



EIS Newsletter

December 1999

The Power of Three

Is it just me or has anyone else noticed this government's love affair with the number 3? Ever since Tony Blair first declared "Education. Education. Education." 3 has been the magic number. Excellence Funding - for 3 years, New Deal Money - for 3 years, Education Action Plans - 3 year funding and Target Setting - achieve within 3 years! Little wonder then that the question what is 7 x 8 floored the government representative on a not so recent radio programme. What did that have to do with 3?

Then of course there was the icing on the cake - The Millennium Review/ Negotiations/ Debacle (please delete as appropriate). Preliminary discussions took place in session '97-'98, yet more discussions and the breathtaking conclusions in session '98 - '99 with the grand finale courtesy of McCrone in '99 - '00. Even COSLA got the hang of things with the final offer that wasn't, followed by the final offer that was, which was in turn followed by the 'we're not making an offer at all!' offer.



Throughout the year the EIS nationally has continued to make reasoned, educational submissions pointing out the deficiencies in various government policies. The research commissioned by the Institute in relation to Target Setting was a particularly powerful piece of work. Nevertheless, despite all the major initiatives we have had to deal with, nothing has so exercised the minds of members both nationally and locally as the Millennium Review. The depth of debate it has generated has been far-ranging and emotive.

From those who saw it as an opportunity to enter into and drive meaningful discussion on the way forward, to those who feared it would open up the Pandora's box of conditions and allow our employers an unprecedented opportunity to make radical changes (seemingly with our implied agreement) and with a wealth of opinion in between, the discussion, disagreement, confusion and cynicism it has produced has been incredible.

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*Welcome to our
latest
Newsletter*

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Secretary's Report

Dear Colleague



This month I wish to return to a topic of which I have written and spoken many times in the past, the **Incident Reporting Form**. As you are aware, at the start of this session a new Incident Reporting Form was introduced in place of the existing forms relating to Verbal and Physical Abuse towards school staff. All teachers were in-serviced regarding this new form on Friday 13 August, however there would still appear to be confusion surrounding the completion of these forms.

The filling in of these forms is a requirement of the Authority.

Although these forms are designed to deal with all incidents in schools I wish to concentrate on incidents of verbal and physical abuse from parents or pupils. (Please note that incidents of abuse from colleagues should not be dealt with on these forms but should be reported to the Headteacher to investigate and take action.

Teachers or Headteachers have no choice in the matter; if an incident occurs it must be reported, and this has the full backing of the teaching unions. With regard to a serious incident, wherever possible time should be set aside immediately after the incident for the teacher to get a chance to recover and complete the form, which should not take longer than five or six minutes.

A copy of the completed form, including action taken by the Headteacher, must be returned to the teacher within ten days of the incident being reported.

If the teacher is not satisfied with the action taken he/she should meet with the Headteacher and discuss this. If he/she is still not satisfied then either the school rep. or myself should be contacted with a view to invoking the Grievance Procedure.

The reason why the unions are emphasising the necessity of completing these forms is two-fold. Firstly the statistics are sent to the Scottish Office and it is vital that they are given a

true picture of what teachers are up against on a daily basis. Secondly the Authority have assured us that off-site provision will remain in place for pupils who are not prepared to comply with the behaviour policies of the school but Headteachers must demonstrate that all measures to keep the pupil at the school have been put in place and sine die exclusion is the last resort. It is impossible for Headteachers to do this if they do not have sufficient evidence.

No teacher has to tolerate defiance, verbal abuse or physical abuse from either parents or pupils.

The completion of these forms is not a sign of weakness or incompetence or inability to control classes but is, to repeat myself, a requirement of the Authority.

If anyone wishes to discuss this further please don't hesitate to contact me.

W.A.Ross
11/11/99

See contacts on page 8

Inclusion

Below is a report of a very well attended Special LA meeting held on 28th September 1999 in Aberdeen Grammar School

Issues continue to be raised by EIS officials with management at Union Management Forum (UMF) meetings.

