

Change to school additional needs support to be examined

Councillors unclear on why many children missed out on places in additional needs hubs

Councillors in Edinburgh have called for an audit a decision was made which has left parents of pupils with additional support needs in the dark over what support would be available for their children next year.

Worried parents with children starting S1 in August raised the alarm last month, after being rejected places in school “enhanced support bases” – instead being told their child’s complex and varied support needs would be met through “enhanced support provision”.

Despite concerns, Education chief Joan Griffiths denied base placements had “been suspended” and gave assurances there was “no planned reduction in resource for these services”.

However the council did not explain why a significant number of applications were refused for youngsters eligible for placements in additional needs hubs.

And councillors appear to be unaware how the decision was made or what the impact of it will be.

After calling last month for a report setting out any impact from the changes, the scrutiny committee backed an internal audit to understand if they were driven by council budget cuts or implemented in line with Scottish Government policies on Tuesday, March 19.

Convener Kate Campbell, SNP, said: “I think most people agree there are still questions about the genesis of this decision”. She added questions also remained about “communication to parents, to children and young people, to schools, and also

the planning around it – making sure there's additional support for children in mainstream setting and also for physical space needed".

Simita Kumar, SNP, said councillors had to "really understand the needs of our pupils who have the greatest learning needs". She said communication had been "lacking" but a "good thing" to have emerged from the process was a plan to introduce enhanced support base provision, currently in nine high schools, across "all schools".

The bases help pupils with disabilities such as Autism and Down's Syndrome to thrive in mainstream education settings.

One parent said she was left "scared and horrified" after receiving the rejection letter as their son "would not be safe without having a full time one to one support assistant".

Another, whose son has Down's syndrome, said if he cannot access a support base upon transitioning to secondary school after the summer the impact would be "huge".

He said parents had "heard rumours from teachers, from other parents, from people we know around the council saying no new children have been placed in [enhanced support bases] this year."

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



The City Chambers at night PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter