

## SSTA meeting with Deputy First Minister

### **SSTA meeting with Deputy First Minister**

The SSTA met John Swinney, Deputy First Minister (DFM) on 12 June and discussed a number of the Association's motions from our Annual Congress in May. The SSTA delegation was led by John Guidi (Vice-President), Catherine Nicol (Convenor Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee) and Seamus Searson (General Secretary). The Vice-President thanked the Minister for attending the SSTA Congress and his interesting address. The following issues were discussed:

#### **Pay and Career Structure**

The SSTA delegation reinforced the need for teacher salaries to be competitive in order to retain teachers and maintain the high education standards in Scottish schools. The intention of the current SNCT pay claim is a restorative pay claim in the step to achieving an appropriate £43,000 for teachers (OECD average) at the top of the main grade. The SSTA welcomed the decision to establish a 'Career Pathway Review Group' with an independent chair under the auspices of the SNCT. There was a need to build the teacher workforce, re-introduce rewards for subject specialism and increase opportunities to gain experience to progress through the management structure. There was also a need to ensure members of Senior Management Teams are given time away from classes to undertake management duties and support teacher colleagues in classes.

The lack of recognition of guidance and pupil support has to be an important element of the career pathway discussions in supporting pupils in particular in the 15 -24 Learner Journey. This would also require changes in the job-sizing toolkit that has not kept pace with the changing demands placed upon teachers. An essential component of any career pathway discussions is the importance of the teacher in the classroom. There was also a need to address Teacher Health and Well-Being by reducing teacher workload and SSTA asked for detailed research in to why teachers are leaving the profession.

#### **National Qualifications**

The recent SSTA survey on the National 5 changes had reinforced the view that the changes had not reduced workload or stress on the part of teachers and pupils. The large number of teachers required by their schools to continue to deliver unnecessary units was highlighted. The units were being carried out to assist schools tracking and monitoring exercises and fear of pupils not achieving a qualification. The SSTA urged again for teacher professional judgement to be respected to remove excessive workload and intensive accountability. The DFM was adamant his decision to remove the units was to reduce teacher and pupil workload. He also encouraged teachers to make professional decisions and not undertake unnecessary units.

#### **Workload**

The SSTA focussed on the continuously increasing teacher workload despite the best efforts of the Minister since his appointment in May 2016. The late changes to National 5 without time set aside to make the changes, the upcoming changes to Highers and the Pupil Equity Fund accountability processes had all increased teacher workload. There was still a need to address teacher workload and the need for direction to schools from the highest levels.

**Additional Support Needs (ASN) and Poor Behaviour**

The SSTA stated its support for Inclusion but the lack of funding, the cuts in support staff and ASN teachers redirected to other duties seriously undermines any attempts of pupil inclusion. The Minister was urged to conduct a review of ASN and pupil support provision. The reduction of staff is leading to more disillusioned young people whose needs are not being met and consequently causing problems in schools.

The SSTA survey on reporting violent incidents highlighted the under reporting of incidents that was hiding the true picture of conditions in schools. The frustration of teachers in not getting support when dealing with poor behaviour was an important factor in teachers looking to careers outside of teaching. It was necessary that all incidents are recorded and taken seriously to identify the scale of the problem in schools.

The mental health of pupils and the lack of support was discussed. The need to provide training for all teachers and specialist support would be necessary to meet the needs of the pupils and it couldn't be added to teacher workload.

**Education Bill (teacher led – voice of the teacher)**

The Minister confirmed that he intended to present an Education Bill before the end of June but he had taken account of the responses given during the consultation period. He was going to pursue increased responsibilities for Headteachers in conjunction with issues raised by local authorities. The SSTA supported the Minister's intention for a teacher led education system but the SSTA delegates highlighted the unfortunate lack of teachers voice on the Scottish Education Council and Regional Improvement Collaboratives. The SSTA reinforced the message that the voice of the teacher should be heard through the recognised teacher unions as they are major partners in the education system.