The meeting was addressed by:

Jurgen Thomanek, Convener of Education & Leisure Committee, Aberdeen City Council

John Stodter, Director of Education, Aberdeen City Council

Fred Forrester, Depute General Secretary, EIS

The Convener and Director outlined the Council's policy on inclusion with particular emphasis on ACC's founding statements on principles of equity and equality and the importance of not excluding pupils from access to provision within their own community.

Fred Forrester outlined that the range of needs of pupils from gifted to those with mental, physical, emotional and behavioural difficulties suggested a practical approach to inclusion. He emphasised that to make comparisons by using Records of needs (Rons) as a measure of inclusion was not valuable because of their variable use throughout Scotland.

Questions and Answers:

Administration of drugs: All 3 speakers emphasised the difficulties with the existing national policy on this issue and that the Scottish Parliament had been urged to resolve the issue. Members were reminded of the voluntary principle and that in the absence of national guidelines, local guidelines must be adhered to.

Inclusion of EBD Pupils:

- *Jurgen Thomanek* outlined
 1. the need for consultation time in the school day for class teachers to meet with specialists
 2. that there should be a review of principles to measure success
 3. his criticisms of the Government's use of target setting as crude and inaccurate
 4. that the Education Committee had not changed the Policy on Exclusion.

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• **John Stodter** made the following points

5. Schools should identify and manage the problems associated with inclusion
6. Concerns from classroom teachers should be referred to SMT
7. Resources should accompany the child
8. Exclusion Policy has not changed
9. Common issues should be brought to the UMF
10. No request for In-service training has been refused
11. Education Officers will not put pressure on schools to keep pupils who are clearly out of control
12. Education Officers will not put pressure on schools to keep pupils who are jeopardising the safety of staff & pupils
13. There must be discussion/consultation with class teachers before a pupil arrives in the classroom.
14. Secondary Review will equalise the distribution of SEN/EBD pupils
15. Acknowledged the requirement for training at the centre.

The President, Mary Matheson, closed the meeting by thanking the speakers for their contributions and reminding the Director of Education and the Convener of the Education and Leisure Committee that we have been trained not to “contain” pupils but to teach them.



Congratulations to

Stewart Duncan
and
Grant Bruce
on their election as
Teachers Representatives
on the new
Education & Leisure Committee
of Aberdeen District Council.

~

Both are long serving experienced members of the EIS
and are committed to representing all teachers.

Women's Training Day

Presently 70% of the EIS membership are women. This is not reflected in the level of participation of women at either local or national level. It has been demonstrated in other areas that women-only training events are successful in encouraging female participation and, with this in mind, Aberdeen Local Association arranged a women's training day. Nine local association members attended the event on 30 September and the tutor was Veronica Rankin, EIS Equality Officer.

The main issues covered throughout the day were communication skills, building confidence and looking at how the EIS can help. At the start of the day the participants were all slightly apprehensive and wondering what they had let themselves in for, but Veronica very quickly managed to put them at ease. By the end of the day the general feeling was that a 2-day course would be necessary to do justice to the issues and although initially participants had reservations about coming out of school for a day, they acknowledged that it had been a very worthwhile experience. The formal evaluations were all extremely positive and, without exception, stated that they would recommend the course to other members of the local association.

In the future it is hoped that we will be able to offer this training again and possibly even extend it to two days. With this in mind I have listed below the course participants so that, if the opportunity arises, you can ask them their opinion of the course and hopefully you will be inspired to put your name forward for the next course- provided you meet the gender criteria!

Linda Stormonth	St Machar Academy
Anne Douglas	EAL Unit
Lesley Shepherd	Bucksburn Primary School
Mary Cruickshank	Fernielea Primary School
Susan Wood	Kincorth Academy
Pat Woods	Linkfield Academy
Jo Martin	St Peter's Primary School
Isabel Silvestros	Seaton Primary School
Karine Martinez	Northfield Academy

Lynda Carnie

Equal Opportunities Officer

Dates for your Diary:

Reps' training: Both are for 2 days

- ♦ **Introductory Course—1st & 2nd February 2000**
- ♦ **Advanced Course—10th & 11th February 2000**

Forms are in school now!

President's Visit

Atholl Hotel - 14th March 2000

Details of all these events will follow after the New Year

Health & Safety

Please contact me if your sensible and legitimate requests for H&S improvements are either denied or fail to elicit valid reasons for the denial. Sometimes lack of cash is a valid excuse, sometimes it isn't. Such is the nature of H&S! The hazard is identified and you assess the risk that that hazard may cause harm. Do you eliminate or reduce the risk? Does the reduction in risk justify the cost? But enough of this deeply philosophical banter

Administering of Medication

At the recent meeting on Inclusion, the Director of Education said that the Scottish Parliament was to consider the vexed question of who should be responsible for this. We await developments but I hope a sensible policy emerges that we can all accept. Remember in the meantime that this is not a duty for teaching staff. You can choose to volunteer if you wish but you must receive full training.



Aberdeen City Stress Management Policy

Perhaps about 2 years ago (how time flies), all staff received a wallet containing not money but details of 5 corporate H&S policies. One was on Stress. In my view, stress related illness will become a big problem throughout the public sector unless it is addressed properly

now. Assessment of the risk associated with any hazard can sometimes seem difficult, but assessing harmful stress levels and who is responsible for them must be like how I imagine mud wrestling to be ... (brief pause for thought),difficult to grasp.

Every year the Education Dept. reports to Personnel Dept. on how the policy is being implemented. Are we all aware that there is a confidential counselling service? (contact Personnel for name and address). Training courses are available (see booklet of courses). The next H&S Roadshow will be based around stress related issues and will be at Summerhill Centre.

Poor communications within a school or the whole education sector can lead to higher levels of stress than need exist (here we can enter debate on what are safe levels; should we learn to accommodate high levels or remove the causes; what are the causes; is one person's stress another person's thrill?).

Do you know what is going on in the school? Do you want to know!? Do you ask?

School management has a clear responsibility to look after the H&S of staff. This must include trying to ensure that they do not suffer harmful levels of stress. Management should be aware, or should be made aware, when they are asking for 'too much'. But each individual staff member also has H&S responsibilities. He/she should not take on work if it is making them ill.

Be aware of that marvellous English word, "No". You can even add, "thank you"

Ventilation and Temperature

The Education Dept. accepts that we have a major problem with these in many of our schools.



The resources are not available to rectify them all in the near future but both sides are keen to agree a rolling programme of improvements that can be communicated to staff (see Stress). I tried to articulate the reasons for these problems in a letter to Mr Mager recently (briefly, these include: global warming; the relentless advance of computers and their associated heat problems (that the government, in its hurry to appear to be concerned about 'Education', has not bothered to allow for); security concerns post-Dunblane mean that open doors and windows are no longer as acceptable as they once were; bricking up windows because of vandalism; fear that some children (and some staff?) may behave dangerously near open windows on floor 1 and above). He fully agrees with me and has written to the Scottish Executive Education Dept., Aberdeen Property Dept. and Convener of Education asking each to consider the cost implications. Schools should continue to make requests for improvements to ventilation/temperature and the Education Dept. can then audit and prioritise. Improvements may be a while in coming but it is vital that schools identify needs and ask for expected completion date.

Rob Peaker

Bullying and Harassment

Workshop



On 1st October 1999, all members of Aberdeen LA Executive attended a training day in Aberdeen delivered by Veronica Rankin, EIS National Equal Opportunities Officer. The article below is one members thoughts on the issues raised on the day.



Punitive damages are making employers pay attention to bullying and harassment. Employment legislation coming into force now is of use to Trade Unions trying to protect members' conditions of service, but it is not going to solve all the problems in school. Part of the workshop concerned the plethora of existing law on Race Discrimination, Sex Discrimination and Disability Discrimination as well as Health and Safety, Industrial Tribunals and so on.

