

# Teacher raises alarm over cuts to inclusion services

Edinburgh Council cuts could lead to a third of school staff who assist pupils with additional needs being axed, with those remaining made to fill gaps in classroom teaching, it has been claimed.

After details emerged of an ongoing review of the education department's inclusion service, amid controversial plans to slash £4m from its budget, a group of parents warned the cuts would "drastically reduce services for vulnerable children who have disabilities and additional support needs".

Now an inclusion support teacher working in the city has raised the alarm over the cost-cutting proposals, saying the restructure could see them used as supply teachers instead of assisting additional needs learners full time and their specialism being "lost".

The council said the cuts on the table were "at an early stage of development" and the "least worst options," but admitted: "The measures will impact on staffing."

"Our saving proposals are at an early stage of development and will require further work and wider consultation before they are progressed to budget decision in February 2025. Officers have put forward these budget saving proposals for this year that have come from suggestions across the whole directorate,

including from schools.”

The teacher, who asked to remain anonymous, said if the plans are approved they would be managed by head teachers in ‘learning communities’ – locality clusters of primary, secondary and special schools – rather than by service leaders who currently manage increasing demand across the city centrally within the council.

It’s understood the teams potentially being de-centralised include English language support, early years support, assistance for pupils with ADHD and Autism and the hospital outreach team which creates learning plans for youngsters who can’t attend school due to illness.

Council bosses recently gave a presentation on the ‘inclusion review’ to staff set to be impacted by the cuts, which was shared with the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS).

It said 38 full time teachers and 23 pupil support officers would be “transferred into learning communities allocated according

to key demographic factors (e.g. number of schools, school roll, levels of deprivation, ASN roll including number of children with English as an Additional Language, care experienced children and young people)”.

It said any staff not transferred “will be supported to transfer into suitable alternative roles within the wider education service”.

On one slide officials promised “no job losses” and “all staff on permanent contracts will be transferred into commensurate posts/grades”.

However the council source, who said they were speaking up on behalf of a group of concerned teachers, claimed the plans involved not renewing temporary contracts. They said this constituted a third of all staff in the service, representing

“at least” 40 employees.

The presentation proposed “deleting” several posts including 10 service leaders who would be ‘managed via compulsory transfer of teachers’ process’.

“We are already a depleted service and none of the temporary contracts are going to be renewed or extended so we’re going to have less staff,” the teacher said.

“And they’re expecting those staff to go into learning communities and the head teachers to line manage them who don’t have any of that specialism, so basically that specialism is going to be lost.

“We offer a lot of training across the city and I don’t know how that would work if there’s no central person managing that.”

They added: “I’ve had quite a few frank conversations with head teachers who have said ‘you will be used as supply because we don’t have enough teachers anyway’.

“We just feel totally de-valued. Some people have been doing this job for 20, 30 years as a specialist and have built-up a real specialism around that support – and people feel like they’re just going to be back in the classroom.

“The majority of additional support for learning teachers haven’t actually taught in a classroom for a hell of a long time. To go back and competently teach in a classroom, people wouldn’t have a clue.

“I don’t think schools have any idea how many people are on temporary contracts in the additional support for learning service. You’re going to have a third less staff to manage with increasing numbers with kids with additional support needs.”

One particular area of concern is the potential impact

on bilingual support for beginner English language learners in schools.

Currently, the centralised English as an Additional Language (EAL) team works across the city, the teacher said, and can “see the scope across the city of where the needs are”.

They said: “For example when we had the Ukrainian families coming into the city, of which there were a lot, we were able to look at where we could put resources where they were needed for that amount of time and put in a strategic plan about how best to support.

“You can’t tell me there’s not going to be another group of refugees at some point in the future coming into Edinburgh, how is that going to be supported?

“Because there will be no team around those families. So again that pressure then goes onto the schools.”

An internal consultation with staff is underway and due to end on November 1.

If the proposals are taken forward, which is likely to depend on whether councillors approve a £4m cut to inclusion spending from 2026-27 mooted by officials, they could be ‘fully implemented’ by March to June 2025, according to the slideshow.

Meanwhile concerned parents have started a petition calling for the inclusion cuts to be scrapped has also gathered 5,147 signatures in just one week.

The petition states: “Despite the spin that this is merely restructuring, it is quite clear that this is a cost-cutting exercise for an already overstretched service. The cuts will have a huge negative impact on ALL children’s education: disproportionately impacting both children with disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.”

It adds parents were “extremely disappointed with how this has been handled”.

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter