

# **Edinburgh Council denies pressure on school rolls in the capital**

**Edinburgh Council denies that there will be any pressure on school places, even if parents move children from private schools to state schools if fees become unaffordable.**

**Christine Jardine MP, used her first question to Sir Keir Starmer at Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday to criticise the UK Government's plans to impose VAT on school fees, citing the projected pressure on the state sector.**

The Liberal Democrat MP for Edinburgh West urged the Prime Minister to explain how money raised from VAT on fees in Scotland could be invested in state schools in Scotland, as while VAT is a reserved tax, education policy is devolved. But the Prime Minister did not respond on that point.

Ms Jardine said: "I was disappointed to see the Prime Minister refuse to address the concerns of many parents and teachers in

Edinburgh West about the impact of his plans for fees on our community.

“After 17 years of failure on education under the SNP, the last thing pupils and parents need is more disruption from this ill-conceived idea. The Council has been clear that our schools are already fit to burst. They cannot afford a surge in enrolment if parents move their parents to the state sector. There must be a clear plan to boost funding for our schools and provide our pupils, parents and teachers with the schools, facilities and opportunities they deserve.”

The UK Government said throughout the general election campaign – and in the King’s Speech – that it will impose 20% VAT on school fees. A large proportion of pupils in Edinburgh attend independent schools, and fears have been expressed that the increase could cause a problem for education authorities if parents decide that, for financial reasons, they have to move their children into the state sector.

The number of pupils who might have to be accommodated in the state system could run into thousands, but Edinburgh Council has denied that there is the pressure which Ms Jardine has stated. The Council told The Edinburgh Reporter it has room for around 12,700 more pupils.

A council spokesperson said: “Our latest school roll projection figures show there is capacity in our schools for 65,948 pupils.

“Projected figures for August 2024 session are 53,143 pupils and for August 2025 a total of 52,881 pupils. This equates to 12,000 and 13,000 spaces respectively in our schools. In total we have 114 primary and secondary schools and out of them only one primary school is projected to be over capacity in 2024 and in 2025 there could be just three primary schools.

“None of our secondaries will be over capacity.”



Christine Jardine MP PHOTO © House of Commons

And Education, Children and Families Convener at The City of Edinburgh Council, Cllr Joan Griffiths, said: “We’re ready to give all children and young people the best start in life. With the extensions we’re making to some of our school buildings and the new campuses we’re planning to build, we don’t expect many of our secondary schools to hit capacity in the next decade.

“Plus, we believe secondary school rolls across the city will slow because primary school rolls are falling. Our latest projections show we have capacity for a further 12,700 pupils in our schools, but we’ll continue to keep this under review.”

Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) confirmed that 9,310 pupils attended SCIS member schools in the year 2022/23.

There are, [according to City of Edinburgh Council figures from April 2024](#), individual secondary schools in Edinburgh where rolls will increase above capacity in a few years’ time, but the gap between total capacity in secondary schools and places

already filled, is an overall figure of 4,634 spaces available for the current year and 4,134 for next year.

## **Secretary of State for Scotland**

And although the government will move to take away the exemption from VAT from school fees, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Rt Hon Ian Murray, confirmed it will not happen immediately.

Mr Murray who represents Edinburgh South said it was a difficult decision to make but there will be no final decision until after the autumn budget. He said: "It will have to go through a fiscal event, so that will be the budget later this year, which will have to then be in a finance bill, so it's not going to happen this side of the year.

"I think 2025 is what the Treasury – when Rachel (Reeve) was Shadow Chancellor – said, so it's not coming in right away. But let's get around the table and try and resolve these issues. I fully understand the concerns of parents, fully understand the anxiety of pupils who may have to change. But let's all work together to try and find a partnership model and an Edinburgh educational ecosystem- type way that we can have it really working together to provide the best education for every child."





New Secretary of State for Scotland The Rt Hon Ian Murray MP on Roof top terrace at Queen Elizabeth House Picture Alan Simpson

## **The Scottish Government**

The Scottish Government says it agrees with the policy. A

Scottish Government spokesperson said: "The First Minister has made it clear that he supports efforts to remove the VAT exemption on independent schools.

"We hope that the UK Government will hold a budget as soon as is practicable to deliver clarity as to whether there will be any increase in Barnett consequential from spending decisions in England, as none have yet been notified to The Scottish Government.

"If a net increase in consequential from schools spending is forthcoming we would seek to make that available to improve education outcomes in Scotland."

Labour said consistently during the General Election campaign that in government it would seek to impose VAT on school fees from day one. The party said this was an unfair tax break and that by "closing the loophole" Labour would "raise vital money needed to improve standards in stretched state schools with more teachers".