Definitions can be tricky – in the Race Relations Act it is relatively easy to see where there has been discrimination because the definitions have been clear, but in some other areas there is a lack of definition which can make action difficult.

Until now the financial compensation for people losing their jobs because of unfair practices of one kind or another has been low. As far as teachers are concerned the case of Muriel Benson has given hope to a number of teachers who are now queueing up to take action. Through her Union she was awarded £47 000 in an out of court settlement after severe stress-related breakdowns forced her out of a job. At this point it would be as well to mention that no one is going to pay out for “trivial” reasons- she really was up against it – but what do we do about situations which have not forced people to such extremes? What do we see as trivial anyway?

The EIS has a useful booklet in schools outlining the kind of behaviour which can be interpreted as bullying and harassment. Members who feel they are being bullied or harassed should not ignore it but should seek help and support and if they feel confident should ask for the behaviour to stop. The school EIS Rep should be able to help. Taking notes of incidents with dates is valuable if a complaint is taken to formal stage. Members who are accused of bullying are offered advice as well. The booklet suggests that complaints should be listened to carefully, that the

behaviour should stop at once and there should not be an assumption that the complainant is over-reacting. The advice of the EIS Rep can be sought whether or not the complaint is felt to be unjust or malicious.

A joint initiative between the Local Authority and Teaching Unions has just been launched. Information is in your school.

You may not be suffering from any of the following.....

Intimidation and aggression

Setting impossible deadlines

Disparaging comments or remarks, often in front of others

Blocking promotion or staff development opportunities

Constantly changing objectives and goals

Taking credit for others achievements or initiatives

Constantly changing the remits and responsibilities of others

Isolating certain individuals and limiting consultation on important issues

.....but please read the circular and make sure the poster is in a prominent position.

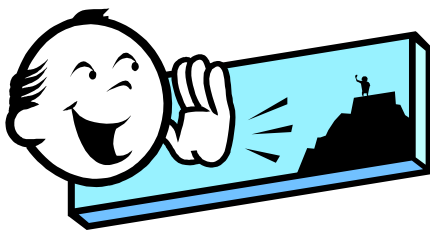
It is tempting to ask at this stage where these pressures are really emanating from, and everyone reading this will have a ready answer, but outside pressure aside there are practices in schools which are unacceptable to adult human beings under any circumstances.

Pat Carlos, LA Executive Member

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Special Local Meetings, Special General Meetings, Special Executive Councils, leaked newspaper reports, the troops on both sides marshalled for debate at the AGM, 'Millenniumgate' has had everything - except a satisfactory conclusion. After a great deal of posturing we have achieved the princely sum of 3.6%, a stay of execution as regards our conditions (but watch this space!) and we await with bated breath the outcome of the McCrone Report. Recent concessions from the Minister will now allow us to have a representative on the committee and we have a written assurance that its findings will not be imposed upon us. The view from the top is that the suspension of the ballot for industrial action is part of a wider strategy but may yet be a tool we shall have to employ. It is also hoped that our new found ability to participate actively in the committee will influence its findings, but we also participated in the Millennium Review and look where that got us!

Still, let us be of good cheer. Here in Aberdeen a recruitment drive has started via Northsound. 'Be a teacher and switch the light on in a child's head'. Would that someone could switch the light on in the heads of anyone who is remotely connected with education! Maybe then we could have a new 3 year plan from the government. Three years of peace, stability and salary increases which reward those already in teaching and encourage prospective students to consider it seriously as a career.



'Education. Education. Education.' is a great principle but if it does not have its foundation based on the reality of the situation in our schools we should recognise it for what it is - nothing more than a great political soundbite. Perhaps the time has come to make our response loud and clear, 'Enough. Enough. Enough.'

Mary Matheson

LA President/Executive Council

We hope that you found this newsletter of use.

We hope to produce one each term and would welcome comments from members about :

- this edition
- what you would like us to include in future issues
- other ways of communicating with members

We would also welcome contributions for inclusion in future issues.

Please contact LA officials if you require more information on any of the issues addressed in this newsletter. We would be pleased to help.

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