

Policy Briefing



Ministerial Statement on National Debate on Education 2.30 pm Wednesday 9 October 2002

Children in Scotland welcomes the Minister for Children and Young People's statement on the Scottish Executive's National Debate on Education.

Children in Scotland supports the National Debate and its continued commitment to consultation with pupils as well as adults. Children in Scotland trusts that the Executive and the Scottish Parliament will take on board the views it gathered during the initial phase. The Scottish Executive funded Children in Scotland to work with partner agencies - the Faculty of Education at the University of Edinburgh, Save the Children, the Scottish Consumer Council and Scottish Support for Learning Association - to reach people who otherwise might not be heard in the debate.

Strong messages that came out of Children in Scotland's consultations were:

- The current fixations – with content over knowledge, academic subjects over other skills, and narrow targets and assessment – are seen as detrimental to young people's learning.
- A wider range of subjects needs to be taught and a broader range of activities available. Learning goes beyond what happens in schools.
- Learning should be fun. Flexibility is essential. Pupils should not have to spend so much time at their desks.
- Young people think teachers should be friendly, patient and sensitive and these characteristics should be looked for in selecting teachers.
- Class sizes should be substantially reduced. Young people wanted a ratio of one adult to eight pupils.
- While the increased government commitment to early years and out of school services is supported, the present coverage and type of services are seen as highly inadequate.

Children in Scotland is the united voice of voluntary, statutory and independent professional organisations working to promote those policies that best serve the interests of children and families in Scotland.

Tel 0131 228 8484; email: gharrow@childreninScotland.org.uk

11 key messages that came from the Young People's consultation are:

- **Children and young people supported having a central place to socialise, to learn and to gain qualifications:** while children and young people learnt things elsewhere, school offered the best opportunity to get qualifications.
- **Schools should do more to promote understanding, respect and appreciation of different cultures:** children and young people should not be judged or labelled at school, and schools should be more flexible to diversity.
- **Good relationships with teachers are paramount:** teachers should relate to young people with patience, humour and understanding, should have time to listen and respect the views of young people.
- **Class sizes should be reduced:** classes should have no more than 15-20 pupils, the pupil:teacher ratio should be 8:1, and classes should be grouped to reflect how different people learn.
- **There should be more to school than academic subjects:** schools should teach skills for life, provide a wider range of subject choice and activities and build pupils' self-esteem.
- **Learning should be fun and flexible:** more balance in the curriculum, smaller classes and better relationships with teachers would help facilitate this.
- **Young people should spend less time at their desks:** more sporting and cultural activities and more leisure time would lead to a more balanced day.
- **Good behaviour should be rewarded:** this would do more to improve pupils' behaviour than punishments that are seen as unfair, futile or disproportionate.
- **Young people should be involved:** individual and policy decisions should involve young people more
- **The school environment should be safe, in good repair and have enough space.**
- **School should also be a place to socialise:** young people should have access to common rooms to relax, or facilities to unwind with friends.

For the full responses to the 'National Debate on Education' and 'Reaching Young People', please go to: <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/polnetwo.htm#Recent%20responses>

Children in Scotland is the united voice of voluntary, statutory and independent professional organisations working to promote those policies that best serve the interests of children and families in Scotland.

Tel 0131 228 8484; email: charrow@childreninscotland.org.uk