

Glenn Rodger
Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
Scottish Borders Council
Newtown St Boswells
TD6 0SA

Dear Sir,

I write on behalf of the parent body at St Ronan's Primary School regarding the proposals for the asymmetric week. Many parents will have attended the public meeting and have completed the council web consultation and we thank you for providing this opportunity to share information and gather our opinions.

As parents we wish to make clear that we do not support any reduction in the education budget, and are concerned that accepting a move to asymmetry may be seen as such. Whilst we recognise that the economic climate requires efficiency within all services we are of the opinion that the quality of education provided to our children must be a national priority, as the success of this is the key to the futures of our children and the future of Scotland. We consider that any council cost saving should be sourced from other areas outside education.

The benefits of asymmetry and the change in curriculum within secondary schools illustrates the potential to make education more efficient. The potential to improve professional development of teachers and inter school communication is also recognised. Many parents support the argument for the change in secondary schools, the opinion regarding benefit to primary school children is more divided. The universal response amongst parents is that any change must not compromise the standard of education provided to the children.

Education continues to evolve, and as parents the justification for budget reduction is difficult to appreciate in the context of early years investment, GIRFEC, and initiatives including free school lunches for the P1- P3, increased physical education requirement, and the introduction/ increase of modern language provision to primary schools. This is all progressing at the same time as significant rationalisation of the management structure for education at council level. The pressures upon our teaching staff and management teams to deliver this packed and expanding curriculum are considerable, and arguably may be becoming untenable when considering further budget reduction. We request that our elected members lobby central government to maintain and potentially increase spending on education to meet the demands being placed upon it. Additional initiatives to enhance education must *not* come at the cost of existing education provision.

With regard to asymmetry the views of the parent body are varied and this reflects the particular needs of children of varying ages, and also the personal situation of families. As stated, the most important factor for parents is that the children's education is not compromised. Many parents feel they can manage the changes necessitated by a move to asymmetry, based upon their own circumstances, but also in anticipation of the short day being a Friday and with the confidence that our school and staff will make the change work for the children.

Whilst parents may be able to accommodate change, this implies acceptance of change rather than a desire to alter current arrangements. A potential benefit may be that new nursery hours align better with asymmetry, however the issue of nursery still being on when siblings are on a half day is likely to present attendance issues, and must also be considered together with asymmetry.

This illustrates the myriad of simultaneous change within education, and the difficulty in appreciating the full picture and significance of all the proposals. Whilst the various proposed changes will not affect all parents equally, there is need to acknowledge that for a significant number of parents accommodating all these changes will be difficult. This begs the question of how realistic the proposed timescale for change is, would August 2015, or even January 2015 be more reasonable?

A significant number of parents have concerns about local childcare provision. Historically Innerleithen has a finite number of childminders. We have no private nursery provision and only one after school club. Whilst we would anticipate potential expansion of services to fulfil this gap in provision, there is little certainty that this will be functional by August. Peebles has sports facilities, however any increased service provision there would not be accessible to many of our children. The lack of accessibility would be due to many different logistics, more than just cost or transport. Many parents work outside Innerleithen, and for those employed in Lothian many employers are already providing flexible working hours for Lothian parents. There is a concern that negotiating for changes to working hours to accommodate asymmetry may not be possible.

For the children there is concern that the school day may be too long for the younger children. I am also aware that the Peebles High School response has raised this issue for the high school children who travel by bus, and the issues are equally valid for our children who travel by bus. The issue of meal provision on the short day has also been raised and the concerns with this are the same for us. The timing of any meal break on the half day requires to be addressed as the children will require opportunity to eat.

The provision of extracurricular sports and activities may also be adversely affected by the move to asymmetry. Such activities are often run by staff and volunteers and are enjoyed by many children and this 'addition' to the curriculum adds greatly to the quality of education. The opportunity to participate and enjoy these activities must be maintained and any change in timetables and school days must acknowledge the importance of these activities. This too has been raised in the high school response.

I am aware that Lothian has had asymmetry for a number of years. They have made asymmetry work, and I assume have dealt with similar concerns to the ones we raise. I hope that the council have consulted and used the experiences of neighbouring councils to inform their plans. We appreciate your consideration of the concerns of parents and ask for council support to successfully address these issues in order to minimise any negative impact of these changes on education and families.

Yours Faithfully,

Vivienne Leckie, Parent Council Chair, St Ronan's Primary School, Innerleithen.