



Promoting Partnership  
in Scottish Education

# backchat

SCOTTISH PARENT TEACHER COUNCIL

Issue No. 122, September 2011

## NEW SESSION HERE WE COME!

***Welcome to all new members and welcome back to the old hands!***

The slight lull in the office over the summer because schools are on holiday was replaced by the buzz of Parent Council membership renewals. If your local authority does not pay your membership, then you should have received a renewal notice and – more importantly – you should have returned it by now, because your membership (and membership-linked insurance) has expired. Please take action now to keep your membership – if in any doubt contact the office.

Welcome to parents and carers at Shetland schools – Shetland is the latest local authority to become a group member!

In this issue you'll find information about events, opportunities and advice. You can also read about the latest Parents Voice surveys on Curriculum of Excellence and the new qualifications framework. The message we get is that there is support for the principles but also confusion and concern – read more in Backchat.

You'll also find news about our 63rd Annual Conference in November – Making Sense of the Change. We've planned it to help parents understand the major changes going on – curriculum, assessment, qualifications, teaching, education authority services – and hopefully

get inspired! There's a great line-up of speakers and a real focus on discussion and debate – don't miss it!

Look out too for info on our IT Survey. We want to gather as much information as possible from all over Scotland about how much IT is used in your child's education, what access you have and where the inequalities are. It's certain that IT will feature more and more in our children's education, so help us find out how ready we are for the digital age.

Finally, SPTC is the only independent parents' organisation in Scotland. We provide thousands of parents with help and advice every year. If SPTC was to disappear, there is no-one else doing this work. If you're passionate about education and have some time to spare, please consider becoming a director. Without parents and teachers as directors we couldn't function, so we need you to volunteer! Full nomination details along with conference and AGM info with this issue of Backchat.

Hope you enjoy this issue of Backchat. We are moving to four issues per year, with email updates for members who sign up – so remember to give us your email address!

### *In this issue...*

- *Parents Voice*
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- *GTCS Call to Parents*
- *Could you be a Director?*

### *Keep in touch...*

#### **WEBSITE**

[www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info)

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#### **EMAIL**

[sptc@sptc.info](mailto:sptc@sptc.info)

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#### **TWITTER**

[parents\\_SPTC](https://twitter.com/parents_SPTC)

# Parents voice... **GETTING LOUDER!**

*Over the last few months we've run two Parents Voice surveys (our plan when we started was to run one each month, but the time it takes to analyse the statistics and produce the reports is, let's say, a bit more than we had thought!)*

*So we're really pleased to have produced two reports in quick succession on two very important topics, the new Curriculum and the planned changes to qualifications. While we know the number of participants means the surveys are not statistically robust, they still give us an interesting insight into what parents and carers are thinking.*

## **The CfE survey attracted 101 participants.**

### **Key points that emerged from the survey were:**

- The majority of parents have mixed feelings about CfE
- The greatest concern is negative attitudes and reluctance of teachers to change
- The vast majority see change in their child's school but little change to parental involvement
- There was no consensus on benefits of CfE

The overall impression from the survey is that parents are generally behind the new curriculum but have mixed feelings and concerns about its implementation, particularly in secondary school. It's also clear there is confusion among some.

Probably the most notable issue was the enormous variety of comments about the benefits – there was absolutely no consensus. From our perspective that is a very important gap that needs to be filled if parents are to feel more confident in CfE.

## **The National Qualifications survey attracted 107**

### **respondents. Key points were:**

- 73% are aware changes are planned
- 77% are enthusiastic about a more flexible system
- 78% lack confidence in the new qualifications framework

Once again, this survey showed that parents and carers are generally on-side with the change, but that they have genuine and legitimate concerns which need to be addressed. The risk is that without clear milestones and tangible progress, this goodwill can be lost. The survey also showed that the school is the main source of information and advice for parents, so schools need to be equipped with information which is parent friendly.

Full details of both surveys are on the SPTC website [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info)

Our current survey on that age-old urgent matter in schools – the loos. Are they a happy place or a problem area in your school? They're vital to children's wellbeing so they do become a matter parents are concerned about.

