

Cross Party Group on the Scots Language Education Sub-committee Inaugural meeting

Tuesday 9th June, 2009

5.30pm

Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 6

Sederunt:

Jim Allan, Muriel Angus, Laura Brandon, Philippa Cochrane, Mary Connolly, Elizabeth Cordiner, Paula Cowan, Cecilia Craig, Rhona Craig, Davie Cunningham, Christine Emmett, Lynne Ferguson, Matthew Fitt, Margaret Foley, Fiona Forbes, Susan Forde, Liz Gray, Rob Gibson MSP, Andrew Harvey, Hilary Jones, Morag Kell, Nelson Liddle, Karon Llewellyn, Sheila Love, Katrina Lucas, Moira MacIver, Jennifer McGlone, Ailsa McInnes, Lucy McKinlay, Wilson McLeod, Janey Mauchline, Vanessa Morris, Liz Niven, Willie Oliphant, Joan Parr, Marilyn Prentice, James Robertson, Christine Robinson, Mirka Ryjackova, Jane Sandell, Jean Sangster, Pauline Sangster, Sandy Stronach, Jack Stuart, Mark Thomson, Jenny Watson, Rosalind Webster, Anne White, Joanne Vena, Maureen Watt MSP, Graham Williamson, Christine Wilson, Caroline Winning

Apologies:

Jo Allen, Eleanor Bankier, Jill Bennet, Sheena Blackhall, David Borthwick, Ann-Marie Burns, Joy Cameron, James Costa, John Gerard, Fiona Gold, Simon Hall, Caroline Hay-Crawford, Noelle Henderson, Wullie Hershaw, John Hodgart, Margaret Houston, Maureen Jobson, Laureen Johnson, Anne McGachey, Ruth McClements, Professor Jim McGonigal, Peter McGhee, Irene McGugan, Peter McKenzie, April McMahan, Joanna McPake, Yvonne Manning, Rosa Murray, Morag Pieroni, June Ranscome, Mary Ritchie, Gemma Rooney, Glenn Telfer, Emma Turnbull, David Watson, Melanie West, Les Wheeler, Brenda Williams

Patrick Harvie MSP, Liam McArthur MSP, Ken McIntosh MSP, Jamie McGrigor MSP, Cathy Peattie MSP, Tavish Scott MSP, Karen Whitefield MSP

1. Welcome and introductions

Matthew Fitt (MF) welcomed sub-committee members and explained he would be chairing the meeting as Rob Gibson MSP was delayed in a Climate Change Bill debate as were other MSPs. MF thanked members for coming from across the country and mentioned that Itchy Coo had supplied the group with folders and water. MF outlined that the purpose of the meeting was to highlight good practice in the Scots Language in Education and to find ways of communicating to MSPs the positive benefits for Social Inclusion and other aspects of learning from increased use of Scots in schools. MF noted that as he had had to stand in as Chair, Mirka Ryjackova would be taking the minutes for this first meeting.

All members introduced themselves.

Apologies were read out including apologies from MSPs.

2. Sharing good practice

2.1 Lynne Ferguson (LF), Literacy Development Officer, from Falkirk Council. LF said that good practice was already established in local authority in pockets but wider consistency of provision was needed. A bid for funding had been made and ways on how to deliver Scots across the Curriculum were being worked out. The aim was to build a community of learning in each associated school group and to establish champions within each cluster. After a series of training sessions delivered by Scots Education Resources, several teachers went on to deliver a number Scots training sessions to other staff. From November 2009, all schools in local authority will be involved in a Scots Enterprise project.

2.1.1 Questions - Cecilia Craig (CC) asked if Determined to Succeed was the right avenue for Scots and if Scots and Enterprise go together. Vanessa Morris asked how Scots featured in the authority's policy on Language.

2.1.2 LF answered that Literacy Performance Reviews are looking for evidence of Scots in the classroom.

2.1.3 LF indicated that she produced an information hand-out and that this would be distributed at the end of the meeting. (See Appendix 1)

2.2 Jenny Watson (JW), Aberdeen Reading Bus Initiative. Moira MacIver (MM), Kittybrewster Primary School, Aberdeen. JW introduced Reading Bus project and mentioned that it was targeted at areas of deprivation in order to raise self-esteem. It was suggested that there were good grounds for a book in Doric and this proved correct as the Reading Bus has already produced two publications. JW said that as enthusiasm has grown, more children's publications and projects have followed. MM explained that she was seconded for 15 months to work with the Reading Bus initiative. It was noted that Scots writer Sheena Blackhall has been an inspiration. MM said that children have been more motivated in class, their confidence to use language has been increased and children with low-attainment had made progress in Literacy. MM said that quality of production of resources like Rock Raptor helps the children greatly in the journey to Literacy. Abertoun, a virtual resource in association with GLOW, is available later in June.

