

Renfrewshire Joint Negotiating Committee for Teachers

To: Renfrewshire Joint Negotiating Committee for Teachers

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Seesaw and Implications of Digital Platforms

Report by

Joint Secretary (Teachers' Side)

Background

The introduction of digital platforms such as Seesaw, Satchel One, Google Classrooms etc was hastened in response to the Covid pandemic, during an unprecedented time in education which required educators to adopt a means of communicating with pupils, parents and carers remotely. One of the legacies of the Covid pandemic is that those digital platforms that served well in that period persist and have now become integrated into classrooms despite the resumption of face-to-face education.

There is now an expectation that digital platforms such as SeeSaw will be used by teachers but there is a growing concern at some of the implications of its use.

Teachers are increasingly raising concerns around associated recording and reporting workload and also the unfettered access that parents have to teachers beyond their working day.

Safeguarding staff and protecting parent/teacher relations

The Seesaw application which is used predominantly in primary schools has implications for external accessibility to teachers through its instant messaging function. It has been reported that Seesaw is regularly being used by parents/carers as a means of communicating directly with teachers despite several reminders that this should not be the case. Many teachers have reported receiving messages from parents during holiday periods, late at night and generally outwith their normal working hours. On occasion, messages may also be confrontational, complaining and at times aggressive or abusive. Some communications being posted have also made inappropriate reference to other pupils, with implications for privacy or conflicts with GDPR.

There may also be unintended negative consequences that affect the parent/carer and teacher relationship arising from the use of Seesaw if teachers miss messages or are unable -or unwilling- to respond immediately to parental questions and concerns. It can lead to frustration

when an immediate response is not forthcoming or where an enquiry is met with a generic response.

The expectation that teachers are constantly “on call” is not compatible with a teacher’s contractual 35-hour week. Teachers are paid to work 35 hours, or part thereof, and there is no separate remuneration for parental contacts made after hours. Notwithstanding, the pressure to be constantly available may also be having an adverse effect on the health and well-being of staff.

Ultimately the unfiltered SeeSaw platform has no buffer, intermediary or means of safeguarding the teacher against unsolicited communications and the Teacher’s Side is seeking to engage to create a workable policy to address some of the concerns.

Workload

The reporting function of SeeSaw, post pandemic, aims to share learning that is happening in class with parents/carers. The use of Seesaw however has burgeoned since it’s initial introduction to the point that there is now, in some schools although not all, an expectation that pictures of every pupil’s work, evidencing numeracy and literacy will be uploaded on a near-daily basis. This level of reporting is unsustainable and is impacting on time spent meaningfully teaching or is reducing the preparation and correction time of teachers when attainment should be the focus rather than incessant recording and reporting. Many teachers are also using their personal time to upload evidence. The limitless use of Seesaw therefore, and its incremental increase, has created additional workload and stress for the teacher and may paradoxically be undermining attainment of pupils.

Where the SeeSaw app is being used there needs to be a more realistic acknowledgement of the time spent within each school’s Working Time Agreement under the allocations for recording and reporting. An accurate time needs to be reflected within the WTA which may in turn necessitate a reduction in the number and nature of other reports that are currently part of schools’ calendars.

Overall, without policy guidelines there is a misuse as well as inconsistent use of digital platforms across Renfrewshire. A reduced but consistent and manageable approach is being sought that balances the workload of classroom teachers with proportionate reporting on pupils’ progress.

Action

- The teacher’s side is seeking an audit of digital platform use within the Local Authority with a view to creating a policy that ensures a consistent approach in all establishments. Said policy should limit access to teachers beyond their normal working day thereby

guaranteeing all teachers the right to “switch off” and have a reasonable work/life balance and incorporate agreed protocols around SeeSaw when messaging teachers to involve intermediaries such as a school office or SMT, as appropriate.

- A recognition that where staff agree to their use digital platforms such as SeeSaw be realistically incorporated into working time agreements with time taken from the recording and reporting time used for that purpose.