

# Education, Children and Families Committee

10.00am, Friday, 16 August 2019

## Climate Change Strikes by Children

Executive/routine  
Wards  
Council Commitments

### 1. Recommendations

---

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to:
  - 1.1.1 to note the national policy on ensuring children attend school
  - 1.1.2 to note the links to child protection and raising attainment, attached to attendance
  - 1.1.3 to require that children and young people attend school during external events organised during the school day
  - 1.1.4 to call for all schools to take part in Rights Based Learning to show support for action against climate change

**Alistair Gaw**

Executive Director for Children and Families

Contact: Lorna Sweeney, Schools & Lifelong Learning Senior Manager Quality, Improvement & Curriculum

E-mail: [lorna.sweeney@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:lorna.sweeney@edinburgh.gov.uk) | Tel: 0131 469 3138



# Report

## Climate Change Strikes

### 2. Executive Summary

---

- 2.1 On March 14 2019, children attending schools in the City of Edinburgh and who attended a climate change strike had their absence authorised by the ECF Committee. This decision was taken to lend support to the voices of children in the international climate change crisis. This decision was not universally popular and when the strikes were repeated on May 24<sup>th</sup> a revised view was expressed. On closer examination of the legal position and the newly published national guidance, the authority position is that children must be encouraged to attend school and that children should be supported to express their views in ways that will support, not diminish their attendance and attainment.

### 3. Background

---

- 3.1 Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1 is the national guidance on promoting and managing school attendance. It was originally published in 2007 and revised in June 2019.
- 3.2 Climate Change is almost universally acknowledged to be an international crisis requiring concerted, intensive response from governments and citizens.
- 3.3 In March 2019, the ECF Committee gave permission, following an emergency motion, for children and young people who attended a Climate Change strike, to have their absence recorded as authorised. This was to be accompanied, in advance, by written parental permission.

### Main report

---

- 4.1 The Education Scotland Act (1980) states that “It shall be the duty of the parent of every child of school age to provide efficient education for him suitable to his age, ability and aptitude either by causing him to attend a public school regularly or by other means.”
- 4.2 In accordance with its duties, The City of Edinburgh Council aims to promote good attendance at school and accepts the statement in the revised national guidance: Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1 that “Absence from school, whatever the

cause, disrupts learning.” This guidance also seeks to explore and address wider issues around the promotion and management of good attendance and the prevention and reduction of absence

- 4.3 Good attendance at school is generally accepted to be a central objective of the ‘safe’ Wellbeing Indicator for the protection of children and is one of the five key drivers for raising attainment as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, alongside attainment, exclusion, engagement and participation.
- 4.4 All guidance, legislation and policy produced nationally or by local authorities is designed to ensure that children attend school and that parents are supported to ensure that this happens.
- 4.5 The current guidance suggests that “schools and education authorities can encourage good attendance by raising the profile of attendance and absence within school communities and in school documents such as the School Handbook.” (IIE2 section 3.6)
- 4.6 ‘Attendance’ does include learning which takes place outside school and can include educational visits connected with school. It could be argued that attendance at an organised event constituted learning were specific tasks to be set in relation to that event, however with no staff present to guide the event, the climate change strike could not be regarded as learning per se.
- 4.7 There are no categories of ‘authorised absence’ which refer to children striking.
- 4.8 The definition of a ‘strike’ in this context most commonly refers to a refusal to work or perform which runs counter to the notion of a school-organised educational outing or for a local authority to be permitting that act of refusal.
- 4.9 It is assumed that parents generally act in the best interests of their children. On the occasion of another climate change strike, some parents may ask for attendance to be authorised, regardless of the authority position, because they believe that their child will benefit from the activity. Guidance states that “in these circumstances, clear school and education authority policies and regular communication of expectations will help school staff respond appropriately.”
- 4.10 During the first Climate Change Strike it became apparent that some schools could not manage to meet the expectations that parental permission would be provided in writing in advance, and this condition was waived on a case by case basis. This was due to the high numbers of learners for whom English is an additional language and/or for parents without the necessary skills to write formal letters. This led to an inconsistent approach across the city. Gathering reliable data therefore became impossible and was discontinued for the second strike.
- 4.11 All schools are expected to participate in rights-based learning through UNCRC, Rights Respecting Schools Awards, or through their own approaches. Learner Participation is developing well in the city’s schools. Almost all Headteachers encouraged action against climate change through rights-based work in school in advance of the first strike. Almost all Headteachers were not in support of children’s absence being authorised by the ECF Committee but all followed the

directive as instructed (with the exemption being given to parents who could not provide advance written permission as discussed above).

- 4.12 Some Headteachers commented that the decision devalued the hard work they had undertaken in working with parents who did not value good attendance at school.
- 4.13 Almost all Headteachers are supportive of working with children and young people to express their views and produce a call to action against climate change, as part of their timetabled Rights Based Learning or opportunities for wider achievement.
- 4.14 The theme of the strike was powerful and emotive but should not be the overriding issue in determining whether children are encouraged to be present at school. There are other, more productive ways to demonstrate support for climate change.
- 4.15 Officers conclude that there is no appropriate exemption in the law or accompanying guidance to support continued authorised absence for climate change strikes. The potential for adverse risk to children who are absent and unsupervised is high and runs counter to Child Protection and Raising Attainment.
- 4.16 The most appropriate way to tackle climate change is to use Rights Based learning either at school or coordinated across the city and mechanisms are in place to support this.

## **5. Next Steps**

---

- 5.1 To work with our schools, Pupil Councils, Head Boys and Head Girls and Youth Parliamentarians to show support for the need to act against climate change.

## **6. Financial impact**

---

- 6.1 There are no financial implications.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

---

- 7.1 There have been no studies on community impact undertaken

## **8. Background**

---

None

## **9. Appendices**

---

None