

# Councillor blogs – Melanie Main on education and parent representatives

At yesterday's full council meeting and AGM the Green Group put forward an addendum to the council's proposal to appoint one parent representative to the Education, Children and Families Committee. The Green Group were keen that more than one person was appointed but their proposal was defeated when put to the vote.

*The addendum read:*

*"Recognises that a second parent member on the Committee could provide continuity, continued representation where one parent member is unavailable, share the workload and improve effective representation. Therefore calls for the inclusion of options for an additional parent member of committee in the annual Governance Framework Report to be considered by Council in June this year."*



Cllr Melanie Main

Green Education spokesperson, Councillor Melanie Main proposed that the City Council's Education Committee should increase the number of parent representatives from one to two, recognising that there are already two teacher representatives and three religious representatives.

Here she explains why.

Lindsay Law, the first parent to sit on Education, Children and Families committee has been a breath of fresh air, her

contributions always constructive and positive. At her final meeting Lindsay made a point of thanking the Director and lead officer, Moyra Wilson for improving relationships between the Council and the parent body, but Lindsay herself should take considerable credit for the positive developments we have seen.

But it is not always easy being the sole member representing a group on a committee. For Lindsay, a volunteer and working parent of young children, I'm sure this brought challenges.

Being the only group member on any committee can be daunting – as I know all too well as a Green Councillor. ECF is the largest Council committee – 87 primary schools, 23 secondary, our special schools, nurseries and early years' centres, let alone children and young people's health and social care, it is a large diverse constituency and a very wide remit.

So we are asking a lot of one volunteer parent. One person who is not a councillor nor supported by a political group that provides vital support, experience and back-up which is so important for effective committee participation.

If our schools are to be successful in tackling the issues we face, and there are many, they have to engage fully with their school communities.

Our teachers, parents and carers are an integral part of the school community and I believe both should be given a real effective voice and representation at all levels of decision making

In compliance with best practice, we afford our teachers, two representatives, Should we not give our parents the same consideration?

In fact there is a fundamental imbalance on Education Committee with only one parent, two teachers and three religious representatives, as required by law. Whilst it is

not within the council gift to change the latter, we could redress the balance with 2 parent representatives.

Two members with terms overlapping would allow for continuity and experience.

Two members would ensure representation when one member was unable to attend.

Two members will help share the workload and build resilience and experience across the vast remit of the committee

I have welcomed and supported the changes made by the Capital Coalition – to reduce the term served and to allow substitutes of parents, but they do not change the basic imbalance.

For example, a substitute for the parent rep, perhaps attending committee for the first and only time, possibly thrown in at the deep end, and very probably attending at short notice – a sole parent could understandably find it far harder to contribute to the business of the largest committee, than a parent representative elected for a two year term.

This council should rightly be proud of Edinburgh's engagement with parents. I remember, at my first meeting as Nursery representative at the Consultative Committee with Parents, the then Labour Convener, proudly reminding us that Edinburgh was the first Council to introduce a CCWP.

So Edinburgh should continue to lead with best practice – building on the initial successful two years of parent representation on Education committee, by appointing two representative parent members.

You can watch Melanie deliver the Green Group amendment [here](#) at 1.04.13.