



SSTA response to

‘Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education: A Governance Review’

1. Introduction

The SSTA supports the Government’s determination to bring about improvements in Education by ‘closing the attainment gap’ and giving all young people the opportunity to fulfil their potential. The SSTA note that the Government states that ‘Scotland has a good education system, with great schools and teachers’. SSTA would argue for a process of review followed by improvements rather than major structural change. The SSTA believe that structural change only diverts energies and resources away from the main challenge of ‘closing the attainment gap’.

The Government has chosen to use its ‘Governance Review’ as the vehicle to look at the agencies and structures involved in education to ‘empower teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education’.

Unfortunately this review does not include the people and the structures in the school that support teaching and learning. The SSTA believes that the Government needs to place the pupil/teacher relationship at the centre – this relationship and how we best support it is the paramount consideration. Structure is only important insofar as they support and nurture teaching and learning in the pupil/teacher relationship.

The SSTA notes that the consultation omits to provide an appropriate level of detail in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies within the education sector – this mitigates against an informed response. The SSTA is disappointed that the consultation process has been undertaken without prior engagement with stakeholders.

The SSTA response will focus on the pupil/teacher relationship in the secondary school and upon the need to build a support structure that supports teaching and learning.

2. The Pupil in the Classroom

It is a fact that the pupil in the classroom relies on a network of people within the school to enable them to better engage in learning. Sitting alongside the class teacher we have guidance teachers, ASN teachers, and a range of education support staff to support the pupil in the class. In addition to this are the teachers with

posts of responsibility who work with the family and other services as the establishment contact (ultimately the 'named person').

Austerity measures have resulted in cuts in education support staff. The loss of specialist support staff has put additional and avoidable pressure on the classroom teacher. The importance of the work undertaken by these other staff is often not recognised or appropriately valued. There is a need to consider the negative impact that the loss of these staff members has had on 'closing the attainment gap'. There desperately needs to be a pupil support structure that promotes and nurtures meaningful engagement with every pupil in every school.

3. The Teacher in the Classroom

Teachers want to be able to focus on teaching and learning. In secondary schools this is primarily facilitated through subject specialists. However, every teacher in a school is developing materials and strategies for their individual classes through broad general education and national qualifications. This exercise is taking place in most classrooms across Scotland and is duplicating the work of teachers. A system needs to be found to develop these resources and make them available to all teachers.

4. The School Management Structure

There has been a conscious move in many Local Authorities away from principal teachers of subject to a Faculty structure across the school. This has resulted in fewer managers undertaking many more management and administrative tasks at a time when they need to be focussed on leading teaching and learning. It is essential that the support systems provided by the Local Authority are there to remove those tasks that do not require the skills and expertise of leaders of teaching and learning. If there is to be fewer managers in the system then there needs to be a concomitant reduction in the net number of administrative tasks allocated to those managers.

Many functions that dissuade teachers to aspire to Depute and Headteacher positions could be managed more successfully if Local Authorities provided support staff in (and outside) the school to reduce the burden of administration.

5. The Scottish Teacher Retention and Recruitment Crisis

Scotland is facing a deepening crisis in retaining and recruiting teachers and headteachers in its schools. The Scottish Government needs to acknowledge that teachers working conditions and remuneration have failed to keep pace with the rapidly changing education environment. Schools and teachers needs to adapt to meet the demands of a modern education system.

As a consequence teaching is increasingly perceived as an unattractive profession with an impossible workload demand, restricted career path and an uncompetitive salary scale. Addressing the structure of schools and its workforce are essential elements in the Scottish Government challenge to 'close the attainment gap'.

The difficulties in recruiting headteachers reflects the unmanageability of the post and the reluctance from experienced depute headteachers who have identified the scale of the problem and refused to be enticed by the post.

6. The School

The education system must focus all possible changes upon enhancing the interaction between the teacher and the pupil. Every child needs to see education as the way forward, and teachers need to lead and be given the support in meeting the needs of the young people in their schools.

The prospect of further delegation of responsibilities and funding to headteachers in schools will only worsen the headteacher recruitment crisis. Headteachers want to focus on leading learning and do not need to be forced into spending more time on bureaucracy and administration. Headteachers already have sufficient powers to identify measures including staffing to bring about improvements. The existing Devolved School Management Guidance and Toolkit allows for a significant degree of devolved decision making to a school level. In many instances Local authorities, due to financial pressures, have delegated many functions to schools that would be more appropriately and more efficiently undertaken away from the school.

Many Headteachers, at present, are reluctant to make creative decisions due to external pressures and the fear of failure. Headteachers know their pupils and their communities and need to be encouraged and supported to make the right decisions for the young people in their charge.

Schools must see themselves as part of a collegiate structure with other schools, colleges and the Local Authority and see themselves as part of a joint network with the sole purpose of raising attainment of all young people in the area, not just those within the individual school.

7. Local Authorities

The Local Authority is the management arm of the education system. It is in the interest of the community that all young people reach their full potential. As the elected representative of the community the Local Authority is the body that needs to play its role in supporting the learning taking place in schools, and where necessary seek improvement. It is essential that local schools feel part of the community. The direction of the school should be determined by the community that is able to see the long term plan and benefits. To rely upon the parents of the children in the school to determine the direction of travel will only satisfy whilst their children attend the school with little regard for the future needs of the community.

The Local Authority should be the focus for parents, colleges, universities and local employers to better support efforts to raise attainment of all young people. Schools alone are unable to see the complete picture and therefore must work in partnership with Local Authorities to meet the needs of all young people.

The major task should be how to encourage the community, including parents, to support the learning rather than creating another level of administration and accountability for the school.