***If you would like to be part of this or future Parents Voice survey – the only qualification is that you have a child at school – then please let us know.***

***We will only send one email a month and you chose whether you respond. We promise not to pass on your contact details to anyone else, and of course we will remove your name from the list if you ask us to. Email [eleanor@sptc.info](mailto:eleanor@sptc.info)***

## **see me**...**see me**

### **...see me Campaign Update**

Scottish Mental Health Week runs from October 10 – 17 and the “see me” campaign is providing free materials to help you fight against the stigma of mental ill-health. “Stall in a Box” is free and includes the latest “see me” promotional materials, a mini wall of support activity and a range of freebies. If you would like to organise a stall for one of your events then email [info@seemescotland.org](mailto:info@seemescotland.org) for more information.

## **LIVE FOR LIFE Music Event**

*The Live for Life Foundation - which supports young people with cancer and Huntington's Disease - is organising a fund raiser. There are lots of bands and a dance troupe taking part at the event to be held on October 1 at the Regal Theatre in Bathgate. Tickets are only £5 and the doors open at 7.30pm For tickets and info contact [anniemack38@hotmail.com](mailto:anniemack38@hotmail.com)*

## **FIGHT AGAINST CYBERBULLYING what works?**

National Anti-Bullying Week 2011 takes place from Monday 14 to Friday 18 November. To mark the occasion respectme and the Scottish Government are launching a competition addressing the theme of Cyberbullying – particularly seeking the views of children and young people.

The competition is open to children and young people aged between 9 and 16 who attend school, out-of-school projects or youth groups. Entries can be sent in to any of the three different categories: Artistic, Creative Writing and Performance and there are prizes of camcorders or i-pods for the winners.

***The deadline for entries is Friday 7 October; if you're interested go to the respectme website:***

***[www.respectme.org](http://www.respectme.org)***

# SPTC CONFERENCE 2011

*Want to understand what's happening to education services?*

*Have questions about the new qualifications?*

*Confused about the curriculum?*

# BE THERE!

## Making Sense of the Change

**Then SPTC's annual conference is a must.**

We've lined up a range of great contributors and loads of time for discussion at this year's Making Sense of the Change event, taking place in Edinburgh on 12 November 2011. David Cameron, one of the architects of the Curriculum for Excellence, will be chairing the day and talking about where we go with the curriculum; Denis Mongon will talk about ways of doing education differently and what part parents can play in the change.

In the afternoon we have three discussion threads: one on reporting, assessment and qualifications; one on Curriculum for Excellence in the secondary sector and senior phase; one on schools and schooling. The discussion groups will be led by experts in their own fields, from various local authorities, and have been planned to give parents, and professionals, space to discuss – and hopefully find some answers to – the big questions we're facing.

There will also be exhibitors and, of course, the chance to meet other parents from all over Scotland.

There's a flyer and a booking form with this issue of Backchat, or download information from the website. We've held prices at 2010 rates, which makes this a great value event – and remember there is a discount for group bookings.

*Hope to see you there!*

## COULD YOU BE A DIRECTOR OF SPTC?

***SPTC is looking for parents, carers and teachers who have the passion and commitment to become a director of SPTC.***

*Behind the three staff members is a board of enthusiastic individuals who take the key decisions about the organisation, the only one in Scotland which provides parents with independent, knowledgeable and parent friendly advice about every aspect of education.*

*It's vital to the future of this unique service that we have a vibrant board of directors who are able to bring their experience to the table and help shape our policies and services.*

*Directors' meetings are held six times a year in Edinburgh and all expenses are paid. Between meetings directors are asked to review reports and papers and make comment, and they can also attend events on behalf of SPTC.*

*If you're motivated to make a difference to education in Scotland, consider becoming an SPTC director. Information is included with this issue of Backchat, or contact the office.*

## IMPORTANT CHANGES TO SPTC MEMBERS' INSURANCE

The membership-linked insurance is one of the major benefits parents groups receive as part of their SPTC membership. The policy is reviewed every year and often changes are put in place. These changes are in the leaflet you receive from us - please make sure you read and understand what this means for your organisation.

This year there has been an important change to Fidelity Guarantee. All cheques from the PTA/PC must already bear two signatures, however because of the increasing use of on-line banking dual authorisation is also required for on-line banking payments or transfers. It is very important that you review your procedures for approving payments – if you have to make a claim on this part of the insurance and the insurers find that you have not followed this stipulation, they will not pay the claim. Please note this applies also to dual signatories – we continue to receive cheques from some PCs which have only one. This means

the insurance company will not meet any claim these members may make on the Fidelity Guarantee.

