



# Backchat

**June 2010**

**Issue 115**

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As we career towards the summer holidays, it's all go for PTAs and Parent Councils all over the country. Lots of you out there are organising events and preparing a send-off for your P7s and senior high school pupils. All in all, an exciting and busy time.

We've been busy here, too, with lots of enquiries from members, work on the big policy issues, organising the conference and preparing for Parent Council membership renewals.

**Along with the mailing of Backchat, Parent Council members not insured through their local authority have received their renewal notice. Your membership/ insurance cover ends on 31 July so please deal with the paperwork promptly!**

We have been successful in limiting the membership fee increase to just £1 across the board, which we believe represents great value for money.

We're also working on a new brand for SPTC and a new website, with even more information and support for parent groups. As well as making it easier to navigate and find the information you want, we plan to add a member's area to the site, with more detailed information on insurance and other services, plus templates for newsletters and news releases and a forum for member's news.

If you have any suggestions for what you would like to see on the site, please get in touch. We'll be spending a lot of time on that over the summer months and hope to launch it all towards the end of the year.

In this issue we have lots of news from members, a special offer for SPTC members from Leckie & Leckie publishers, and much more.

Have a great summer!

## Member offer from Leckie & Leckie

Educational publisher Leckie & Leckie is offering SPTC members a great deal on its revision and classroom resources for Scottish secondary schools. Members can claim a 20% discount off any orders placed till the end of August. In response to the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, Leckie & Leckie has developed a brand new range called **Active Learning which address** the new curriculum. Books are available for Third Level Business, Maths and English with Science, History, Home Economics and Physical Education.

The company has also launched its **Practice Papers for SQA Exams**. These are brand new practice exam papers with fully-worked answers, topic indexes, marking schemes, revision advice and top tips. PDF versions for whiteboard use are also available. For more information on Leckie & Leckie resources visit the website [www.leckieandleckie.co.uk](http://www.leckieandleckie.co.uk). You can sign up for their monthly enewsletter which includes special offers, information on new books and a £100 revision giveaway every month.

SPTC members can use promotional code LLW023 to claim 20% discount when placing orders at [www.leckieandleckie.co.uk](http://www.leckieandleckie.co.uk) or by calling Customer Services team on 0870 460 7662 or by emailing [leckieandleckie@harpercollins.co.uk](mailto:leckieandleckie@harpercollins.co.uk)

## Little carbon footprints are getting bigger and bigger...

Despite many parents groups setting up walking buses and many campaigns to encourage children to walk or use other environmentally friendly methods of getting to schools, it seems that more youngsters than ever arrive at school in a car.

This is according to the country's largest-ever pupil transport survey which showed that in 2009 7,500 fewer children travelled to school using "active" means. A spokesperson from Sustrans, the UK's leading sustainable transport charity which published the Hands Up survey of 415,000 Scottish pupils, commented that the underlying trend is not good and that Scotland still has one of the poorest records in the world on travel to school.

Let us know what you think and what you are doing to promote active ways of getting to school or if you drive your child to school, what are the reasons. If you would like to find out more about the Hands Up survey, go to the Sustrans website on: [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

### Child protection – getting the balance right

The SPTC conference on 6 November is taking shape, with speakers and workshop leaders now starting to be booked. We'll be looking at the implications of the new Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act for parent's groups, and making an effort to strike a balance between protecting children and making their lives risk-free and sterile.

**Full details will be on the website soon and in the next issue of Backchat but put 6 November in your diary!**

### Scottish Child Law Centre

The SCLC has just launched a new leaflet "A Quick Guide to Parental Rights & Responsibilities". The SCLC aims to promote the understanding of Scottish Child Law through their advice line, email and text services; it has leaflets on various topics of child law and a comprehensive training programme. For more information go to their website on: [www.sclc.org.uk](http://www.sclc.org.uk) or phone: 0131 667 6333

### Help us Monkey Around!

Do you have views about how our education system is organised and run, about how schools work? Then sign up NOW for Parents Voice, our occasional email Survey Monkey. We've just launched our second Parents' Voice survey and we need interested parents to tell us what they think!

**Don't delay – join up TODAY!**

## NEWS FROM YOU

*If you have any projects or work that you would like to tell other parents about then let us know. Not only will we try to feature it in Backchat but it will also appear on our News From You section on the website. If you would like more information from any of these Parent Councils contact the office and we will pass your request on.*

### KEMNAY PRIMARY PARENT COUNCIL, ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

The PTA is part of the Parent Council but remains fairly independent although they do have a PTA member on the PC Committee. They recently organised a Quiz Night with bar supper at the local pub and are now busy organising their Summer Fair which is to have an "Eco" theme.

Our Parent Council is working on improving the transition from primary to secondary school and want to get more parental input and feedback into the process. We have set up a meeting with the Kemnay Academy Parent Council and have invited other cluster primary schools. As part of the transition work, we are also trying to obtain more feedback on Curriculum for Excellence from parents, particularly in the upper stages.

As the school is increasing its focus on numeracy, our Annual Parent Council Open Night at the beginning of the next term will have a numeracy theme. This will involve a presentation by the pupils to make sure parents will attend and there's going to be a "meet the teacher" session during the interval. It will also be an opportunity for parents to find out how they can actively support the school by volunteering for such things as the PTA, the "Garden Gang", the Eco Group and Library duty.

