

Councillor Godzik Worried about Capital City Partnership

by Councillor Paul Godzik



The recent comments from the Chamber of Commerce on the performance of Edinburgh's schools follow a raft of worrying statistics on the education and employment prospects for youngsters in Edinburgh.

Figures published in December showing that the gap between the best and worst performing high schools is widening, plus news that Edinburgh's youth unemployment figures are amongst the worst in Scotland, should act as a wake-up call to the Lib Dem/SNP Administration currently running our city.

Yet far from attempting to address these issues the recent Lib Dem/SNP Council budget sees the very real prospect of exacerbating these problems. In my view we risk creating a 'lost generation' similar to those trapped in the cycle of poverty and unemployment that scarred Thatcher's Britain.

There is no doubt that we have many excellent schools in Edinburgh, with a dedicated workforce and some fantastic facilities, thanks to the investment by the previous Labour Council which delivered over 30 new schools. Talking to teachers and other educational professionals in schools across our city, I am constantly struck by their commitment and passion for the job. In my own ward, schools such as James Gillespie's, Boroughmuir and St Thomas' High Schools perform well above the national average, and we should celebrate their success.

Yet across Edinburgh many schools are performing below average. Edinburgh is now below the national average in

Standard Grade results, and with regard to Higher Grades there is a vast disparity – our highest performing school achieves over 50% of pupils passing 3 or more Highers, our lowest school sits at 0%. But while there are complex reasons for this disparity I see no real desire within the Lib Dem-led Council Administration to deal with this matter.

Squeezing funding for our high schools and removing some of our most experienced teachers, following on from year-on-year budget cuts for head teachers, will simply compound these problems. As head teachers have stated, planned budget cuts on principal teachers and management support put at risk the smooth introduction of the new curriculum and will 'impact on raising attainment'.

Along with national changes to the Educational Maintenance Allowance, and on-going concern about tuition fees I fear many children from poorer backgrounds must feel they are being discouraged from education, and that is surely not the message we wish to send.

On youth unemployment the figures are even starker. One in six teenagers in the Capital is leaving school and going straight on the dole, one of the worst records in the country. That is why it is extraordinary that the SNP Government is withdrawing funding from the Capital City Partnership, which assists 3,500 unemployed people per year. I believe there is a vital need for the Council to ensure that the Partnership survives. It is encouraging that Labour in the Scottish Parliament is pushing for a Scottish Futures Jobs Fund and the reintroduction of Project Scotland, both will help young people into work. Quite simply jobs and education need to be key priorities.

The global economic downturn is of course the reason for cuts and falling budgets, and we can all argue ourselves hoarse on who was to blame for this. There is also no getting away from the fact that there are some very difficult decisions to be

made. Yet if we fail to invest in our children and young people, our most valuable asset, then we will fail as a nation to emerge strongly from this downturn. We cannot avoid cuts of some kind, but the recent Council budget shows that the Lib Dems and the SNP are making the wrong cuts, at the wrong time, and it is our children that will pay the price.