

Letter to the Editor – schools crisis and the need for scrutiny

Letter from Rod Grant, Headmaster of Clifton Hall School, Newbridge.

I read with interest the front-page story in today's Herald ([Schools Crisis: Number of teachers off with stress soars; Tuesday, 4th May 2021](#)), regarding the increasing numbers of teachers absent because of stress.

Many readers' natural inclination will be to say that teachers are misguided, underworked, have long holidays and are just 'moaners'. I don't think teachers are helped by the current stance of our Unions, which, all too often, take a position that is clearly adding fuel to the fire when it comes to the increasingly negative perception of our profession within the wider community.

Having said that, anyone who thinks the teaching profession is 'cushy' should join us. There are so many leaving the profession that there are plentiful opportunities for those who wish to change career and enjoy long holidays and easy days. Hmm, I thought not. Colleges aren't exactly seeing a rampage of enthusiastic want-to-be teacher hordes at the moment, and little wonder.



Rod Grant

After more than a decade of woeful mismanagement by this Scottish Government, we find ourselves in a worrying period of uncertainty. If the article is correct (and there is little reason to doubt this, as the data provided comes through a Freedom of Information request to local authorities) then we really do need to have a Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills that enjoys the respect of the profession and who is willing to be more proactive in their determination to improve the system.

Here are some of the current issues. Our Secondary teachers have been tasked with providing grades for this year's qualification process. I understand the reasoning for this but the SQA issued 8 pieces of Guidance in the month of April alone. All of which has to be read, digested and acted upon. Then, teachers face the knowledge that their personal assessments are being judged by external moderators, parents of pupils and pupils themselves. The pressure of this judgement of standards is intense, to say the least.

Add to this the burden of excessive paperwork, fewer support staff (the lifeblood of a successful school), increasing numbers of pupils with additional support needs, increasing numbers of pupils who have English as their second language, a policy of inclusion which supports disruptive pupils at the expense of their harder working and more engaged peer group, a constant stream of new initiatives and an unprecedented marking workload and we have the ingredients for a recipe that does not serve anyone well.

I am not here to say 'poor teachers'; I *am* here to say that our profession is exactly that – professional, hardworking and dedicated to Scotland's children. The fact that teachers are leaving the profession in increasing numbers and suffering from unprecedented levels of stress stems from the fact that those in power are unable to let go of the reins. We are currently seeing a system that is overly controlled.

We need an education system that is well resourced, properly funded, and run by the professionals who actually understand the pedagogical approaches central to academic success. We need less interference, fewer initiatives, a less politically correct 'agenda' and a return to an academic era more aligned to our respected heritage. There are far too many centrally run Government agencies with no independent body overseeing the system. The SQA? A Government Agency. HMIe? A Government Agency. Education Scotland? A Government Agency. Therein lies the problem – no criticism, no scrutiny, a system reliant on those in power saying, 'nothing to see here; move along'.

Well, let me tell you, there's plenty to see here and it ain't pretty.

Rod Grant