The Local Authorities have the ability to bring together all local services to support pupils and their families in their journey through school. The Local Authority should play an important part in removing burdens and obstacles from teachers and headteachers and allow them to exert all their energies on learning.

As there is a growing recruitment crisis for head teacher and deputy posts, further devolving of powers to headteachers is another burden on those professionals and will merely exacerbate this situation. In some respect, this step would be regarded as adding to bureaucracy, rather than improving education outcomes for children and young people. The priority should be to identify those tasks that can be taken away from teachers and headteachers and undertaken more efficiently by those more suitable and qualified within the Local Authority.

Local Authorities should be bringing schools together by building upon the natural school clusters. This includes primary, secondary and colleges as well as schools within the same sector and across Local Authority boundaries with similar challenges. The Local Authority should be managing all education staff across the Authority building capacity and ensuring all young people in every school have access to the best experienced teachers and support systems.

Creating new education regions would just create more bureaucracy. This would undermine the role of the Local Authority by putting additional unwanted pressure, responsibility and bureaucracy on teachers and headteachers in schools.

Local Authorities have an important role in retaining, recruiting and managing all education staff. Decentralising these functions to the schools just adds more bureaucracy and takes the focus away from teaching and learning. Local authorities need to collaborate across Authority boundaries to ensure there are a sufficient number of teachers, headteachers and supply teachers in our schools.

The Local Authority needs to identify and create opportunities for all teachers to reach their full potential whether in the classroom or in management positions in schools. Good examples of collaboration would be a national supply teacher register, a joint recruitment strategy, developing leadership programmes, and a national professional development network for all education staff.

8. Education Scotland

Education Scotland should be the implementation arm of the Scottish Government. Education Scotland should be the driving force for curriculum development and excellence. It should see itself as responsible and accountable for the delivery of the curriculum in every school. Education Scotland should not be independent of the schools and Local Authorities but working in partnership with and responsible for the education in our schools.

Secondary teachers have been set adrift in the past number of years in developing curriculum materials. This has led to teachers in every school developing their own materials and strategies for their individual classes through broad general education and national qualifications. This has just added to the workload of teachers by duplicating the work of the teachers. Secondary teachers would prefer Education Scotland to create national subject groups developing materials for all teachers that could be adapted to meet the needs of the young people they teach. This would allow teachers to focus on teaching and learning rather than 'reinventing the wheel' without adequate time resource in schools.

Education Scotland together with Local Authorities should be responsible for developing the education workforce by developing pathways for every teacher through professional development and opportunities to gain knowledge, understanding and experience, thereby identifying, supporting and encouraging leaders of education in the future.

It should be the responsibility and duty of Education Scotland and the Local Authorities to produce a lasting and self-perpetuating legacy for the future.

The Inspectorate function needs to be separate from Education Scotland to allow all bodies to be subject to challenge. The SSTA would recommend that the Inspectorate focus its efforts upon Local Authorities. The Local Authorities should be the driving force for excellence in schools for all young people. The Inspectorate should seek naturally occurring evidence in the schools to support the work of the Local Authorities.

Local Authorities should be responsible for managing, challenging, supporting and developing schools. The Inspectorate focus on individual schools has created barriers to collaboration across schools and the sharing experiences and expertise that are to the detriment of the system.

9. Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL)

The Local Authority, as the employer, should have the responsibility to identify and create opportunities for all teachers to reach their full potential whether in the classroom or in management positions in schools. Thereby, identifying, supporting and encouraging leaders of education in the future.

The SSTA believes the function of SCEL should not be independent of, but be part of Education Scotland and be a normal part of the partnership with Local Authorities in developing the full potential of the education workforce.

10. General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)

SSTA fully supports the GTCS in maintaining a register of teachers, and setting the professional standards of teachers in Scotland. The GTCS plays an important role in accrediting programmes leading to the award of GTCS standards and initial teacher education. This should include programmes such as 'Into Headship' and the 'signing-off' of professional update.

However, SSTA sees a conflict in being responsible for the Student Placement System and Teacher Induction Programme as the GTCS moves away from its regulatory function and begins to fulfil the role of the employer. The Local Authority accommodates the Student Placement System and should be the obvious body to organise, with the help of Education Scotland, the Teacher Induction Programme. The involvement of GTCS in these processes is an additional and unnecessary layer in the recruitment and retention of teachers.

11. Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

The SSTA supports the SQA's two main roles of accreditation and the awarding qualifications in Scotland. SSTA sees the SQA as an independent and valuable body in the heart of Scottish education.

The SQA is not the employer of teachers, but has been allowed to place heavy demands upon teachers and schools that have unbalanced the school system. The development of the Curriculum for Excellence has changed how schools operate and has the potential to increase the professionalism of teaching. However, the SQA through the new regime of National Qualifications has undermined teacher professional judgement, skewed the curriculum and placed impossible burdens on pupils, teachers and schools.

An unintended conflict has developed between the custodians of the Curriculum (Education Scotland) and the custodians of the Qualifications (SQA). This adversely impacts on pupils, teachers and schools. The Curriculum for Excellence is in danger of being if the system remains unchecked. Education Scotland should work with Local Authorities and schools to deliver a wide and balanced curriculum with the SQA focussing upon the accreditation and award qualifications of the curriculum.

12. Fair Funding

The Government wishes to establish a fair and transparent needs-based funding formula for schools and make sure that more money goes direct to headteachers. This issue is a constant headache as a formula based on Free School Meals alone cannot guarantee that the money goes where it's needed. It would be far better to trust the judgement of the teachers, the professionals in the classrooms, to identify the need of every individual young person. The challenge would be for Government to meet this need with the appropriate resource.