

## HOME EDUCATION AND THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

Readers may remember that, in response to our concerns about some councils' failure to follow the guidance, Robin Harper MSP tabled the following Parliamentary Question: S2W-15598 (Lothians) (Green): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps have been taken to monitor the effectiveness of its guidelines on home education.

Answered by Peter Peacock on 20 April 2005: Following publication of the guidance in March 2004, the Scottish Executive wrote to Directors of Education to emphasise the need for local authority policies to reflect it. We have also established an e-mail address at [home.education@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:home.education@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) to enable home educators and others to provide feedback to the Executive, and have given a commitment to review the guidance next year.

A number of other MSPs have become directly involved in cases where families have had difficulties in extricating their children from state schools and have often managed to help resolve matters. Special mention must go here to Mike Rumbles, Chris Ballance and Alasdair Morgan, although many others have also offered their invaluable assistance.

Robin Harper has now gone on to table the following motion in the Parliament in order to highlight the problems still being faced by members of the home education community and it has already attracted cross party support.\* One MSP has even shared a personal experience of home education.

S2M-3739: Home Education - That the Parliament expresses concern that some local education authorities in Scotland are not adhering to the statutory guidance on the circumstances in which parents may choose to educate their children at home which was issued by the Scottish Executive in March 2004 with the aim of improving relationships between local authorities and home-educating families; notes that, while the majority of councils have changed their policies, procedures and practices to reflect the statutory guidance, many others have delayed or refused consent to parents wishing to withdraw their children from school, despite those parents having provided adequate information about their home-based education provision; notes that in England and Wales the law allows for the deregistration of a pupil from any school upon written demand, whereas in Scotland parents require council consent to remove their child from a state, but not a private, school; commends the majority of councils in Scotland for engaging positively with home-educating families and making the guidance work, and supports Schoolhouse and the home education community in Scotland in their call for an amendment to section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 so that children attending state schools in Scotland may be withdrawn from state schools upon written notification to the local authority.

Schoolhouse has long been pressing for a change in the law to allow for the withdrawal of children from Scottish state schools on demand. It is therefore important for us to request our MSPs to sign up to Robin's motion in order to help impress upon the Scottish Executive how vital it is to have the primary legislation amended.

Readers in Scotland have 8 MSPs (one constituency MSP and 7 'regional list' ones) and you can contact them directly through the Scottish Parliament site [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk), using your postcode to identify who they all are. You can also send them an e-mail directly: [FirstName.LastName.msp@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:FirstName.LastName.msp@scottish.parliament.uk). You should include your postal address so that they know you are one of their constituents. Ministers and the Presiding Officer will generally not sign up to members' motions but should still be approached as they may well offer to take some other action.

\* As we go to print, the following MSPs have signed up to Robin's motion:

Donald Gorrie, Murdo Fraser, Alex Johnstone, Shiona Baird, Mr John Swinney, Mike Rumbles, Rosie Kane, Murray Tosh, Derek Brownlee, Mr Ted Brocklebank, Alasdair Morgan, Brian Adam, Patrick Harvie, Mrs Margaret Ewing, Linda Fabiani, Mark Ballard, Eleanor Scott, Mr David Davidson, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Ms Rosemary Byrne, Chris Ballance, Alex Neil, Bill Aitken, Miss Annabel Goldie, David McLetchie, Margaret Mitchell, Margo MacDonald, Jim Mather, John Swinburne, Mary Scanlon, Mr Mark Ruskell, Nora Radcliffe, Richard Lochhead, Colin Fox, Mrs Nanette Milne, Rob Gibson, John Scott, Tricia Marwick, Mr Jamie McGrigor, Elaine Smith, Michael Matheson, Mike Pringle, Bruce McFee, Fiona Hyslop, Roseanna Cunningham