

The Highland Council

Minutes of the **Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT)** held remotely on Tuesday 3 June 2025 at 3.00 pm.

Present:

Representing the Management Side:

Ms S Atkin
Mr J Finlayson (Chair)
Mr D Millar
Mrs M Reid

Representing the Teachers' Side:

Mrs K Laird (AHDS)
Mr L MacKenzie (EIS)
Mr S Tillman (EIS)
Ms G Warburton (EIS)

Also present as observers:

Mr G Murphy (SLS)
Mr M Smith (EIS)

In attendance:

Ms K Lackie, Assistant Chief Executive - People
Mr A Bell, Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side
Ms F Grant, Chief Officer – Secondary Education/Joint Secretary, Management Side
Ms A Jansson, Interim Chief Officer – Early Years and Primary Education
Ms A MacPherson, Strategic Lead - Resources
Ms R Bell, Policy Officer
Ms M Murray, Principal Committee Officer

Mr J Finlayson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mrs M Cockburn, Mr D Loudon and Mr D Macpherson.

2. Declarations of Interest/Transparency Statements

There were no Declarations of Interest or Transparency Statements.

3. Minutes of Meeting held on 3 December 2024

The Committee **APPROVED** the Minutes of the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers held on 3 December 2024.

4. Work Plan Update 2024-25

There had been circulated Report No LNCT/1/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

In relation to Violence and Aggression, the Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side, commented that high-level messages had their place but, to staff, it was how things

were delivered in schools and what was seen in practice that mattered. In addition, thanks were expressed for the work undertaken by the officers involved in the review of LNCT Agreements.

The Committee:-

i. **NOTED** the position in respect of:

- a. Violence and Aggression; and
- b. Review of LNCT Agreements;

ii. **APPROVED**:

- a. LNCT 24 Use of Temporary Contracts for Teaching Staff;
- b. LNCT 37 Special Leave Policy; and
- c. LNCT 38 Flexible Working Policy; and

iii. **APPROVED** the deletion of LNCT 12 Winding Down Scheme.

5. Work Plan 2025-26

There had been circulated Report No LNCT/2/25 by the Assistant Chief Executive – People.

During discussion, the Joint Secretary, Teachers' Side, made the following comments:-

Violence and Aggression

- the Teachers' Side saw it as vital that receipt of incident reports was acknowledged, and that feedback on action taken was provided to impacted staff members, with follow-ups to incidents occurring as a matter of routine. Impacted staff needed to know that something was happening, and that there was consistency of approach, with management backing them up and the Council backing up management. It was queried who would follow up with Headteachers under the new Education and Learning structure, and what was being done from the outside when considering the data;
- in relation to the new investment allocated to focus on universal and bespoke support for schools, the Teachers' Side awaited formal job descriptions to be able to pass comment. Additional roles were a start, but it was essential they had the most appropriate remit, with the time in which to do the job, to impart the greatest positive impact. The question existed as to whether retention or reestablishment of the Additional Support Needs Officer role would be most appropriate; and
- when comparing data from the previous school session to the current session, there had been a decrease of less than 1% in reported incidents. It was essential that what was done going forward led to a far more noticeable decrease to instil confidence in staff that the Council as an employer was making positive moves to address matters and cared about staff welfare and wellbeing. Staff morale was vital for a positive school ethos and, without a reduction in such incidents and an increase in support from the Council, it was feared there would be barriers to establishing a positive school ethos and that embedding any behaviour policy based on positive relations would be difficult. Data was all very well, but it was queried what was being done with it and how this would impact practice best at all

levels. Training was good, but it was important to ensure it was the most appropriate training that would have the most positive influence moving forward. Whilst the system may have changed, the outcomes of reporting should not, and appropriate action would remain as a requisite to maintain staff trust in their employer.

