

Note of Meeting – Touch Typing – 6 July 2022

Present: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Fergus Ewing MSP
[redacted under s38(1)(b)] (Mr Ewing’s office)
[redacted under s38(1)(b)] Touch by Type
[redacted under s38(1)(b)] Touch by Type
[redacted under s38(1)(b)] Scottish Government
[redacted under s38(1)(b)] Education Scotland
[redacted under s38(1)(b)] Scottish Government
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Purpose

1. The meeting was held at the request of Mr Ewing to discuss a proposal from Touch by Type for a pilot project to potentially expand access to touch typing skills by young people at school.

Introduction

2. The Cabinet Secretary noted that this issue had previously been raised by Mr Ewing in Parliament and at a Parliamentary Committee. She was keen to have the discussion and to hear a range of views.

Touch by Type

3. [redacted under s38(1)(b)] said that she had taught many children to touch type over the past decade. She believes that the main problem is that while most young people can access a computer keyboard with the “hunting and pecking” approach, they only realise the full benefits of the keyboard when they are able to type. Being confident at typing can improve grammar, vocabulary and the self-confidence of young people. She was seeking support for a pilot study to look at the benefits of touch typing and she noted international research on how typing can improve academic achievement. Mr Ewing has already been sent the research paper and [redacted under s38(1)(b)] noted that she would send the research evidence she holds to the Cabinet Secretary.

4. [redacted under s38(1)(b)] wished to conduct a pilot of the project in an Inverness school which would involve up to 15 hours training for young people aged 9 or 10 years; an age before bad habits set in. A key objective would be to train teachers who in turn could cascade that training to young people. An advantage would be that training would not need to be repeated annually and, if successful, the pilot could be rolled out throughout Scotland. In order to make the project a success, young people need the tools to learn, supervisory teaching along with an enjoyable course experience. Software is used to support the training which includes young people with additional support needs. It would not be possible for a young person to learn to touch type without the need for supervision in their learning. Nicky Grant from Highland Council had been enthused about the project and the Council may well be a willing partner in the pilot going forward.

5. The Cabinet Secretary noted the fact that we do not have a set national curriculum in Scotland that dictates what schools should teach. In addition, it would be unusual if the Government were to intervene to support one aspect of the curriculum offer over another. She was aware of the support for children with Additional Support Needs to undertake examinations using digital means and to use computers in their normal classroom setting. She asked officials to consider what resources are currently available from Education Scotland and elsewhere that support the typing skills of young people with Additional Support Needs in particular.

6. [redacted under s38(1)(b)] referred to the Doorway Online being available to all young people in schools in Scotland and that it is used with learners who are visually impaired. In addition, BBC Dance Mat Typing is available to primary pupils and there are other free resources which Education Scotland would be willing to highlight.

7. Mr Ewing acknowledged that the Government cannot dictate what should feature in the school curriculum. He regards typing as a life skill; therefore making the distinction with other areas of the curriculum. He highlighted his own positive experience of learning to type. Should Highland Council decide to proceed with the development of a pilot project, it would be helpful to have the collaboration of Education Scotland.

Actions

8. Education Scotland officials are asked to establish the range of free touch typing teaching resources that are currently available to young people with Additional Support Needs and how these are used with the digital devices that are currently used in schools. The Cabinet Secretary will then write to Mr Ewing on this matter.

7 July 2022