

# Teaching union says politicians must listen to teachers

Scotland's teaching union has warned that Edinburgh politicians need to 'listen to school leaders' about the 'enormous strain' teachers are facing, ahead of a return to schools next week.

Andy Gray, Chief Education Officer at The City of Edinburgh Council, has written to parents outlining the plan for reopening school from 15 March. You can read the letter in full below.

Parents have been informed that "senior phase pupils (S4-6) who are taking national qualifications will be prioritised for face-to-face lessons, but all year groups can expect a minimum of half a day per week of in-school learning".

Opposition councillors have told the local democracy reporting service that the council's plans for some Edinburgh schoolchildren to only return to classrooms for a half-day a week are 'inadequate, unclear and likely to make lives more complicated'. However, Scotland's largest teaching union has criticised those calling for an 'accelerated' return to classroom teaching.



Alison Murphy, of the Educational Institute of Scotland's Edinburgh local association, said: "Teachers are incredibly keen to be able to return to doing the job we love and are trained for – teaching pupils face to face in classrooms -but this needs to be done safely.

"We have seen how quickly case numbers can rise, and rushing to a full return of all pupils risks throwing hard-won gains into reverse.

"The very worst thing that could happen is for us to have to move back into lockdown, or for large numbers of individuals and classes to have to repeatedly self-isolate because of outbreaks in schools.

"We have seen just how disruptive and damaging that is. Further, it is clear that, particularly with some of the new variants, transmissibility from older pupils is very similar to adults.

"Thus, schools must be able to maintain 2m distancing between pupils, as well as between pupils and staff, and between staff.

"This is as much for the protection of families as it is for those working in schools – to quote directly from a SAGE-endorsed report, 'children aged 12-16 played a significantly higher role in introducing infection into households'.

"For every parent calling on all pupils to return at once, there will be many more worried about the risks of their children bringing the virus home."

The council has indicated that some pupils will only be in school for half a day each week, but The Scottish Government has said it has a 'clear expectation' that all high school pupils will be full time after Easter.

A government spokesperson said: "It is for schools and

councils to decide how to safely balance in-school learning based on local circumstances and what schools can safely deliver within the coronavirus guidelines.

“Every school building is different, so what can be done safely in each can only be decided locally.

“Subject to progress in suppressing the virus, we have a clear expectation that all secondary school pupils will be back in school full-time following the Easter holidays.”

Ms Murphy said: “It is vital that schools are given time and support to plan how to manage a safe return.

“Far from calling for an acceleration of the return, politicians need to listen to school leaders about the enormous strain this latest change in guidance is placing on them, and support them in ensuring that they can do this in a way that suits their specific circumstances and constraints.

“It is time for the point scoring to stop, and for everyone to listen to those who best know what will work in schools – the teachers and other professionals who have dedicated their lives to the pupils of Scotland, and who need to be trusted to do the best for the children in their care.”

*by Joseph Anderson Local Democracy Reporter*

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