

Council report on ASN education “lacks clarity”

The Education Committee meets on Thursday when it is being asked to note the contents of a 67 page officer report entitled Inclusion Review – and which says clearly that “there are no savings associated with this element of the inclusion review”.

Last time the committee met they discussed possible cuts of anything up to £22.4 million from the education budget with around £4 million alone in the area of inclusion spending or spending on children with additional support needs (ASN). The education budget is under pressure with an in year overspend of around £6 million to be accounted for.

The £4 million figure appears to have vanished from view in this Thursday’s papers which say only that the overall inclusion budget is £80 million and “the element of the budget in scope as part of this restructure represents £10.6 million. There are no savings projected for this budget in the current phase of restructuring the central inclusion support services”.

The Education Director, Amanda Hatton, undertook the Inclusion Review. She said at September’s committee meeting that she would suggest how to make £4 million of savings “in the coming months’. But the report on the table for Thursday’s meeting

is, according to parents making a deputation tomorrow, unclear, and does not mention a specific figure.

In September it was holiday hubs which were in the spotlight, with suggestions for cutting a £2 million contract for this service amid the need for a £4m total reduction in inclusion spending on the table. Parents objected and pointed out that they rely on this service during the holidays.

Allan Crosbie, president of the Educational Institute of Scotland union (EIS) said that schools have already borne significant reductions. He said: "Primary teachers with a general ASN role were cut 70% between 2008 and 2023 while ASN needs rose by 491%. So the council can't pretend that it didn't make those kinds of cuts to those kinds of services. It can't pretend that the teachers haven't taken the fallout that we have now."

He left councillors with a plea: "The council needs to value teachers labour very properly and clearly, and we have been taking cuts over more than a decade."

RISE IN DEMAND

The number of children in Edinburgh requiring ASN support has risen to almost 50% of all children at schools in Edinburgh which is above the national average of around 34%. This assistance ranges from language support to help for children with anxiety or who have autism or ADHD and a whole range of other services in between.

At the full council meeting earlier this month SNP councillor Euan Hyslop lodged a motion which demanded that the council halted any action on cuts until it had at least consulted parents. As a result there will be no action to alter the service provision until approved by the Education Committee. A dialogue had already been opened up with parents of ASN children and with staff in March this year. But parents and

councillors worried that these cuts would be pushed through without committee approval saying they were “operational” and so falling short of a service restructure which had to be ratified by the committee.

Cllr Euan Hyslop said to The Edinburgh Reporter: “There are some very serious questions that still need to be answered regarding the restructure of the Additional Support for Learning and Educational Psychology Services as part of the Inclusion Review.

“It is still very unclear as to how the proposed restructure is going to support the delivery of £4m of cuts as was reported to Committee in September. A fact that has now been contradicted by the Inclusion Review Update Report on front of us on Thursday which states that there are no savings associated with this part of the review.

“We have considerable concerns about the impacts that service restructuring could have on vulnerable young people who have been the target of numerous ‘reviews’ and backdoor cuts under this Labour Administration.

“We brought a motion to Council on 7th November to demand that no changes to these services are implemented without consent of Committee, and until parents and service users have been fully consulted. The motion passed in full and marks a significant win for the right of parents and young people in their pursuit to be heard throughout this process.

“Administration Councillors and senior Officers need to come clean about what the proposals are going to mean for children with Additional Support Needs. Where are the cuts coming from?”

Cuts

“Fathers and Allies for ASN Reform” is one of the groups

objecting to the cuts and has lodged a written statement ahead of Thursday's meeting. They will also speak at the meeting. In their letter ([Page 7 here](#)) they highlight the challenges faced by parents including a lack of transparency and engagement in the inclusion review process.

They point out that the proposed changes could have devastating consequences for children and families in Edinburgh – meaning **all** children as any cuts to the education budget will have a knock on effect on pupils who either do or do not have additional support needs.

Parent's view

Gary Staerck is a parent of children with ASN, and a member of the Fathers and Allies Group. He knows only too well that it is areas like this which appear to be easiest for the council to cut back on. He explained: "There's a reduction in the number of teaching staff and an increase in the number of pupil support assistants (PSA) staff, so the experienced staff numbers are going down, and less experienced, cheaper staff numbers are going up. As they disperse staff out into the learning communities the specialists would end up being located in pockets around the city rather than where they need to go."

He is clear that more information must be made available by the council. Explaining that some of the data in the report is being seen for the first time (and that the numbers do not in his view add up), he said: "No one has seen any data from the review which started back in March. That is one thing I will mention in my deputation – the unanswered questions. Nobody else can make a judgement on anything properly as no-one else has seen the information. If we had more information, then maybe we could see where they're coming from.

"We are open to making changes but not necessarily these changes."

He admits that the funding is key and said that their [petition](#) will also be sent to The Scottish Government “because they need to be looking at why they’re not providing more funds”. He continued: “They’ve already looked at ASL provision and said it is not good enough and it is not working, but say it is down to local government.”

He concluded: “We may be a minority group, but we’re very used to fighting for things.”

The City of Edinburgh Council has a need to make savings of £110 million over the next four years, with £30 million of that in the next financial year.

The Education Committee will meet on Thursday at 10am at The City Chambers.

[The papers are here with links to how to watch the meeting on the council webcast either live or as a recording.](#)



The statue of Bucephalus who took Alexander the Great into many battles stands in the quad at The City Chambers Edinburgh