Raising Attainment Strategy

- it was welcomed that this was not a quick process but an improvement journey over the coming years. Four years ago, when initially emerging from Covid, the priorities identified had been literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing, and attainment. At the time, the Teachers' Side had welcomed the inclusion of health and wellbeing, seeing it as vital to ensuring progress was appropriate and sustainable. However, the Teachers' Side had warned that attainment could not be the main driver as, if so, it would negatively impact health and wellbeing and have a potentially detrimental impact on all areas. During the last few years, the suggestion had been that attainment had become the main driver and that it had indeed had a negative impact on some staff. It was essential that the new Raising Attainment Strategy fully considered the health and wellbeing of all, as well as the capacity of both schools and individuals to achieve what had to be manageable targets and goals. In initial meetings, there had been strong messages of transparency, inclusion and collaboration, and those principles had to remain throughout the development process and moving forward. Consistency was key, whether within an individual classroom or across the entire authority area, as it made things easier for all involved; and
- with reference to the statement in the report that the Teachers' Panel and officers would work on ensuring professional learning activities were available to ensure the successful implementation of the strategy, it was unclear what the envisaged role of the Teachers' Panel was. Whilst the Teachers' Side would expect to remain engaged within and consulted upon matters ongoing, it was for the local authority as the employer to ensure that any such strategy was appropriately resourced regarding professional learning activity etc. Whilst the importance of the strategy was acknowledged, its timing, whilst the authority was managing a restructure of central education support, had led to increased stress and anxiety around School Improvement Plans (SIPs), Standards and Quality Reports and Working Time Agreements (WTAs). Schools saw it as potentially unfair having to go into the summer with SIPs remaining incomplete and having only partially agreed WTAs. There appeared to be a variability between primary and secondary schools, which might be due to the different structures that existed within them. However, expectations were proving to be potentially unrealistic. The initial plan had been for an unveiling of the strategy week beginning 2 June but it was understood this had now been delayed until 16 June which further added to the uncertainty and restricted the SIP window to five weeks, the first of which was the week where the information was being provided, and the third and fourth of which were the final and first weeks of term respectively, weeks which were already workload intensive with many existing priorities already associated with them. To assist, it was requested that pro-forma paperwork be made available to schools to allow SIPs to be commenced as swiftly as possible, even before 16 June, and that schools be able to detail plans considering raising attainment at as early a time as possible, without need for significant revision or resubmission, given that any such draft would include their considered priorities over raising attainment. In summary, the view was that raising attainment must come from a position of stability, which was not what schools felt they were in with the current level of uncertainty.

Review of LNCT Agreements

- LNCT 16 Self-evaluation for Self-improvement - initial work had commenced on this Agreement, and the Teachers' Side was in receipt of an initial draft proposal upon which comment had been provided;
- LNCT 20 35 Hour Week (Peripatetic Staff) – Additional Support Needs (ASN) staff had become significantly more peripatetic, particularly from 2019 onwards, and this Agreement, which really dealt with visiting subject specialists, therefore required revision to ensure it remained fit for purpose;
- LNCT 31 Planning in Primary Schools - whilst the existing Agreement was good, the emphasis appeared to have changed. The introduction of Key Assessment Tasks and High-Quality Assessments had impacted significantly upon planning, and a revised Agreement was therefore required; and
- in relation to joint work to agree a policy outlining the procedures for job-sizing across the authority, progress had stalled but, once recommenced, things should be able to move swiftly forward.

The Management Side responded as follows:-

Violence and Aggression

- in terms of the new Education and Learning structure and the support mechanism for Headteachers, it was explained that Area Quality Improvement Managers were being appointed to line manage Headteachers, supported by Education Support Officers;
- in relation to the new investment allocated to focus on universal and bespoke support for schools, officers would continue to engage with the Teachers' Side on all roles and job descriptions. Clearly if there were established job descriptions there would be less need for engagement, but the detail of any new roles would be provided;
- the Chair emphasised that the Management Side valued employees and recognised the importance of what happened at school level, particularly in terms of establishing the right ethos and the implementation of policies and procedures;
- it was highlighted that a report on the Improving Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan, based on the recent Members' workshop to which the Teachers' Side had also been invited to contribute, would be considered by the Education Committee on 4 June 2025. The impact incidents of violence and aggression could have on staff was acknowledged. However, the data indicated that 85% of incidents involved children with ASN, and it was therefore considered possible to implement focussed and tailored approaches to address the issue. The agreed additional investment in ASN teachers and Pupil Support Assistant (PSA) lead practitioners was about providing support in situ in schools, working with young people who were challenged in a mainstream school setting, and creating a calmer and more manageable environment. Training was key, and it was recognised that difficulty in taking up training was an issue that needed to be addressed. PSAs in particular struggled to access training as they did not have time provided to them, and the team of PSA lead practitioners would have a key role, working directly with PSAs and engaging with Headteachers and key staff on how to manage incidents. The importance of supporting teachers and school staff to undertake what were, at times, very challenging roles, and of ensuring they understood they were valued and respected, was recognised. Steps were being taken to address incidents of violence and aggression, but it was important to understand and contextualise the situation in Highland.

Raising Attainment

- focussing on raising attainment was not to the exclusion of health and wellbeing, which needed to underpin everything;
- the matter of SIPs had arisen at the Primary Headteacher Reference Group, and Headteachers had been advised to proceed as they would usually. Raising attainment was an ongoing journey, and when the revised strategy was shared with Headteachers they would be able to see how it sat against their SIP and perhaps make some adjustments, but it was not a case of starting afresh; and
- the Chair commented that there was a shared ambition to improve attainment in Highland, and it was hoped that there would be additional support within the strategy that would enable schools to focus on the attainment journey.

The Committee **NOTED** the position in respect of:-

- i. Violence and Aggression;
- ii. Raising Attainment Strategy; and
- iii. Review of LNCT Agreements.

The Chair expressed thanks to both sides for the engagement that took place throughout the year.

The meeting concluded at 3.25 pm.