

FROM THE EDITOR

As this issue of *Scottish Educational Review* goes to press, we are approaching the first anniversary of the establishment of full democratic accountability for educational affairs in the Scottish Parliament. The past twelve months have been a time of great opportunity for education in Scotland. However, despite education being firmly fixed at the top of the political agenda both in Edinburgh and in Westminster, it is disappointing that the repeal of Clause 28 has so comprehensively dominated the headlines while so many genuinely important educational issues have been overlooked. Clause 28 in the Conservative Government's Local Government Act of 1988 introduced an additional section (2A) into the part of the previous Act which dealt with the prohibition of political publicity. Specifically in relation to education, Section 2A prohibits local authorities from promoting "the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship". Precisely what is meant by a "pretended family relationship" remains somewhat obscure and it is hardly surprising that few commentators and even fewer opponents of repeal ever refer to the precise wording of Section 2A. This piece of legislation is discriminatory and a manifestation of the kind of intolerance which should have no place in a civilised society. The Scottish Executive has quite rightly sought to remove it from the statute book. However, under incessant pressure, the resolve of the Executive has been shaken and concessions have been made on legally enforceable guidance to schools on the conduct of sex education.

Parental neglect of children always struggles for attention in the public eye, so it was not surprising that this issue was unable to compete with publicity from the "Keep the Clause" campaign. Recent convictions and 5-year prison sentences for the parents of a 5 year-old child who was kept in a plaster cast for 10 months causing her permanent disfigurement, passed with relatively little comment in the media. There were a few brief expressions of moral outrage in the press, and some genuine attempts in the broadcast media to pose questions about the appropriateness of jail rather than support for parents who neglect their children. The real question is why society has tended to neglect child neglect as an issue. The sad and unpalatable truth is that most harm caused to children is perpetrated within their own families and by their own parents. Neglect is very rarely discussed, partly because it may be less obvious than other forms of abuse, but also because it is uncomfortable to be confronted by the possibility that we have as a society tacitly come to tolerate what evidence suggests is an all-too-commonplace occurrence. In addition to compassionate vigilance on behalf of children by teachers, the more constructive response of the education system to child protection in the longer term may be to deal more effectively and sensitively with "parenting" as part of the curriculum. However, in any enhanced curriculum for personal and social education there is surely no place for legislative intolerance or discrimination against individuals on the basis of their sexuality.

Meanwhile, as documented in Gari Donn's Parliamentary report for this issue of *SER*, the Scottish Parliament has been progressing the Standards in Scottish Schools, etc. Bill. The new legislation, following a period of intensive consultation, contains many significant measures. Particularly significant is the requirement on all schools to give pupils the opportunity to express their views on policy matters. This is a welcome step since it reflects Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK government almost a decade ago. Article 12 asserts children's right to express their views on all matters affecting them and to have their views listened to. The new Bill endorses existing good practice in many

schools where effective pupil councils have already been set up. The increasing involvement of children and young people in the decision making processes of education is an important component of education for citizenship, another area currently undergoing national review and development. In this issue of *SER*, Jill Duffield and Julie Allan take up the theme of citizenship in their analysis of secondary school pupils' perceptions of a local authority strategy for raising achievement.

A central theme in current educational policy and the core of the current Education Bill itself is the aim of improving standards in schools. One of the most prominent strategies being advocated and funded by the Scottish Executive with this aim in mind is the Early Intervention Programme (EIP). Anne Pirrie and Helen Fraser, who are involved in the evaluation of EIP, provide in their article an allegorical warning against expectations that national prescriptions can be provided on the teaching of literacy and numeracy. With so much importance being attached to educational standards, the education system has developed an acute need for sound measures or "performance indicators". Bob Sparkes strongly attacked the credibility of "Value Added" measures in his article in Volume 31.1 of *SER*. In a companion article in the current issue he provides a carefully constructed statistical critique of the "Relative Rating", one of the other indicators advocated by the Scottish Executive as a measure of the performance of school subject departments.

What is the distinctive "Scottish Dimension" in education is a question which Carol Campbell comprehensively addresses in her qualitative analysis of the development of school-based management. Christine Teelken provides a further comparison of the Scottish and English educational systems in her timely analysis of market forces in education. Martin Cloonan and Roy Canning examine issues surrounding completion rates for Scottish Vocational Qualification courses and draw attention to the need for much more thorough national monitoring and evaluation. Finally Paula Cowan and Henry Maitles explore attitudes towards teaching the Holocaust in a small sample of primary schools.

Volume 32, Number 1 of *Scottish Educational Review* represents but a small sample of research and scholarship in the field of education in Scotland. The range of issues and the rigour with which they are addressed reflect the kind of healthy diversity and commitment to high academic standards which should reassure those with a genuine concern for Scottish education. However, this issue of the journal appears at a time when Ministers have seriously questioned the general quality of Scottish educational research in a number of public statements. On behalf of the editorial team, and with quiet confidence, I commend the work of the contributors to all those who are interested in education in Scotland and elsewhere. It is also appropriate in closing to thank the large number of anonymous referees whose role is so vital in maintaining the academic quality of *SER*.

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