

Anger over lack of investment in Midlothian school

Concern about the safety of children at a local school which includes military families has been raised by parents who claim it has been 'forgotten' by its local authority.

Mauricewood Primary School, in Penicuik, has more than 350 pupils on its roll with one in five coming from local military based families, but parents say plans to invest in it have been delayed and Midlothian Council has said there is not even enough money for basic improvements.

Safety issues raised include leaking roofs and claims a fire, sparked by an electrical fault, was only avoided after children smelt smoke.

After a meeting between parents and the council failed to address concerns, the school's parent council has now written to education secretary Jenny Gilruth MSP, asking her to step in.

In their letter they say: "While the size of the school is an issue, our biggest concern is about the safety of our children following a spate of issues.

"These include an electrical fault nearly resulting in a fire, detected initially by children smelling smoke from their class; and longstanding roofing problems leading to leaks in classrooms.

“Suitability reports rating the building as poor – showing major problems and/or not operating optimally – date as far back as May 2018, with no works so far taken to address the issues.

“Ultimately, the council is failing to provide a suitable environment where the children can learn, despite the best efforts of school staff, who often go above and beyond for them.

“We are worried that it will take a serious incident, or for it to reach a point of no return, for this matter to be addressed.”

Parents say they confronted the council at a meeting last month pointing out that more than 1,000 new homes were being built in the area and developer contributions should be invested in the school.

However they say they were told contributions were not enough to go ahead with plans for an extension and that “if borrowing was required to undertake work and provide a building big enough to educate Mauricewood’s children, a statutory requirement, and safe for them to learn in, parents would have to sacrifice “other things that are important to people, for example leisure centres not opening at weekends” .”

David Mackay, parent and chair of the school’s parent council, said the council had failed to plan for the inevitable situation facing the school despite years of being aware of the problems.

And he said parents were concerned that Mauricewood would face the same fate as Mayfield Primary School in Dalkeith which closed at short notice in December because of its poor condition with pupils relocated to a new school.

Mr Mackay said: “Midlothian Council has unfortunately failed to plan for and address the needs of Mauricewood

Primary School over a sustained period of time, leading to a perfect storm of major issues – capacity, condition and suitability.

“Despite council awareness and discussions going back years, Mauricewood seems to have fallen through multiple cracks and never been prioritised when it comes to developer contributions or other sources of funding.

“We’re extremely concerned about the safety of the building, as well as the long-term effects that these issues are having on the children’s education.

“Having seen what happened with Mayfield Primary School in December, there unfortunately seems to be a pattern developing regarding schools in Midlothian. A pattern that only purposeful action can break.

“Until a commitment is in place to address the major issues outlined as a matter of urgency, we will continue to ensure our voice is both loud and clear.”

A Midlothian Council spokesperson said: “We acknowledge the frustration expressed that, having previously identified the need for expanded capacity, a project was developed to extend Mauricewood Primary School to address the forecasted capacity breach.

“The attendees at the Parent Council Meeting on March 20 were informed that this project is presently paused for affordability reasons. The existing Building Condition Survey for Mauricewood Primary School in 2021 notes the Overall Condition Assessment as Condition B level, which is defined as *Satisfactory* in performing adequately but showing minor deterioration.

“The school is being resurveyed during the Easter 2025 break, with the completed and revised data available in May to review and prioritise work packages and align them with the budget

profile for affordability and areas of highest need in the learning estate.

“A report will be brought back to council following the conclusion of this work.”

A spokesperson for Scottish Government said: “It is vital that children have a safe and nurturing environment to learn. While it is the statutory responsibility of local authorities to manage and maintain the school estate, direct Scottish Government funding has seen the number of schools in ‘good’ and ‘satisfactory’ condition increase from 62.7% in 2007 to 91.7% in 2024.

“The Scottish Government is continuing to invest in the school estate through the £2 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme, through which Midlothian Council will receive significant funding for the following projects the Council identified as priority: Beeslack Community High School, Penicuik High School and Mayfield Primary School Campus.

“The Education Secretary takes the concerns raised by parents seriously and intends to respond to their letter directly.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter