

Email sent to Andy Gray and Andrew Kerr in response to first CEC email 20 March 2020

Dear Andy and Andrew

Below is the email I have just sent to all EIS members. I have highlighted some of the areas about which we require urgent clarification. In addition to these broad points, there are a host of other questions that need to be addressed. A few of these are:

- In yesterday's survey, there was a clear understanding that staff who volunteered to help should be able to choose an area to work in that would minimise the chances that they would have to take public transport. This is totally disregarded in today's instructions. Where is the risk assessment around this?
- What is supposed to happen to the distance learning provision for children in the PPP schools? Staff cannot do two things at once.
- Looking at the geographic spread of the PPP schools, what happens to children of key workers in, say, the Queensferry area?
- What provision is there going to be if and when children, many of whom will be finding this a very difficult time, exhibit distressed behaviours and become violent?
- What staff:pupil ratios are you planning on implementing?
- At the moment, staff in the PPP schools are being *instructed* to attend. Other staff may have volunteered to work in hub schools. At what point will the PPP staff have the opportunity to "stand down" and be replaced by other staff?
- What are the precise details of the cleaning regimes that will be in place in each of these schools, and what should staff do if they feel that required standards are not being met (this links to earlier questions I raised with you, and to which I never received a response)?
- What provisions are being made for when a child arrives who seems to be displaying symptoms?
- What provision is there for daily testing of staff and children - given that the vast majority of the children will be the children of key workers, and the whole point of this exercise is to minimise impact on front line services, setting up a system that seems to maximise the chances that those children will become infected and bring the virus home seems to border on the criminally irresponsible.

All of these are matters that, until 4pm today, I thought we would be able to address in a calm, measured way, so that we could provide this essential provision in as safe a way as possible, so we could play our part in protecting society. I cannot begin to express my anger and upset that this has not been possible. The very real distress that you have caused to a huge number of staff by announcing this *volte-face* in such a way cannot be over-emphasised.

Another consequence of the way this has been handled is that I have not had proper opportunity to consult with my fellow trade unionists. I do not know to what extent they share my concerns. I am copying them into this message so that they will have a chance to respond themselves. I am, however, reasonably sure that they will share my anxieties about how this situation can be rescued,

and will be as anxious as I am to have these matters addressed. I trust you will be able to answer these, and the many other points that will be causing many people sleepless nights. I am willing, as I always have been, to meet with you at any time (be that virtually or face to face) to discuss how we can actually do our bit to deal with this crisis properly (the fact that I was more than happy to answer questions, and feed into the volunteer survey, on Sunday afternoon, and spent a considerable part of Sunday evening answering queries and encouraging members to respond is a small token of this goodwill – goodwill that, right now, feels as it has been thrown back at all staff. I trust we will be able to arrange an urgent meeting for first thing tomorrow morning. If this is not possible, I will be reverting to EIS HQ to get urgent advice as to next steps.

Alison

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From: Edinburgh Local Association - EIS <edinburghla@eis.org.uk>
Sent: 23 March 2020 19:12
To: Alison Murphy (Edinburgh - Sec) <edinburghla@eis.org.uk>
Subject: Edinburgh EIS Update 23 March 2020

Dear EIS Member

We are writing to you to express our deep disappointment and anger at the sudden change in the stated position of the City of Edinburgh Council and its plans to provide childcare for key workers. This decision was taken without any consultation with us and, having praised the council at the end of last week for the decisions taken, and for the constructive way it has been engaging with the unions, we find ourselves deeply dismayed by the sudden turn of events. There is clear direction from the Scottish government that LNCTs should be used to develop and discuss policy and actions. This has not been done today with this decision.

On Friday, City of Edinburgh Council told staff and parents that schools would be closed for at least a week. Yesterday it asked for volunteers to help with vital provision for key workers. Today, at 4pm, it instructs a large percentage of its staff to come into school tomorrow. This has caused genuine distress, confusion, hurt and upset. Staff have shown enormous good will over the period

of this crisis - this feels like all that has been thrown back at us, and many of you will be questioning the Council's commitment to its duty of care for us.

National EIS advice that went out on Sunday was very clear. You can find it in full here:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/Edinburgh/images//gensec220320.pdf>.

However, we would like to draw your particular attention to the following sections.

Irrespective of what sector you work in, if you are already self-isolating as a result of pregnancy, underlying health conditions or caring responsibilities for others with such conditions; or are following NHS advice in relation to displaying possible symptoms of COVID 19 or having been in close contact with those doing so, especially members of the same household, - you should continue to work remotely and should not be attending your workplace. If there is any grey area, err on the side of caution and advise your line manager that you will not be attending unless they can demonstrate that an appropriate risk assessment has taken place to address your issues. You should advise said person that you continue to be available to work remotely as required. If, as a result of schools being closed, you have inescapable childcare duties, you should indicate to the school that you are unable to attend in person for that reason but that you are happy to work remotely as per the Scottish Government guidance.

Where staff have been asked to report, bearing in mind the personal advice outlined above about those who should not do so, all engagement must be on the basis of existing NHS advice around social distancing etc. and should be accompanied by appropriate risk assessments. If you have concerns you are entitled to ask the school to address them before deciding whether you are able to attend work.

The Scottish Government guidance makes clear that local LNCTs should be involved in all discussion around these arrangements. That hasn't always been the case but we believe it must be, as basic issues need to be agreed: for example cleaning regimes in hub schools, testing of staff keeping such hubs open, operational guidelines e.g. 1 adult to 10 children ratios in a typical classroom? If employers fail to engage, we will press for the Scottish Government to intervene where required.

Every member of staff who has been instructed to attend tomorrow morning must read the above carefully, and act accordingly. Further, given that, on Friday, we were all told that schools would be closed for a week, if you are remote working from a location that means you cannot return to your base school tomorrow, or if you have made family care arrangements that cannot be undone at such short notice, you should email your line manager to inform them of that fact.

Let us reiterate - we have had no involvement in this decision. We have had no sight of any risk assessment, nor received any assurances around cleaning regimes, operational guidance or any of the other things that should have taken place before CEC's email went out. To be clear- the EIS fully supports the need

to provide essential care, and wants to do this in a safe, managed, sustainable manner that minimises virus transmission and protects staff and children. Until 4pm this afternoon, we thought that CEC wanted to work with us ensure that this could be done. We will, tonight and first thing tomorrow morning, be asking CEC for information around all these points. We will also be liaising closely with HQ, and are keeping them informed of developments.

It seems pointless to say to you not to worry - the confusion caused by this sudden change by our employers is a huge extra stressor at a time of enormous anxiety for all of us. All we can say is that we will continue to fight on your behalf. Once again, do read the national advice very carefully, and act accordingly. We will be back in touch as soon as we know more.

Try to stay safe and well.

Alison and Tom

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