

Plans to cut transition teachers criticised

An Edinburgh teacher has criticised council plans to cut the city's education budget and cut jobs to save cash, saying that schools are already at breaking point.

Papers released ahead of the council budget include proposals to slash millions from education to help plug a £76 million gap. Councillors will meet this month to debate and agree the final spending plans.

Council officers have said they could not guarantee the "very tough funding decisions" wouldn't have a "detrimental effect". However, they added it was essential to protect "core" teaching staff.

Part of the cutbacks suggested to balance the books this year is to stop using 'transition teachers,' a post set up by the council in the wake of the pandemic to ensure that all pupils move from primary to secondary school as smoothly as possible.

It is understood that there are around 20 working in schools across the capital. One, who spoke to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, was dismayed at the suggestion they were either disposable or "additional" staff.

A budget report said £1.6 million could be cut this year increasing to £2.4 million in 2024/25 "focussing on a review of transition teacher posts and additional specific pupil support allocations made to support P1-P3".

The report also stated: “These posts were allocated to provide additional support during the pandemic and can now be removed without impacting on core teaching activities or core support activities.”

However the transition teacher, who works in several primary and secondary schools in Edinburgh and asked to remain anonymous, said there was “nothing in the job description about it being a Covid recovery role”.

The teacher said: “We were employed on permanent basis to do a very particular job.

“They see us as additional – but the work we’re doing is absolutely vital.

“There isn’t anybody on the ground in the education system that thinks this isn’t a valuable position. Everyone is coming round to the idea that this is really beneficial.”

The teacher explained that the main task of transition teachers is to “support efforts to raise attainment”, saying “we know the primary to secondary transition is a pivotal moment, and that attainment tends to drop after transition.

“Already we can see the benefits of having a teacher that really knows these pupils and can cascade that information in person, in the moment in classrooms alongside their high school teachers.”

The Edinburgh Council employee added it “absolutely beggars belief” the council would cut school jobs amid ongoing industrial action.

“This is exactly why we are striking at the moment. It’s not just about our salary – it’s about how our schools are chronically understaffed, we are chronically under resourced and they are proposing to take away yet more resources that we really need.

“I don’t accept the argument at all that we can afford any kind of cuts from education, they would have to be looking elsewhere for these.

“Everyone we are working with – parents in particular and the pupils themselves – really value the changes that we’re making to improve the transition and make it a smoother one. The idea that we’re additional is simply not a true representation.”

The proposed cuts were discussed at the council’s Finance & Resources committee on Tuesday.

Edinburgh’s Acting Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning Lorna French said transition teachers are a “very valuable group of staff”.

She added: “They work across sectors, they identify children with learning loss and then they put measures in place with the high school.

“We can’t say that removing any team will not have a detrimental effect per se but what we can say is if we have to make very tough funding decisions then we have to protect the core teachers that are in place in front of classes.

“This was an additional team that we anticipated would make improvements.

“They have, however when we had to take the very very difficult decisions that we took as a group, it was recognised it was an additional team that we could do without in the coming years if we absolutely had to.”

Councillor Alys Mumford, Greens, challenged the report for using “potentially misleading language”.

She said: “The wording in the report does say that this role can be removed without any adverse impact, and I feel like that’s a bold statement to make.”

by Donald Turvill

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