

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill - informal session with teachers

Monday 9 December 2024

Note of discussion

Committee member attendees

Douglas Ross MSP (Convener)
Jackie Dunbar MSP (Deputy Convener)
Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP
Ross Greer MSP
John Mason MSP

Discussion on Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill with teachers.

The Committee spoke with teachers from a range of primary, secondary and special schools on the Bill. The session was organised by EIS at the request of the Committee. The following summary is intended to provide an overview of the main themes that emerged from those discussions.

General views on the Bill and the suggestion that local authorities and schools would have to offer residential outdoor education to every pupil?

- Teachers said that having an obligation on them to attend residential trips would be a significant change to their terms and conditions which would need proposed amendments to the SNCT Handbook to go to the SCNT tripartite body for agreement.

- One teacher said they had a 'heavy heart' in relation to the Bill as it has good intentions however there were too many unknowns on how it would work in practice and it is not clear how teachers would cope with increased demands.
- Concerns were raised that teacher/pupil ratio numbers for out-of-school activities are currently 1 to 10 for mainstream classes and if the Bill became law, greater numbers of staff would be required to support additional support needs and behaviour of concern.
- Teachers said residential trips tended to be staffed by younger staff members with no parental or caring responsibilities or temporary staff who felt they would be more likely to gain a permanent contract, as well as those looking for career advancement- which raised equality issues.
- One teacher said the majority of primary school teachers are female, many with primary caring/parental responsibilities, and expressed concern regarding making it a requirement to attend a week-long residential trip.
- Teachers talked about increased violence against staff - which would have an impact on any requirement to offer residential trips to every pupil. This was challenging in a school setting where support is on-hand, but outwith school less support would be available.
- Teachers highlighted the difficulties in getting cover for a Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher when they are needed to attend a residential trip.
- One teacher highlighted the closure of many local authority outdoor centres and said the costs would be

prohibitive if private centres would have to be used in order to fulfil the obligations of the Bill.

- One teacher raised the practicalities of composite classes where one half of the class attends a residential and the impact on teachers' workload planning for both classes (i.e. those attending as well as those not attending the trip). This created additional cover implications for primary schools in terms of teaching staff and pupil support assistants who worked with more than one child.
- One teacher gave the example of where teachers willingly volunteer to support extra-curricular sports and music activities however said that if they were mandated to participate in residential outdoor learning, that this would change the nature of the relationship and potentially impact wider extra-curricular activities.
- One teacher said the Bill needed to be considered as part of the wider outdoor learning policy as set out in the Curriculum for Excellence and spoke of the cluttered curriculum where often well-intentioned national priorities are added and nothing else removed which created overload in schools.
- Teachers said that other forms of outdoor learning other than residential trips can be useful however they too have implications for staffing levels and it was felt that they were not as beneficial as residential trips. Some, but not all, schools had opportunities for outdoor learning on their doorstep.
- It was highlighted that, if the Bill were to become law, the timescale for renegotiating terms and conditions at SNCT could be lengthy. One teacher said any attempts to circumvent SNCT negotiations via legislation would be viewed seriously by EIS.

Sustainability of the current model for residential trips

- Teachers said the current model is reliant on volunteers and would continue to work so long as there are teachers volunteering to attend residential trips.
- One teacher said that there is no involvement from the SNCT in relation to residential trips because there is no contractual requirement for teachers to attend and they therefore have a choice whether or not to attend.
- Teachers raised the cost of the school day and said it is becoming increasingly more difficult to organise residential trips for pupils living in high deprivation areas. There were numerous hidden costs attached for families.

Why teachers volunteer to support residential outdoor education and the impacts pupils and teachers

- Teachers said the benefits from residential trips are long lasting and often result in improved pupil behaviour in the long term.
- Teachers said that residential trips help build trust between teachers and pupils which is extremely useful when returning to the classroom.
- One teacher explained that teachers generally want to be with their class on a residential trip and it was important in building relationships.
- Teachers said residential trips can be liberating for pupils particularly when they see themselves succeed.
- Teachers found residential trips a useful and enjoyable learning experience for teachers, as well as for pupils.

- One teacher said it was great for teachers to see their pupils outwith the school setting and to witness pupils achieving in various activities.
- Teachers said that on returning from a residential trip, pupils were often more resilient and able to persevere in difficult situations.
- Residential trips provided areas of reference for teachers to go back to when dealing with difficult situations with pupils.
- One teacher said GIRFEC is a big driver for going on residential trips.

Pupils with Additional Support Needs

- Teachers highlighted the need for additional staff numbers to support the increasing number of pupils with ASN on residential trips.
- It was highlighted that pupil support assistants are also used in addition to classroom teachers to help support pupils with ASN on residential trips.
- Teachers spoke of the different approaches to residential trips for pupils with ASN. Some specialist centre staff took the lead on organising the trip and providing support, particularly in relation to pupils with complex needs. There were other occasions where teachers provided much of the support and sometimes felt unqualified to do this.
- Concern was raised regarding staffing levels and being unable to support pupils with specific ASN and one teacher spoke of occasions where pupils with ASN came

to the trip but could not stay overnight as there was insufficient support available to allow them to stay.

- One teacher highlighted that extra staff are also required for planning purposes where some pupils with ASN who are not coping may have to be taken back to school.
- Teachers said consideration has to be given to the mental health and wellbeing of some pupils with ASN and how to best support those pupils on residential trips.
- One teacher raised the issue of staff training in relation to supporting pupils with ASN on residential trips.

Main barriers to schools arranging residential outdoor education trips

- Teachers spoke of financial concerns as being the main barrier to schools organising and supporting residential trips.
- One teacher said the cost per residential trip has doubled and now the school organises a trip once every 2 years as opposed to annually.
- Teachers spoke of many pupils being unable to attend residential trips due to financial constraints and that currently the provision of residential trips is not universal.
- One teacher mentioned that organising trips in January and February, which is close to exams, are the only options at the moment as this time of year is the only time which is affordable.
- Teachers highlighted that schools often take a different approach to residential trips depending on the local needs.

- Teachers said that, although parents are encouraged to help pay for residential trips, not all parents can afford to.
- Teachers highlighted that the cost to parents does not just include the cost of the trip but also includes travel costs, clothes, shoes, bags etc. It was explained that schools can provide additional costs through fundraising or through private funding in areas of deprivation where fundraising is not effective as the school community is often economically disadvantaged,
- One teacher commented that some schools have additional PEF funding which is used to help with residential trips.
- Teachers explained that it was important not to stigmatise those who cannot afford to go on residential trips but the reality remained that many pupils are unable to attend as their parents cannot afford the costs associated with the trip and the limited funds available to schools to subsidise some of the costs of the trips.
- Teachers acknowledged that outdoor centres now supply clothes and specialist kits on residential trips however made the point that other costs are incurred, such as the costs of pyjamas and clothes for the week, which some parents cannot afford.
- One teacher said that residential trips created cover issues in schools. In secondary schools, it was difficult to get subject-specific supply teachers so classes could miss out on at least a week of learning time which was already pressurised in National Qualifications courses,
- One teacher said that sometimes levels of fitness among pupils can become a challenge on residential trips.