(See appendix 2)

2.3 Margaret Foley, Quality Improvement Officer. (Answering question asked at 2.1.1) M. Foley said that Scots is an integral part of Literacy Strategy at Dundee City Council. She said that Scots is an entitlement for teachers, pupils and parents and that Scots is for the whole year, not just at certain points in the school calendar. M. Foley highlighted that Dundee has a large Asian Heritage population and that teaching Scots can have a positive

impact on bilingualism. M. Foley spoke about use of Itchy Coo books, convincing the English Network to find space for Scots, recent use of fairy tales in Scots with nursery staff and using the Dundee dialect of Scots. When working in Scots, young people relax and find it motivating. Dundee Education works closely with the Scottish Storytelling Centre and the Dundee Rep. The aim is to have a Literacy Contact teacher to promote Scots in each school. Time Tram Dundee published by Dundee City Council was in both English and Dundonian, reflecting bilingual nature of the city. Whar's Wattie?, the first teaching resource in Dundonian, will soon be made available to Dundee's primary schools. M. Foley performed an extract from the Dundee version of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'.

(See appendix 3)

2.4 Andrew Harvey (AH), English Teacher, Uddingston Grammar School, South Lanarkshire. AH began by saying that transition regarding Scot from primary to secondary can be difficult and that there is a tradition in secondary schools to treat Scots as a one-off lesson or at best a week-long activity. There is a lack of context and in certain years of secondary, assessment doesn't allow room for Scots, especially in S3. The question the South Lanarkshire Literature Working Group on Scots posed was how to establish Scots with credibility in secondary schools. The answer was to treat it as any other language and AH mentioned there was a stigma to be dealt with at very start of the process. The Literature Working Group on Scots, commissioned by Janey Mauchline, Quality Improvement Officer for South Lanarkshire, surveyed teachers and pupils to ask about their experience of Scots. The Group identified a suitable Scots text, *The Girnin Gates* by Hamish MacDonald, based on which a study unit could be developed in order to encourage Linguistic Diversity, Identity, and Confidence. The unit, called 'Tak the Leid', aims to enhance pupils' Creative and Personal Writing. AH hoped that other authorities would use the resource as a model.

AH made a direct appeal to MSPs that this sub-committee is not asking for millions for arms and weapons but is seeking commitments to secure the future of Scots, which is one of the languages used by our children who are the country's most precious resource.

(See appendix 4)

2.5 Nelson Liddle, English Teacher, Inveralmond HS, West Lothian 'North Sea Neebors' is a project to encourage S2 pupils to explore the etymology of Scots and to give the language legitimacy and connection with history and to increase pupils' confidence. In addition, Scottish pupils, as they communicate to their Danish counterparts through English, will be helping English learners from another country to improve their English skills, making the Scottish children teachers of English. The project also encourages cross-cultural interaction for pupils in deprived areas making them feel included in the wider community of Europe and will broaden educational experience. Project is being hosted through the new education Intranet, GLOW, but NL highlighted the fact that pupils were keen to also

send things to each other by post and seemed to be interested in stepping back from the digital age and want to write letters to each other.

(See appendix 5)

2.6 MF thanked the contributors and intimated that future could include more examples of good practice.

3. Discussion of Scots Audit and A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE)

MF welcomed Maureen Watt MSP to the meeting and opened the discussion by reminding the group that MW had been instrumental in the inclusion of Scots in A Curriculum for Excellence. Susan Forde (SF) mentioned that the Head Teacher of Kinross High School has plans to integrate Scots in their new building. Janey Mauchline (JM) said that ACE is instrumental for teachers to engage with Scots and that ACE makes it possible for any subject can be taught in Scots. JM commented that ACE provides grounds for optimism. Mark Thomson mentioned his work in prisons and schools and made the point that Scots should not just be something fun to do but is for serious purpose as well. Mary Connolly (MC) mentioned a visitor to Nethermains Primary School who had referred to the pupils' Scots work as 'slang'. After a discussion about language, the visitor wanted to learn more. MC said that ACE gives children opportunities to explore Scots in a meaningful way which has not been the case for many years. Cecilia Craig (CC) said that Scots should be taught in context and pupils be made aware of the historical development of Scots. This would increase sense of value and status. Katrina Lucas (KL) found it amazing and encouraging that pupils want to learn more Scots words for everyday use, not just poetry. KL has had very positive feedback from the parents of non-native English speaking pupils. AH referred to context and history and mentioned investigations by pupils in South Lanarkshire of local place-names. AH also talked about research conducted in different departments in his school (Uddingston Grammar) on use of Scots in other subject, noting that Music used the word 'ceilidh' and PE used the word 'baw'. SF noted that study of Scots is connected with pride and status and if a child is not happy with their own place, then it is difficult to be happy as a person. MF noted that having the meeting in the Scottish Parliament gives the language and practitioners increased status. Jack Stuart said it should be clearly stated in the Curriculum that the languages of Scotland are English, Scots and Gaelic. Fiona Forbes expressed concern that Scots may remain as part of poetry and song instead of everyday experience and that if ACE does not clearly highlight the status of Scots, it will not go forward in education. JM reiterated that Scots is in many parts of ACE and is clearly stated in four Capacities and in the Experiences and Outcomes for Literacy and English. Jim Allan (JA) highlighted the role of Scots in Teacher Training Institutes and called for clear guidelines that would make it essential for teachers in pre-service training to study Scots. JA said that currently Scots is often an elective subject but with stronger guidelines for student teachers, more provision for Scots in schools in general would follow. Elizabeth Cordiner (EL) mentioned that the initial reaction to Scots Poetry 4 cool kids

