

**Edinburgh EIS
CEC Budget
Written Deputation – The Reality in Schools**

Dear Edinburgh Councillor

The budget situation in Edinburgh's schools is extremely concerning. The cumulative impact of years of cuts means that schools have insufficient funds to meet even basic requirements. Yet they are being asked to deliver on an ever-increasing range of targets, and are frequently finding themselves having to support families where other front-line services have been cut. There has been genuine anger from teachers who have been lectured over the last few months over the need to "support and prioritise disadvantaged pupils" – for years teachers have been putting their hands in their pockets to provide food, stationery, clothing etc for pupils, not to mention giving hours and hours of unpaid overtime to support students in a huge variety of ways, and being told that somehow we don't care enough for vulnerable pupils has only served to reinforce the belief that the only real value politicians have for education is when it can be manipulated to serve their political agenda. Many teachers feel that, if our political leaders genuinely cared about the pupils of Edinburgh, they would never have allowed the budget situation to become as bad as it is.

The following looks at just a few of the issues facing schools. It is a very brief, and broad-brush outline – I am advised that these submissions are best kept short, and I would hope that you are all already fully aware of what is happening in Edinburgh's schools. It would seem to me that one of your chief duties is to ask searching questions about how your decisions are being implemented, to interrogate the consequences of your votes, and to revise decisions when it is clear they are not having the intended outcomes. If you require more information or explanation, I am more than happy to discuss things further.

Devolved School Management Budgets

Last year's decision to cut the DSM budget was bad enough. Subsequent decisions about how to implement that cut at school level have been devastating. A crude attempt to "poverty-proof" cuts has meant that many schools are now left with a situation where they are attempting to educate children with a budget of less than £1/pupil/day. Surely you are all aware of the flaws inherent in basing all budgetary decisions on SIMD data? Surely no one in Edinburgh is so naive as to believe that there are not pupils living in poverty in every part of this city – and that the impact of Covid-19 is making that even more true?

Added to that, there are further decisions, such as billing individual schools for supply teacher job retention payments and claw back of carry-forwards, that are making the situation even more untenable for many schools.

How can any school provide even basic education with the sort of operating budgets in place in Edinburgh? The decisions facing Edinburgh headteachers now include: reducing PSA support (so reducing support for pupils with additional needs); cutting subjects such as CDT; reducing budgets for buying core science equipment; reducing management time (putting further pressure on school leaders, who are already at breaking point, and impacting on schools' ability to do any strategic planning) – the list goes on... Further, Edinburgh's

spending on its pupils, compared with Scottish averages, raises serious questions about this council's priorities:

<https://scotland.mylocalcouncil.info/Data.aspx?id=S12000036&cat=14193&data=12486&lang=en-GB>

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Surely it is incumbent on you to look at the reality of the budgets in this city and ensure that there is enough money to fund the core activities you expect every school to deliver?

Nursery Teacher Cuts

The majority of our highly skilled nursery teachers have already been removed from nursery classes, and the remainder will be moved at the end of this session. So, at a time when everyone is talking about the impact of Covid-19 on pupils, Edinburgh's youngest children are being deprived of help from those with the greatest expertise in how to support their learning.

(As an important aside, if you want a brief summary of many of the flaws in the narrative around "lost learning", I suggest you go to

<https://www.tes.com/news/covid-catch-up-why-pressure-lengthen-school-days-relies-myth>).

When you voted for this cut, you were given information about how GTCS-registered teachers were not, in fact, crucial to maintaining high-quality early years provision. Much of the evidence cited looked at how other graduate practitioners were deployed in early years settings. Have you all actually looked at what has happened in the CEC nursery schools and classes in your wards?

Are you confident that each teacher has been replaced by a graduate practitioner? Since research is clear that the educational level of the early years workforce is one of the strongest predictors of quality outcomes, how confident are you that Edinburgh is maintaining that level? I trust you can put your hand on your heart and say that people like Early Years Practitioners are not being asked to take on work far beyond their usual remit, because of the removal of nursery teachers? I also assume that you are confident that already overburdened primary school management teams will be properly supported when they take on increased leadership responsibility for nursery classes or, even more significantly, nursery schools? If not, what actions will you be taking about that?

Instrumental music cuts

CEC will soon be looking at *how* to implement the cut in budget for instrumental music tuition. These links are just some of the things you need to be aware of when thinking about this cut.

<https://theferret.scot/music-lessons-for-children-plummet-due-to-pandemic/>

https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/General%20Documents/Wilson_Hunter_Moscardini_2020_Widening_the_gap.pdf

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Edinburgh/CECBudget2021>

Given all this, I hope you will think again about the wisdom of this decision – or, at the least, be honest with the citizens of Edinburgh about its likely consequences...

Covid recovery

Space does not allow me to go through the many issues related to covid recovery here – and I do appreciate that the budgetary situation related to the pandemic is complex, challenging and fluid. You will all be aware that the EIS is in dispute with CEC over what we see as a failure in duty of care towards staff – there are separate negotiations ongoing regarding this, and I am happy to speak to councillors around this, especially as it relates to matters such as properly utilising our supply teachers to support the recovery; what actions will make a real difference to children as we transition back to “normal”; how to alleviate the intolerable pressures on school staff.

The above are just a few of the core issues facing schools. To properly enunciate all the problems would take a much longer submission. If you genuinely want schools to do some of the things you are requiring of them, rather than it being the case that you are simply mentioning things because they are politically expedient, it is *more* funding that is needed, not less. Just a few of the things that would actually make a difference to schools’ capacity to deliver on the improvement agenda are:

- DSM budgets that are realistic, and where money from that budget is not constantly clawed back
- Properly funding initiatives such as the digital learning strategy
- Ring-fencing some of the money from the Scottish Government covid-recovery fund to properly utilise our supply teachers – and, indeed, other eligible staff, such as supply PSAs and sessional Youth and Children’s Workers
- Keeping the Closing the Gap team running for 2021/22, and making more strategic use of Lifelong Learning Locality Development Officers and others with an appropriate Youth and Children’s work remit
- Providing more support for school leadership teams, including properly funding posts so that there is sufficient management time to actually overtake the work required
- Maintaining, and expanding, the PSA workforce

I hope that, when you make your budget decisions – and, perhaps more importantly, when you continually interrogate the implications and outcomes of those decisions - you will keep these points in mind. If you, as the leaders of our city, are serious about wanting the best for the children of Edinburgh, you *have* to ensure schools have the funding they need to be able to support and educate those children.

Kind regards

Alison

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PS: Another question for you... Some councillors have been publicly critical of the levels of live learning being offered by schools. I'm curious as to why it is seen as easy for teachers to be able to deliver live lessons for pupils, yet CEC Council cannot offer its citizens the option to make live deputations to its meetings? What does this say about the priority the council gives to democracy, and for the ability for councillors to be able to question those making representations?