

Widespread IT problems in Edinburgh schools persist

Teachers and pupils in Edinburgh are at “breaking point” due to widespread IT problems in schools which leave some waiting over half an hour just to log on to a computer, a teaching union has said.

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) has been flagging the issues for over a year but said the situation is now “utterly intolerable,” reporting a further rise in complaints from teachers since returning after the summer holidays.

EIS called for pressure to be put on the company paid by the council to run school IT systems to ensure improvements are made.

The union said tech troubles – which include lengthy waits to get logged in, slow internet browsing, troubles loading even small files such as word documents and problems using video conferencing software – mean some teachers now come into work early just to ensure they can use their computer, whilst others are reportedly “double planning” lessons with back-up plans.

Council officers blamed new anti-virus software installed which was “eating into the capacity on devices” and said the problems “are now resolved”.

However this was disputed by EIS Edinburgh secretary Alison Murphy, who said the majority of members working across the capital felt things were “the same or worse” when asked only last week.

Ms Murphy laid bare the situation facing “a very large number of schools” during a deputation to the education committee on Tuesday.

“The situation is utterly intolerable. We cannot improve learning and teaching if we do not have the basic tools to do the job,” she said.

She told councillors the system “is just not working,” adding one teacher told her persistent computer problems was a “main contributor” to taking time off for work-related stress.

“The staff in the schools are putting hours and hours and hours of work into this,” she continued. “I’ve lost track of how many teachers have told me they are coming in early to work every morning simply to turn on a computer and wait for it to log on. That is not sustainable and we have to have some action around this.

“A number of teachers are actually double planning, they’ve got the lesson they want to do but they’ve got the back up lesson in case it doesn’t work.

“Something needs to happen to improve this. We’ve been asking this to be fixed for months now and it has not gotten fixed. This can’t go on, it just can’t.

“Computers need to be able to log on swiftly and then they need to be able to run a reasonable number of programs – it is as basic as that.

“Students are at breaking point, staff are at breaking point. It has already led to people being off sick.

“CGI is the company that you guys have paid a very large

amount of money to to do this and somehow this is not working.”

Ms Murphy questioned the contract agreement between the council and CGI, asking what the penalties are if improvements aren't made – and how the company can be pressured to act.

But the IT crisis was played down by officers, who said the problems were sorted out by the contractor at the beginning of November.

The City of Edinburgh Council's Director of customer and digital services, Nicola Harvey, said: “The issues are now resolved. What we do know is there was an issue with what's called Trend anti-virus software on laptops, that was actually eating into the capacity on devices and was slowing them down.

“CGI have made two configuration changes to devices and we know that problem is now resolved.”

Responding following the meeting, Ms Murphy pointed to a survey conducted with Edinburgh EIS members last week – after the changes were reportedly made to the IT network – which showed 90 per cent ‘have not noticed an improvement’ whilst 70 per cent expressed the ‘same levels of dissatisfaction as before’ and 10 per cent said the situation is worse.

“Unfortunately the evidence is that it has not in the vast majority of schools been fixed,” she said.

“60 different schools responded and the majority of them said things were either the same or worse, certainly very few said it had gotten better. The situation, as far as we can see, is unresolved.”

by Donald Turvill

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