged the effectiveness of local authority actions to tackle workload to be variable across the county. In light of the outcomes of their engagement with local authorities around these issues, Education Scotland has committed to ongoing support at local and national level in recognition of the continuance of the workload issue.

The nature of the information supplied by local authorities suggests, as outlined in the Education Scotland report, that the issue of excessive teacher workload is widely recognised by them and that steps have been taken at authority level to address the issue to a greater or lesser extent across Scotland. The majority of local authorities expressed explicit commitment to ongoing joint-working with teacher trade unions on workload.

While this may be the case, the excessive workload of teachers continues to be a critical issue for the EIS both locally and nationally, and upon which vigorous campaigning and lobbying continues in all relevant fora, including those related to school improvement and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

The 2016 AGM resolved to monitor the workload impact of NIF, and focus on this will continue as per the terms of the Resolution as NIF develops.

At establishment level, the WTA aligned to the SIP, remains the central means by which teacher workload is controlled.