



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

Briefing Paper on Pupil “Strikes” in Order to Promote Climate Change Action

Background

The school “strike” movement started in August 2018 when Greta Thunberg, then 15, held a solo protest outside the Swedish Parliament. In recent months the ‘Youth Strike 4 Climate Change’ has promoted pupils strikes (or more accurately, non-attendance) and these have grown and so that pupils from many countries are now not attending school on Fridays (or in some cases part of Fridays). This movement now includes pupils from schools in Scotland and the next “strike” is planned for 15 March 2019 when there will also be a rally outside the Scottish Parliament.

Some Councils, such as Edinburgh & Glasgow, have agreed not to take “punitive action” against pupils that “strike” on 15th March 2019, and to record such absences as authorised if the school receives prior parental/carer permission. The EIS understands that other Councils are considering similar policies.

EIS Policy

The EIS believes that climate change is a topic that teachers and pupils should continue to engage with, as set out in the Curriculum for Excellence, in order for pupils to play a role as responsible citizens in wider society and also to allow them to make informed consumer choices in the future. Members should exercise usual professional protocol about discussing anything “political” with pupils and certainly shouldn’t leave themselves open to being accused of encouraging pupils to strike.

EIS policies support reducing our carbon footprint and seeking alternatives to fossil fuels. Whilst the EIS has some sympathy, therefore, with the aims of the “strikes”, it does not have a position of endorsing participation in them.

The advice below is intended to support members in dealing with this issue sensitively, whilst ensuring that appropriate protections are in place for both staff and pupils

EIS Advice to Members including Headteachers

All EIS members should follow their employer’s advice for dealing with unauthorised absences and follow any specific advice given by the Employer on dealing with pupils that do not attend school owing to the ‘Youth Strike 4 Climate Change’.

Ensuring pupil safety is paramount. Schools and staff have a duty of care towards young people as well as a need to ensure appropriate cognisance of child protection issues. Existing procedures and protocols, therefore, should not be deviated from unless expressly altered or relaxed by the employer.

Pupils may seek advice on participation in the “strike”. Clearly GTCS standards make clear that it would be inappropriate for teachers to potentially influence pupil decision making, irrespective of any personal sympathies which may be held. For pupils who are 16 or over, any decision to participate in the “strike” can be made on an independent basis and then processed in line with the Local Authority’s policy; for those under 16, pupils might be advised that they should seek parental endorsement if they are going to be absent and that parents should inform the school.

This minimises the risk to pupils in relation to unauthorised absence.

Councils and headteachers may wish to advise parents/carers that they are responsible for their child during the absence from school and for their journeys to/from school if pupils are absent for part of the school day.

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