

# **Councillor calls for YouTube block to be lifted**

**A councillor who has been inundated with emails from pupils, teachers and parents after access to YouTube was blocked in Edinburgh schools has called on the council to let youngsters back on the site.**

Cllr Christopher Cowdy described the move as an “overreaction”. It came following reports some pupils had viewed “concerning material” on their school devices.

The ban has been in place over the last two weeks while the council reviewed “permissions to access online services”.

Although it has since been lifted for teachers, students are still unable to watch YouTube on computers and iPads across the education estate.

“We’re continuing to work with our digital partners to ensure safe access for pupils,” a council spokesperson said on Monday.



Christopher Cowdy Conservative councillor for Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Cowdy, who is set to raise the issue at a full council meeting on Thursday, said while he understood the importance of preventing pupils from viewing inappropriate and harmful content, they can already “access pretty much anything they want from their own devices”.

“The council have not banned every single unsavoury website so part of my argument is if they can already access it I really don’t see the benefit of banning YouTube,” he said.

He added the site is “very important” for learning.

“I really got that impression from teachers, from the parents and from the pupils,” he said. “I got probably about 50 emails – these were very compelling, really well written emails.”

Cllr Cowdy reported that a headteacher from a local school said they were also “inundated with emails about the YouTube ban”.

He continued: "Pupils over the last couple of years – not just because of Covid but because already there are issues about attainment – every tool should be available and YouTube is something that I think a lot of children engage with, and to remove that is just putting another obstacle in the way.

"Safeguarding issues are important, online particularly as we're all aware of the huge variety of information both negative and positive you can get online – and I understand that schools have a responsibility to check on that.

"But it's my understanding also that YouTube is a pretty well-renowned platform and they do have good filtering systems already in place."

The councillor, who represents Fountainbridge and Craiglockhart, added he suspects there has been "a lack of understanding from the council about how important this is".

"I think there's a lack of balance and an overreaction and I think it's maybe typical of a council's knee jerk reaction," he said.

"The council does have an obligation to ensure the children are safe but I think they've really got to balance that with the educational benefits that come out of YouTube."

His motion being tabled later in the week will seek the support of councillors to "overturn the blanket ban on YouTube at schools to allow pupils to access material vital to their educational attainment".

An Edinburgh City Council spokesperson said: "The council has reinstated staff access to YouTube across the Education estate and we're continuing to work with our digital partners to ensure safe access for pupils.

"Our secure learning platform ClickView is still available for curricular content. All parties will be informed as soon as

the issues have been resolved.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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