

Open Letter to the City of Edinburgh Council 17 March 2020

Dear colleagues

We are writing an open letter to you to share our deep concerns about the current situation around the Coronavirus. Clearly this a complex and a fast-moving situation however we wanted to take the time to share the concerns of our members at this time.

We want to acknowledge at the present time that the decision to keep schools open is being guided by national governments. However, it is clear from what our members have said to us that there are deep concerns, anxiety and ongoing worry about the decision to keep schools open. There is a sense of bewilderment, confusion and a degree of anger at the contradictory message from the governments to socially isolate, to cut down on travel etc. at the same time as seeking to keep schools open. We have been contacted by many members highlighting concerns about ill pupils in schools, of the impact of colleagues who are ill or have been told to self-isolate for up to 12 weeks and how this affects the operational viability of each school.

As both UK and Scottish governments have said we are at the start of a phase in which the expectations are that the number of those contracting Coronavirus will rise steeply. This will clearly increase the fears and anxiety of our members. Both governments have said that decisions will be guided by the evidence – it is important that this evidence includes a very clear understanding of the incredibly high levels of stress, anxiety and distress being felt by all staff. We would be happy to share with you examples of some of the communications we are receiving – communications from people who are clearly very distressed, feeling unsupported, and are, in some cases, giving evidence of a level of anxiety that is leading us, as their union, to query with them whether they are actually fit to be at work. We have particular concern for school managers, who are being put in an almost impossible situation as they balance their duty of care towards staff and pupils with their need to follow instructions from their managers.

We ask for your support in reassuring our members that everything that can be will be done to ensure that the staffing situation will be central in determining whether or not a school should stay open, that guidance to members with underlying health issues will be clear and supportive and that our members can have confidence that you will make the best decisions with the welfare and protection of both pupils and staff. We would ask that you do all you can to relay these concerns to national decision makers (COSLA, Scottish Government etc) and we will be doing the same through those channels open to us. Ultimately, though, City of Edinburgh is our employer, and the duty of care for staff rests there. We hope you will consider the above when deciding how to fulfil that duty of care.

Tom Britton

Edinburgh LA President

Alison Murphy

Edinburgh LA Secretary