

CONSULTATION ON REGULATIONS TO REDUCE PRIMARY 1 CLASSES TO A MAXIMUM OF 25 PUPILS

Children in Scotland is pleased to respond to this consultation. We are wholeheartedly in favour of measures that promote good early childhood experience and provide a solid foundation for good health, positive educational outcomes and effective social participation. Many factors promote better educational outcomes for children, class sizes being one of these. There is clear evidence that small classes can deliver significant and measurable educational benefits.

That being said, while we are by no means opposed to setting the class size limit to twenty-five in early primary school, we do question both whether it is the most effective approach to raising educational attainment and to promoting other aspects of children's well-being. Evidence that reducing the statutory maximum from thirty to twenty-five would produce is inconclusive. Research would suggest that, to gain significant and sustained benefit, class sizes would need to be reduced to fifteen or fewer. There is, in addition, research that indicates that alternative approaches, such as improving the quality of the pedagogical input, can achieve comparable improvement at lower cost. At a time when substantial reductions in public sector budgets are imminent, it is of particular importance that resources are used in the best, most effective and most sustainable way.

The sustained impact of small class sizes in early primary school is also questionable. A number of studies suggest that such benefits as are accrued are largely short-term; follow-up studies do not appear to demonstrate conclusively that positive impact remains evident at later stages in the education process.

Our main comment, finally, relates to the now overwhelming and indisputable body of evidence showing that effective support provided to children and families in their earliest years, that is, between birth and three, costs less, is more effective and its impact more permanent than any intervention that takes place later in a child's life. The opportunity to influence some of the most important contributors to good outcomes, such as positive attachment and parenting, is effectively missed if not acted on in this period of life. The Scottish Government is commendably committed to ensuring that every child has 'the best start in life', and to meaningful implementation of its Early Years Framework. When resources

are tight and choices have to be made, we would contend that investment in pursuit of these objectives should be given higher priority than class size reduction.

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies and services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents more than 450 members, including 90% of Scottish Local Authorities, all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and Europe.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Government, local authorities and practitioners. It also services groups such as the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People (with YouthLink Scotland). In addition, Children in Scotland hosts Enquire - the national advice service for additional support for learning, and Resolve: ASL, Scotland's largest independent education mediation service.