In addition, there have been changes to the Personal Accident Insurance where the benefit rates for disablement have increased. This part of the insurance policy is for an official or helper who is injured as a result of accident while on PC/PTA business.

The membership-linked insurance is specifically designed for PTAs and Parent Councils, to cover the kinds of activities our members are involved in. A disco, pony rides, bouncy castles, fireworks – almost every type of event is covered. The leaflet giving Insurance Information is sent to each member – please read it carefully and keep it safe.

If you have any questions about these changes, or any part of the membership-linked insurance, please contact the office.

## GTCS CALL TO PARENTS

GTCS - the professional body for teachers in Scotland - is currently preparing to become an independent body. As part of this process, GTCS is keen to receive applications from people who are

not teachers but have an interest in the education of children and young people and can bring their ideas and talent to both Council and Panel meetings. For further information or to download an application pack visit [www.gtcs.org.uk/appointments](http://www.gtcs.org.uk/appointments)

# LOTHIAN PEER EDUCATION PROJECT



Fast Forward is a health and wellbeing charity working predominantly with children and young people in the Lothians. They have just announced the start of their Parent Peer Project and are looking for parents and carers under the age of 30 who would be interested in volunteering and becoming peer educators. The volunteers will receive training in new skills and experience, allowing them to deliver workshops to other parents on speaking confidently about drugs and alcohol to young people. If you would like to find out more contact Ailsa by telephone on 0131 554 4300 or email [ailsa@fastforward.org.uk](mailto:ailsa@fastforward.org.uk)

## SPTC LATEST ON COMMUNICATION WITH MEMBERS

We've been asking members to consider opting for an email version of Backchat and many have done just that – thank you! Like every other organisation we're trying to reduce our carbon footprint by reducing the amount of paper we send out, and also by reducing our spending on things like print, stationery and postage.

So if you still receive a paper copy of Backchat and email would suit you just as well or better, let us know. But rest assured that if you need a paper copy of Backchat, it will always be available to you.

This session you will receive four issues of Backchat plus – if we have your email address – regular e-bulletins in between.

Your school will also receive copies of PTA Magazine, which is produced by our sister organisation in England. PTA Magazine is a full colour, glossy magazine with a lot of content we believe will be of interest to Scottish parent groups. The plan is to include more Scottish content over time – and of course you are encouraged to contribute your own news and views.

The aim overall is to give members the information you need in the best way possible.



## TELL-A-STORY DAY on Friday 28th October

This is a national celebration of storytelling and is the perfect opportunity to get together with your school community and rediscover the pleasure of telling and listening to stories.

You could tell your own tales or encourage others to share local myths and legends, fairy tales, scary Hallowe'en stories or treasured family legends.

Organising a TASD event is easy, entirely free and the staff at the Scottish Storytelling Centre are on hand to help with your planning. On their website you will find tips and advice, free resources and tales to download.

If you register your event on the website, you will receive free posters and stickers but you must do this by Monday 26 September. Go to: <http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk/festival/tasd.asp>

## PARENTS AND CARERS - HAVE YOUR SAY

The General Teaching Council has just launched a consultation on proposed changes to the way it deals with cases of teachers whose competency or conduct is being considered. It's important that parents and carers have their say in this. You can find details of the consultation here: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/independence/consultation-fitness-to-teach.aspx>

SQA (*the Scottish Qualifications Authority*) recently published the unit specifications for the new National 4 and National 5 qualifications. If you would like to comment on these, go to the Have Your Say facility on the SQA website. You can also read a summary of feedback they have received on the development of the new qualifications. **Go to [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)**



## MAKE YOUR KIDS FREE RANGE KIDS

Sustrans, the UK's leading sustainable transport charity, have launched the Free Range Kids Campaign.

Free Range Kids are children and young people who experience freedom outside their front door – confidence to travel independently, play outdoors, explore their local community – because they have the skills, opportunities and support to do so safely.

To find out how you can get involved in their campaign then visit their website where you will find advice, tips and resources for both families and schools.

[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)