

Dear Andy

Firstly, thank you for your constructive response to our initial notification of our dispute. As we discussed, the post-Christmas move to remote learning for the majority of pupils meant that many of the issues we raised had to be put on hold. However, the imminent return of nursery-P3 pupils, alongside some senior phase pupils and possible adjustments to arrangements in special schools means that we need to look again at measures to restore the confidence of EIS members that schools are safe working environments, and that CEC is fulfilling its duty of care towards its employees.

The following is a list of some of the key measures members are raising. It is not exhaustive - I am being contacted daily by members raising fresh concerns, and more are likely to emerge next week, as increasing numbers of pupils return to classrooms - but it does cover some of the most pressing issues.

Supply teachers This would normally be one of the busiest times of year for supply teachers. Instead, our supply colleagues, who are an essential part of the workforce, report that there have been virtually no requests for supply work. At the same time, the rest of the teaching workforce are working utterly unsustainable hours, that are putting their health and wellbeing at real risk, not to mention negatively impacting on the quality of education they are able to deliver. CEC not only has a moral obligation to take measures to support its supply staff, but making better use of their skills would be a pragmatic way of alleviating some of the strains on schools. Scottish Government is making funding for extra staffing available to local authorities - we need CEC to commit to ring-fencing some of this so that supply teachers can be used to:

- Provide extra in-person support in schools
- Cover all staff absence, so that already hard-pressed permanent staff are not also being asked to cover for absent colleagues
- Support staffing for composite P3/4 classes, in line with Scottish Government guidance
- Provide help with remote learning, especially in secondary schools as some staff are diverted to supporting pupils with in-person practical work
- Provide targeted support for vulnerable pupils, both in-person and remotely (potentially through links with the Closing the Gap team, though other approaches are possible).

The Scottish Government has said that all supply teachers should be being utilised to aid the covid response, and we want CEC to commit to offering work to all on its supply list.

The above covers the need to expand the *teaching* workforce, but it is also vital that Scottish Government money is used to expand the entire school workforce - this might include offering more hours to PSAs, cleaners etc, as well as employing more staff.

Physical distancing in primary schools

Physical distancing is cited by all guidance as being one of the most essential mitigations. It is vital that primary staff are able to maintain 2m distancing from colleagues *and* pupils. The following adaptations should aid with this:

- Class sizes should be reduced. This will not only aid with physical distancing, ventilation and other mitigations, but is also the best way of

supporting pupil recovery, as it enables more individualised attention for each child. Supply teachers can be utilised to support this - either by working directly with the classes, or by supporting remote learning/key worker provision for older children and thus releasing other staff.

- Every school needs to look at the rooms being used for N-P3 classes, and ensure that they provide sufficient space to enable distancing. Where this is not the case, classes should be moved. This will have the added advantage of aiding with ventilation (see below for further on this).

Face masks

Concerns around the increased transmissibility of the new variant, combined with worries over the practicality of maintaining physical distancing from pupils, mean that many staff feel that cloth face coverings offer insufficient protection. We call on CEC to make FFP2 masks available to all staff who require them.

Support at school entrances

You will be aware that, before Christmas, some schools had real concerns over transmission risks due to congestion when parents/carers were dropping off and picking up pupils. This is something the First Minister has highlighted as a major issue. We want to see relevant schools offered extra support around managing this issue. This to include:

- Clear messaging to parents from CEC, highlighting this matter
- Extra support to those schools where their location provides particular challenges - this might well involve help from Police Scotland around traffic management etc. Other parts of CEC might also be able to help with things like markings on pavements, and there is potential to utilise community support officers, street wardens and others with relevant experience
- Offering extended hours to support staff
- Advice to schools around other specific mitigations, such as timetable alterations

Staggered timetables

Many schools will be looking at timetable adjustments - this might be in response to the need to facilitate in-school practical work in the senior phase, or to reduce mixing at breaks and starts and ends of the school day. This places extra burdens on staff, due to supervision requirements. Schools need to be offered practical support to help with this - offering support staff increased hours, so that rotas can be extended is one obvious measure, but a more general increase in staffing would also help. As well as supply teachers, lifelong learning staff with an expertise in youth and children's work would be able to help here.

Ventilation

Edinburgh EIS commends the work CEC has done on this issue, and welcomes the fact that further guidance will be issued soon. However, this does remain an area of considerable concern. It is important that *all* staff are informed about protocols - highlighting this at SORT briefings, and emphasising the need to share information with all colleagues is key. Staff also need to be able to access CO₂ data for their rooms, know what levels indicate concern and be informed

about appropriate action - this may involve the purchase of additional CO₂ monitors, where current monitoring is insufficient.

Pressures around remote learning

As more staff are required to be in school, delivering in-person teaching, the pressures on those delivering remote learning will increase further - and they were already a major source of stress. CEC needs to:

- Make it clear to all staff that no one should be trying to simultaneously deliver remote learning and work with pupils in school
- Support secondary schools to make any necessary alterations to timetables so that they can accommodate the requirements about senior phase practical working
- Communicate clearly with parents/carers about the need to be realistic about expectations
- Utilise supply staff to support remote learning provision and in class support

Senior phase practical work

It is likely that we will need to discuss issues around this in more detail in the coming weeks, as we look at the specific arrangements in schools. However, it is already clear that there are going to be particular pressures on staff in smaller departments. Schools may well need support in communicating with parents around a temporary reduction in what can be delivered to BGE pupils in particular subjects, as staff focus on senior phase work. Utilising supply staff will be important here, but we recognise that there may not be sufficient subject specialist supply staff in all areas. However, remote learning provision could be temporarily expanded in some non-practical subject areas to make up for this, using the skills of our supply colleagues. Freeing up subject specialists from providing support to key worker and vulnerable children will also ease pressures, and is another area where supply staff can help.

Other issues

- We have already raised the need to encourage the wearing of face coverings by secondary pupils. This, alongside supporting those pupils in maintaining physical distancing, will need to be addressed as numbers in schools increase.
- Edinburgh EIS has, on several occasions now, asked for the numbers of pupils and staff who had to self-isolate over the Christmas holidays, due to being identified as a contact through their attendance in school on 21st and 22nd December. We should be grateful if that information could be supplied as a matter of urgency - and we would also ask for the same information relating to any staff who had to self-isolate over the February half-term.
- Edinburgh EIS welcomes the steps CEC have taken to relieve pressures on school leaders around Trace and Protect. As numbers in schools grow, these pressures may mount, and we would ask that CEC looks to ensure that school leaders are properly supported with this.

Special schools

There have already been highly productive discussions around special school provision, and the EIS would like to note the positive engagement of Anna Gray and her team. However, as matters evolve, further concerns are arising from

members. However, these tend to be quite specific to each school, so it may be that the most productive way forward here is for myself and EIS LA President, Tom Britton to have further discussions with Anna.

As I said, this is not an exhaustive list, but it does cover some key concerns. I should welcome your thoughts. I would also ask that we meet to discuss. Given the importance of these matters, such a meeting should include Tom Britton and Phill Pearce, in their roles as EIS LA President and Vice President, as well as myself.

Kind regards

Alison