

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 12 NOVEMBER 2002

LENGTH OF THE SCHOOL WEEK IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND UNITS

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1** To advise Members on the Scottish Executive's policy and guidance on the length of the school week for pupils in special schools and units, and to seek approval for a framework that will implement the new guidance.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** In November 2000 draft guidance on the length of the school week in special schools was received from the Scottish Executive. The revised and final guidance has now been received by Education Authorities.
- 2.2** In 1999 the Riddell Committee Report recommended that the length of the school week in special schools should be in line with that of their mainstream primary and secondary school equivalents. This position has been reinforced by Section 2 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act, 2000 and the extension of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

3. PRESENT POSITION

- 3.1** The Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975, as amended, require schools under Education Authority control to be open for 190 days per year. They do not define, however, the length of the school week for pupils. This is a matter for individual education authorities. There is however a consensus that the norm for primary schools will be 25 hours and 27.5 hours will apply to secondary schools. These norms have been used extensively, for example in discussions relating to the national agreement on the teachers' working week.
- 3.2** The length of the school week in special schools is shorter than their mainstream equivalents. It is not uncommon, for example, for secondary aged pupils to be working a 22.5 hour week, which is 5 hours less than their mainstream peer group.
- 3.3** The new guidance confirms that the Scottish Executive considers it to be unacceptable that pupils in special education should, in general, have a shorter school week than those of the same age attending mainstream schools. At the same time the guidance aims to introduce a greater element of flexibility in the length of the school week than currently exists. The aim should be to ensure that

based on pupils' needs, every child should have the opportunity to benefit from mainstream hours.

- 3.4** The exceptions to this general rule which may be considered are:
- Pupils for whom mainstream school hours may be too demanding.
 - Pupils for whom lunch and breaks are included in class contact time. (This most commonly would apply to pupils with complex learning difficulties.)

- 3.5** There are a number of benefits of moving to a standard week.
- Breadth of Curriculum.
 - Length of time spend on particular programmes of study.
 - Obtaining of National Qualifications.
 - It allows easier access of pupils from Special Schools and Units to attend particular
 - Courses in mainstream schools.
 - It is consistent with the principle of inclusion.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 The guidance acknowledges the need for adequate planning and consultation. It is therefore expected that parity of school hours will have been achieved by August 2003.

4.2 The present position in East Ayrshire is summarised in Table 1, below+

Table 1: Current Length of the School Week

Establishment/Centre	Length of school week (hours)
Park School	22.50
Hillside School	22.50
Witchhill School	22.50
Woodstock School	22.50
Barshare Primary School	25.00
Cumnock Academy	27.50
Patna Supported Learning Centre	22.50
Crosshouse Communication Centre	23.45

4.3 It is proposed that East Ayrshire develops an Action Plan to implement the new guidance. This will involve consultation with headteachers, staff, parents, school boards, and psychological services. Other associated services will also have to be consulted, particularly in relation to arrangements for transport. It is proposed that 2002/2003 be regarded as a transitional year with the aim of full

implementation by August 2003. Planning will have to be complete by March 2003 to allow an input into the budget setting process.

5. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** This change is entirely consistent with the Authority's commitment to inclusion and its obligation to comply with disability discrimination legislation.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** There are considerable financial implications arising from this change. These arise from two areas:

- Potential revision of transport contracts
- Staffing implications for both teachers and ancillary staff.

- 6.2** Quantification of the impact will depend on the roll of the establishments concerned in August 2003, and the individual needs of the children affected. Currently, the cost of implementation is estimated as being £80,000. There will be no impact on the current financial arrangements for financial year 2002-2003. The financial impact will require to be considered in the budget process for 2003-2004.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members :

- (i) note the Scottish Executive's policy position and guidance on the length of the school week for pupils in special schools and units;
- (ii) approve the movement towards parity in special schools with equivalent mainstream provision by August 2003; ; and
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

GRS/GRS
28 October 2002

Members requiring further information should contact Graham Short, Head of Schools, (01563-576089).

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. SEED Circular 4/2002 – Length of School Week: Pupils in Special Schools and Units

Implementation Officer: Graham Short

AGENDA