

# WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Council: 25 June 2008

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**Subject: Class Size Reduction in P1 – P3**

### 1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is:

- to advise Council of the costs of implementing the Scottish Government's policy to reduce class sizes in P1, P2 and P3 to a maximum of 18.

### 2. Background

2.1 On 27 February 2008, Council passed the following motion:

*'Council notes that parents, pupils and teachers have been seriously misled by the SNP on their promise to reduce class sizes.'*

*Council notes that the promise to reduce class sizes is undeliverable and in the words of government advisers "the scale of the commitment does not allow it to be delivered in the life time of a parliament" and "the commitment will take 8-10 years to achieve."*

*Council further notes the minutes of a meeting between the government and the Deans of Faculties of Education which states that SNP ministers were told their commitment would require an additional 4,000 student teachers and the doubling of places available on BEd courses neither of which have been actioned.*

*Council believes that this indicates that the SNP's commitment to class size reduction was nothing more than an empty promise. Council also considers that to state in the concordat that councils must 'as quickly as possible to deliver class sizes of 18 is disingenuous, given that the SNP were explicitly told by the government own advisors that it was not deliverable within this three year spending period.*

*It is clear that unless West Dunbartonshire Council receives significant investment from the Scottish Government then the SNP Administration will fail to deliver the class size reductions that their SNP ministers promised in their manifesto.*

*The Council therefore instructs officers to cost the full implementation of the SNP promise to reduce class sizes and calls on the Convener of Education & Lifelong Learning to write to the Scottish Government requesting the full funding required for WDC.'*

- 2.2** At the following meeting of Council, on 26 March 2008, in answer to a question, the Executive Director of Educational Services indicated that the costs referred to in the final paragraph of the motion would be reported to the Council in May, or possibly April.
- 2.3** At the meeting of Council on 28 May 2008, the Executive Director of Educational Services indicated in a report that it would not be possible to produce accurate estimates of costs until the June meeting of Council. This report now provides Council with the information requested.

### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** Currently, class size maxima in primary schools are as follows:
- |      |    |
|------|----|
| P1   | 25 |
| P2-3 | 30 |
| P4-7 | 33 |
- (Note: composite classes at any stage have a maximum of 25 pupils)
- 3.2** Within the SNP's manifesto for the Scottish Government elections in May 2007 was a commitment to reduce class sizes in P1 – P3 to a maximum of 18 pupils. This aim was subsequently built into the Concordat between national and local government and there is an expectation that Local Authorities will move as quickly as possible towards the achievement of that goal.
- 3.3** The costs involved in reducing class sizes fall into two main categories:
- Revenue costs: principally, the costs of employing additional teachers;
  - Capital costs: principally, the costs of extending or adapting existing school buildings or of providing temporary accommodation for schools which are operating at or near full capacity.
- 3.4** Within West Dunbartonshire, we have taken a number of steps over recent years to reduce class sizes in primary schools through targeted allocations of additional staffing. Specifically, schools are allocated a basic full time equivalent (FTE) teachers' staffing based on pupil numbers to which additional staffing is added based on the following factors:
- number of classes;
  - level of deprivation ;
  - due and additional management time;
  - due and additional "McCrone" time for preparation and correction.

In addition, one-off allocations on an annual basis are provided to take account of exceptional circumstances such as large numbers at one stage and specific targets arising out of HMIE inspections.

Finally, some probationer teachers are allocated as extra teachers at no extra staffing cost to the school and single post vacancies are sometimes filled by the allocation of two probationers to the school in question.

- 3.5** Tighter monitoring measures have also been introduced to ensure fair and equitable allocation of staff across all primary schools.

- 3.6** The staffing formula for West Dunbartonshire primary schools is more generous than that applied by most Councils.
- 3.7** Recently, some press coverage has suggested that Councils have been cutting staffing levels in schools as part of efficiency savings. This has not happened in West Dunbartonshire. Indeed, it is anticipated that an additional 8.20 FTE teachers will be employed in our primary schools in August 2008 when compared to August 2007. This does not include the 53 probationers assigned to primary schools for 2008/09 (compared to 54 probationers at the start of session 2007/08).
- 3.8** It should be noted that this increase in staffing has been achieved against a background of primary school rolls which are projected to fall in West Dunbartonshire from 6895 in 2007 to 6841 in 2008, a drop of 54 pupils.
- 3.9** Once the final allocation of staff to a school has been agreed, Head Teachers have a degree of freedom as to how those staff are deployed. For instance, Head Teachers may choose not to use additional teachers to create additional classes, but instead to deploy them in one or more of the following ways:
- as flexible resources to support a range of different classes as required;
  - as specialist teachers to extract groups of pupils from classes to deliver, for instance, the science or creative arts curriculum;
  - as additional support for particularly difficult or challenging classes.
- The specific deployment of staff will also vary from year to year depending on need, on local demographics and on the particular strengths of staff involved.
- 3.10** In any statement on class sizes, it should be borne in mind that modern primary schools operate much more flexibly than has traditionally been the case. For instance, one of our primary schools is scheduled to have two P1 classes, each of 19 pupils next session. However, this school also operates a Nurture Group for vulnerable pupils in P1. This involves extraction to a separate room of a small number (usually around 5 or 6) of pupils for significant portions of time to work with a teacher and learning assistant in a more intensive and supportive setting on social and emotional development. For much of the week, therefore, the true class size of both P1 classes in this school will actually be around 16 pupils. A range of such extraction procedures apply in all our schools.
- 3.11** A further important factor is the input from the Network Support and Early Intervention teachers who operate across all our primary schools. The work of these two teams further reduces the pupil/teacher ratio in early primary school. There are currently 22 FTE Network Support Teachers (some of whom are partly or wholly deployed in Secondary Schools) and 24FTE Early Intervention teachers (some of whom are partly or wholly deployed in Early Education Centres).
- 3.11** In addition, a centrally funded team of peripatetic Music & PE teachers provides further support, with an allocation of 0.2 FTE (ie 1 day per week) to

- each primary school, effecting a further reduction in pupil/teacher ratio during the days when they are present.
- 3.12** Finally, it should also be remembered that large numbers of Learning Assistants are employed, both in individual schools and in the Network Support Team, to provide individual and group-based support to pupils. This further reduces the pupil/adult ratio in all schools at all stages.
- 3.13** One of the challenges faced each year by the Department of Educational Services is the annual staffing exercise for schools. This is rendered particularly complex in primary schools by a range of factors, including:
- variations in pupil roll from year to year;
  - large variations in the numbers of pupil at each stage in any specific school;
  - the need to redeploy any staff declared surplus in the case of a falling school roll;
  - the desirability of creating permanent employment opportunities for good teachers coming to the end of their probationary year;
  - fluctuations in the number of placing requests submitted each year;
  - the nature of roll projection methodologies available;
  - the need to ensure fairness for all schools while addressing local needs.
- 3.14** It must be stressed, therefore, that the information contained in Appendices 1 and 2 to this report are snapshots in time and that the picture might be quite different in 2009 and beyond.
- 3.15** It should also be noted that figures given in the appendices are estimates, and the true figures will not be known until school census day in September 2008. This is the date on which actual staffing levels for each school are finalised.
- 3.16** Appendix 1 details the projected class sizes for all classes in all primary schools in West Dunbartonshire in August 2008.
- 3.17** Appendix 2 provides details about how staffing levels are calculated for each school.
- 3.18** Currently, the Department's policies, which are in line with recognised best practice, are that:
- primary Head Teachers should not have a timetabled class commitment;
  - composite classes should not be the norm in larger primary schools where other options are viable.
- 3.19** If the principles described in 3.18 are observed, then it would be necessary to employ an additional 21.5 FTE teachers to reduce all classes in P1 – P3 to a maximum of 18 in West Dunbartonshire schools. This would incur an additional revenue cost of £813,410 per annum (recurring annually) based on an average unpromoted primary teacher's salary with on-costs of £37,833.

- 3.20** If the principles described in 3.18 were to be abandoned, and all available resources were to be devoted to the reduction to 18 of class sizes in P1 - P3, then the additional cost would probably be reduced to approximately £500,000 - £600,000 per annum. However, there would be educational costs in other areas of the school arising from such a change in policy and a possibility that average class sizes would rise in P4 – P7 as a result.
- 3.21** At present, it is unclear how the costs outlined in 3.19 or 3.20 would be met.
- 3.22** Because of the current overcapacity in our schools, many primary schools would require no or minimal physical adaptation to cope with a reduction to 18 of class size maxima in P1 – P3.
- 3.23** Other schools, however, would require more significant adaptation and some would require extensions to their current buildings or the provision of temporary classrooms.
- 3.24** It is estimated that the total cost of adapting, extending or providing temporary classrooms for West Dunbartonshire schools as required to deliver class size maxima of 18 in P1 – P3 would be approximately £6.1 million. This would be a one-off capital cost, although it might be necessary to make further one-off investments in future years in light of roll variations.
- 3.25** Within the current financial settlement, a sum of £378,000 has been made available for capital projects aimed at reducing class sizes in P1 – P3 in West Dunbartonshire schools.
- 3.26** The figures provided in paragraphs 3.19, 3.20 and 3.24 are based on information available at the present time. Should it be decided to proceed with a policy of reducing class sizes to maximum of 18 in P1 – P3, then further detailed financial modelling would be required.
- 3.27** Appendix 3 is the national submission made by the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) to the Scottish Government on this subject. As reported orally to Council on 28 May 2008, West Dunbartonshire Council was not one of the Councils which contributed to the survey mentioned in this submission.

#### **4. Personnel Issues**

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues arising directly from this report.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1** The financial implications of full implementation class size maxima of 18 in P1 – P3 are described in paragraphs 3.19 – 3.26 above.
- 5.2** This Report assumes that implementation of this policy would necessitate the creation of discrete classes of no more than 18 pupils in all schools in P1, P2 and P3. If a more flexible approach were to be adopted (eg that such classes should average no more than 18 pupils or that the teacher/pupil or adult/pupil

ratio should be no more than 1:18) then both the revenue and capital costs would be significantly lower.

## **6. Risk Analysis**

**6.1** Since this report is hypothetical in nature, there are no risks associated with this report at this stage.

**6.2** The main risks to implementation of the policy are:

- the difficulty of securing adequate funding for the revenue and capital costs of implementation;
- potential difficulties in recruiting sufficient additional teachers of high quality to facilitate implementation.

## **7. Conclusions**

**7.1** Class size reduction is a complex matter which involves a range of factors.

**7.2** West Dunbartonshire Council has successfully deployed a range of strategies to target class size reduction in primary schools over recent years.

**7.3** It would require a significant injection of one-off capital investment and ongoing revenue funds to reduce class sizes to a maximum of 18 in P1 – P3. These costs are detailed in paragraphs 3.19 – 3.26 above.

## **8. Recommendations**

**8.1** It is recommended that Council should note the contents of this report.

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1: P1 – P7 Class Sizes 2008/09  
  
Appendix 2: Staffing in Primary schools – estimated for 2008/09  
  
Appendix 3: ADES report on class size reduction

**Background Papers:** Minutes of Council meetings of 27 February and 26 March 2008

Report to Council on 28 May 2008 on Class Size Reduction

**Wards Affected:** All wards