

Temporary classrooms to be used in two primary schools after the holidays

Pupils at two Edinburgh primary schools are to be moved into temporary classrooms after it emerged that roofs there had been built using a potentially dangerous “crumbling concrete”.

Some pupils at Trinity and Cramond primary schools will be taught in portable classroom units when the new term begins next month, following the discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

Earlier this year the council said 15 buildings it owns “may” contain the concrete mix – which government officials fear could pose a “risk to life” – and surveys are ongoing to determine if any others are at risk in addition to the schools identified so far.

Other local authorities including West Lothian Council have already set out plans to spend millions replacing RAAC panels in schools, however the cost to Edinburgh is not yet known.

At Trinity Primary in Newhaven, the bubbly, lightweight material was found in roofs above the kitchen and the ground floor classroom, admin and toilet area. As a result four classes will move into makeshift classrooms being erected in the nearby Trinity Academy playground.

The same contingency plan will be put in place at Cramond, where two blocks each containing two separate rooms and toilets will be sited on the netball pitch in time for the start of the new term.

An email to parents said the temporary measure will “provide a very good quality learning environment” and support would be on hand to ensure the transition for pupils was “as smooth as possible”.

The units were previously used at Liberton Primary School after a fire caused significant damage to the building in 2020.

The council has not said exactly when the remedial work will commence but it has asked engineers to progress initial designs for the roof replacements.

Once detailed plans are finalised and a contractor has been assigned it is understood an update will be given on how long the project will last.

The alarm was raised about the potential dangers of RAAC, also known as Siporex, in 2018 after the roof of a primary school in Kent suddenly gave way.

Commonly used in the construction of roofs and walls in the UK from the 1950s to 80s, the material “is now life-expired and liable to collapse” according to a warning from the Office of Government Property (OGP) last year.

Meanwhile a leaked email sent to Downing Street from senior officials at the Department for Education in December said many school buildings now posed a “risk to life” as a result of the presence of crumbling concrete.

A Freedom of Information request by the Local Democracy Reporting Service revealed in February that Edinburgh Council had identified 15 buildings “that may have been constructed”

using RAAC and investigations are continuing to determine the full scale of the problem across the city.

Cllr Joan Griffiths, education, children and families convener for Edinburgh Council, said: “Since the beginning of the year we’ve been carrying out ongoing and detailed assessment of our property estate looking to identify any buildings that may contain Reinforced Aerated Autoclave Concrete (RAAC). Following an initial review RAAC was identified in several roof areas at two primary schools at Trinity and Cramond.

“The safety of all our young people and staff in our schools is paramount and the measures we have taken reinforce this position. As soon as these were confirmed we immediately put in place alternative learning and teaching arrangements at these schools for the small number of classes affected. These have worked really well and been positively received.

“We will be replacing the affected roofs at both schools and are putting in quality temporary classroom blocks during the summer break so learning and teaching can continue.

“I want to praise all the parents and staff for their support over the past few months and the various Council teams who worked tirelessly to support the schools. Everyone has done an amazing job keeping the disruption to a minimum and we’ll keep parents updated.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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