

Class sizes attacked by parents

Edinburgh parents have welcomed the news that a solution will be proposed at the full Council Committee on Thursday to curb the size of early years classes – and it will not cost the Council a penny.

Labour and Tories have joined forces to submit a motion at Thursday's council meeting, the day children start back at school. The Greens said they will also support the motion.

It is claimed that Edinburgh P1 classes are too big and apparently the Convener of Education, Children & Families has told the press that her department is overstaffed, over-managed and needs to become more efficient.

The motion asks the department Director, Gillian Tee, to look into solving both problems by transferring back-room staff, who are qualified teachers, into the front line.

The motion refers to schools where the number of classes have recently been cut, leading to larger early years classes. One such school is Roseburn Primary. A parent there welcomed the news. "It's great that our councillors finally have a chance to solve the twin problems of bloated classes and a bloated bureaucracy at a stroke. Teachers are flying desks in HQ whilst their colleagues are struggling to introduce the Curriculum for Excellence in classes way above the guidelines. If the Council move back-room staff to the front line, kids all over the city will benefit. For years the department has been cutting schools at the expense of building an empire at Waverley Court."

The motion sets the ball rolling, by asking Gillian Tee to provide a report detailing two things: a) class sizes in all Edinburgh's P1-P3 classes and b) which of her non-school

employees are teachers- and which ones might need refresher training should a decision be made to deploy them back to the classroom.

The motion reminds councillors of The Scottish Government's pledge to reduce class sizes in P1-P3 to 18 and the desire to cap class sizes at 25 for early years. Over 2,000 of the 3,868 pupils starting in Edinburgh's P1 will be in classes over 25, according to an FOI request and a statement from Councillor Marilyn MacLaren earlier this year.

Last week parents launched a campaign calling for cuts to be made to bureaucracy and for managers to be sent into classrooms. The "Kids Not Suits" campaign criticises the city council for failing to tackle the education department's massive back-room costs at a time when school budgets are being cut and class sizes in many schools are rising.

The anonymous online campaign was launched by a parent whose child will be starting P1 in a class of 30 at Roseburn Primary School in a fortnight.

He said "Six months ago we were told Sammy would be going into a class of 23 – then the Council cut a teacher from the school and all the parents are very unhappy about the change. As well as the 30 children going to P1, there are 7 starting school who are joining 15 older P2 kids in a composite class. Children have been separated from their chums after they've spent the last two years together at nursery. Because we are a teacher short, all the lower primary classes are being reorganised up to P4 and they'll all be packed like sardines. Friends are being split up all over the place. It's daft.

Other schools have big classes too. Here's a chance for 6,000 early years children from all across Edinburgh who are in classes over the guidelines to get the most out of school."

According to recent Government statistics, Edinburgh ranked 6th worst out of 31 Scottish Councils on P1 class sizes in

2009, the last year for which figures are available.

The parent is hoping that any citizen across the city who is unhappy about the large class sizes and a top-heavy bureaucracy will help the campaign by asking their councillors to support the motion at the full Council meeting on August 19th.

Last week Council chiefs hit back at the campaign, saying that "a huge majority of our resources go directly to schools, with a relatively small amount funding back-office services."

Research has shown that Children & Families has 524 staff involved in back-room services and management. The figure excludes the other 3,310 who are not teachers but work directly with children, such as community centre and nursery staff, psychologists, residential care officers and social workers.

Of these 524 staff, 190 are managers. Said the Roseburn parent "I think many of these people are ex-teachers. Councillor MacLaren said back in March that over 50 of her schools would have P1 classes over the guidelines. So if even just 10% of these back-room staff were moved back to the classrooms that would mean one more teacher for every one of these schools. It would make a huge difference for early years pupils."

The parent has outlined 12 ways to sort out Children & Families problems and cut it down to size by learning from other Council departments and cutting duplication with them.

These are detailed on the Kids Not Suits website at www.roseburn32.plus.com where residents can find out how to lobby their councillors to support this week's motion.