The parents at Kemnay are always trying to improve the school's carbon footprint and the fabric of the school by lobbying the local council for better draught-proofing and toilet facilities for the school annexe. Currently, the children have to leave the annexe, go across the playground and into the main building if they need the loo which is not only a bit of a trek - especially in winter - but is disruptive, can encourage "wandering off", and means that children in the annexe tend not to stay hydrated as going to the loo is such a hassle. This doesn't seem to be high on the council's list but the Parent Council are continuing to question that decision.

We are hoping to alleviate the problem of parking at the school gates by setting up a "walking bus" starting from the local car park.

Our current project is to set up a "Welcome Group" for families who join the school mid-term. The aim will be to let the new family put a name to at least one parent in the playground at the start and end of each school day. As we try to have a representative from each class on our Parent Council, we are thinking of inviting the new family out for a coffee before or soon after their child starts school to chat about the school and generally make them feel welcome.

We are currently busy putting our bird boxes back up in the garden along with the webcam to try and catch the birds nesting.

### CERES PRIMARY PARENT COUNCIL, FIFE COUNCIL

During the past few years we have been very active in fundraising and raised £15,000 for a Trim Trail and its installation. We raised this by applying for grants from the National Lottery and Fife Council and also through smaller initiatives – a P4 bring and buy sale, one parent ran in the Edinburgh half-marathon and one of our families did a sponsored swim. The Trim Trail was installed at the beginning of May and is proving extremely popular, not only at break times but also before and after school. Not only does it enhance playground activities but its all-weather surface extends the useable area of our small playground. The pupils are very proud of their "new" playground as they were not only involved in the design of the Trim Trail but also in the choice of equipment.

Whilst fundraising and organising social events are core elements of what we do as a Parent Council, we have also devoted a great deal of time and effort to the campaign to get a new extension to our school. Although we are a medium-sized village school in terms of pupil numbers, in terms of physical accommodation we are bursting at the seams! After a long campaign and a number of setbacks we succeeded in winning approval from Fife Council for a two-storey extension to the school and we were delighted when planning permission was granted

earlier this month. Full steam ahead now and we are all looking forward to a much improved school site in the next twelve months.

### **WHITHORN PRIMARY PARENT COUNCIL, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY COUNCIL**

We have been promoting our activities via a recently created Facebook page and have found that by using this medium we are reaching 57 out of the 86 families at our school. The page has generated lots of feedback. In order to make communication as cost effective as possible we will be using Skype which is free to use and free to download from the Internet.

We have also secured a room within the school which will be fully equipped with a PC, printer, etc and will be used to create a welcome area for parents to come during school hours to discuss any issues they may have.

#### **Engage for Education**

The Government has just launched a new website for everyone with an interest in Scottish education. The Engage for Education website at [www.engageforeducation.org](http://www.engageforeducation.org) promises to give parents, teachers, pupils and others an opportunity to influence government policy by providing feedback on key issues in education.

The process will be two-way as participants will receive replies from officials including direct input from Education Ministers. There will also be workshops on hot education topics which will help facilitate discussions and encourage feedback. The initial workshops will focus on such things as Curriculum for Excellence and the support teachers need; how homework can be both effective and enjoyable; and attitudes towards Modern Languages.

#### **Commissioner to have a *RIGHT blether* with Scotland's children and young people**

A *RIGHT blether* is a national consultation led by Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, to make sure children and young people's opinions are heard and acted upon when it comes to improving and safeguarding the quality of their lives.

In November, children and young people will get the opportunity to vote on the issues that most affect them. The results will inform the Commissioner's work, establish priorities and lead to real change. And because results will be analysed by local authority area, specific local change will be possible.

For a *RIGHT blether* to reach as many young people in Scotland as possible, the Commissioner needs help.

- **PARTICIPATE** *Could you run rights workshops for children and young people? Or could you encourage your school to run them?*
- **CREATE** *Could you help children or young people tell the Commissioner about some of the brilliant things that are going on in Scotland?*
- **MEET** *Could your school welcome the Commissioner's tour for a day?*
- **VOTE** *Could your school become an accredited voting centre in November?*
- **CELEBRATE** *Could you organise a party to celebrate the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?*

Every school in Scotland has been sent a copy of the Rights Resource Pack and an invitation to get involved. Please speak to your head teacher to encourage them to sign up. It's a great opportunity for children and young people to have their views heard and opinions acted upon. To find out more and to access FREE blether resources please go to [www.arightblether.co.uk](http://www.arightblether.co.uk)

## HMIe inspection system scrutinised – update

Following our article in *Backchat 113* a parent from East Ayrshire emailed us in praise of the Scottish inspection system. She said:

*“I feel that I can look at this from both sides, as a parent and as an ex-inspector. Before I had my children I worked in England and was an inspector of work-based training. I was also a Curriculum Leader in a Further Education college and experienced the inspection process myself! I was also involved as a parent in my children’s school inspection last year.*

*I understand the pressures that inspection brings, however I do feel that it should not be a process to be feared as the aim is to maintain and improve the quality of education.*

*In my experience inspectors are pleasant and are prepared to report all the good practice as well as finding any problems which can then be addressed. I do believe that a school/college/training provider who is providing a good service has nothing to fear from inspection and those who are not up to standard should be assisted and given the opportunity to address the issues that arise during inspection.*

*I also believe that a central system of inspection (such as HMIe) maintains a better standard of quality as devolving the responsibility local authorities would inevitably result in differences both in approach and also standards.”*

For more information on the role of parents in the inspection process, you can download our leaflet *When School Inspectors Come to Visit* at [www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info) or request a paper copy from the office. We’ve added info about the RIF report for schools, which parents can also access.

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