performances is ‘surprise’ and afterwards ‘recognition’ and ‘delight’. Sandy Stronach (SS) noted his 16 year involvement with the Doric Festival and commented on the confidence children have when speaking Doric but their loss of fluency when writing in Doric. SS suggested that the older generation of speakers could be used as a resource to help younger generation of speakers in their language development.

4. Ways Forward

MF announced that the discussion had to move on to ways forward but some ways forward had already been suggested at Point 3.

M. Foley mentioned that Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) reports which record use of Scots in the classroom help to firmly establish the language in schools and local authorities. MF noted that this sub-committee could ask HMIE in writing for more information and clarification and that Mary Ritchie and Ann McGachey of HMIE had sent their apologies but were keen to be kept informed of the sub-committee’s work. MF then suggested that schools and organisations could invite local MSPs to visit to observe good practice in Scots and to ask pupils what is happening in schools with Scots. It was agreed by a show of hands that this should be actioned and MF would follow up with sub-committee members on this. James Robertson commented as General Editor of Itchy Coo books he was pleased that the Itchy Coo project had encouraged local authorities to develop Scots resources and teaching project but advised that resources had to be revisited and revitalised. Sheila Love suggested that young teachers should be encouraged to be confident in teaching Scots and to drive a bottom-up approach for incorporating Scots in the life of the school. M. Foley mentioned signage in public buildings to increase exposure of Scots. [MF welcomed Rob Gibson MSP to the meeting.] CC mentioned the Scots Audit’s finding that there is no coordinating agency or body for Scots and that without coordination provision could well be chaotic. NL replied that GLOW could fulfil such a role. Liz Niven mentioned SQA and the importance of the position of Scots in the examination system. JS stated that if Scots is not present in exams, then the language will not have status. Jean Sangster said Scots could be considered for all subjects. Graham Williamson said that language knowledge needs to be addressed first and that status will follow. MF suggested that in addition to HMIE, the group could write to Scottish Qualifications Authority. Maureen Watt, in reference to inviting MSPs to schools, recommended including councillors as they make local decisions about resources. MF suggested that the group consider producing a simple easy to use survey which would collate views on Scots from pupils, teachers and parents. It would take the form of an A4 standard template sheet gathered from across the country to provide a more realistic snapshot than the Audit could provide or the School Pupil Survey

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/04/01090908/20)

which concluded that 306 pupils in Scotland speak Scots. There has been no comprehensive survey of Scots. Sub-committee agreed that this should be actioned. CC mentioned that during her own research in the North East one

pupil said 'I don't speak Scots because nobody speaks Scots to me.' KL agreed that there is an urgent need for firm statistical evidence on which to base further projects. MF highlighted the News and Information sheet which contained information about related websites, including the sub-committee's own website, www.scotsinschools.com

(See Appendix 6)

5. Any other committee business

SF raised the matter of the inclusion of questions on Scots in the 2011 Census. For those wishing to write to the Registrar General, contact: Duncan Macniven, Registrar General, General Register Office for Scotland, Ladywell House, Ladywell Road, EDINBURGH EH12 7TF

Rob Gibson MSP thanked MF chairing the meeting and Mirka Ryjackova for taking the minutes, and thanked the members for attending the meeting.

MF read out a final thought from Jo Allen, PT English at Portobello High School, Edinburgh, who was on maternity leave:

"The prospect of raising our wean in a culture rich in understanding of its own languages....very exciting!"

6. Future meetings

Maureen Watt MSP had agreed to chair a meeting of the sub-committee in Aberdeen in September. The date and venue of this meeting to be confirmed.

Another meeting will be planned for November in Glasgow or Ayrshire.

Minutes:
Mirka Ryjackova (Itchy Co)