

Tributes paid to popular head teacher

Tributes have been paid to the former head teacher of Scotland's biggest primary school who has died less than two years after retiring.

Edinburgh-based Helen Gillanders was at the helm of Dunbar Primary School for 15 years before stepping down in the summer of 2023.

News of her death yesterday was broken to parents and carers by the school's current head teacher Jacqui McKinnon who described Mrs Gillanders as someone who loved her job and her 'school family'.

Mrs McKinnon said: "She was the head teacher at Dunbar Primary School for 15 years and throughout the time spent all her energy ensuring the school was the best place it could be for all the pupils and staff."

East Lothian Council's head of education Nicola McDowell paid tribute to Mrs Gillanders as a 'much-loved' member of the team.

She said: "Helen Gillanders was much loved in both the school and local community during the 15 years she spent as head teacher at Dunbar Primary School.

"I know that all of her colleagues, pupils and friends in the community have been deeply saddened to hear the news that she has passed away.

"All of our thoughts are with Helen's family and loved ones at this difficult time. She will be remembered by her work 'family' as a vibrant, happy and wonderful person who worked tirelessly to make the school the best place it could be for staff and pupils."

Mrs Gillanders, who was a grandmother, retired at the age of 61 from the primary school which was recently named Scotland's biggest with a roll call of 906 pupil across two campuses in the town.

Councillor Shamin Akhtar, depute East Lothian Council leader, who served as the administration's education spokesperson during a large part of Mrs Gillander's time as head teacher said: "This is such sad news. Helen was absolutely committed to her profession, and it shone through during her 15 years at the school.

"She supported the children, young people and their families with care and compassion. Her passion for education was infectious and I remember her knowing the names of all the children when you walked along the corridors with her.

"She has left a lasting legacy to the community of Dunbar. My heartfelt condolences to her family."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter