

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL
POLICY AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

Item No 3

25 June 2020

DEPUTATION REQUESTS

| Subject | Deputation |
|---|--|
| 3.1 In relation to Item 6.2 on the agenda – Schools Re-opening | Victoria Primary School Parent Council |
| 3.2 In relation to Item 6.2 on the agenda – Schools Re-opening | Trinity Primary School Parent Council |
| 3.3 In relation to Item 6.2 on the agenda – Schools Re-opening | Trinity Academy Parent Council |

Deputation for Item 6.2 (Re-opening Schools August 2020), and also relevant for Motions 8.1 -8.3.

Dear Councillors,

We are writing to you on behalf of Victoria Primary School Parents Council. As you are aware Victoria Primary school is extremely pushed for capacity and we are currently waiting for the completion of our new school building, which has been delayed.

Our parents are extremely concerned and angry about the offer of schooling for the 2020/21 academic session. I am sure you are aware that some have even taken the opportunity to speak to the BBC (see reporting Scotland on 15th June 2020) and other Press about this matter.

There are two main areas they would like to bring to the council's attention. Firstly school pupils, particularly in P1 – 3, have found online learning extremely challenging to engage with. Children are falling behind in their learning and parents do not see how one day a week of contact time with a teacher can address this. There are concerns that this time will be spent settling children for learning, rather than the concentrated teaching. This approach will not allow any consistency to a nurture approach – each week will be starting over.

It is unreasonable to expect parents, who are not professional teachers, to continue to deliver 80% of the curriculum. Particularly in families where English is not the first language or where parents may not have a high level of learning themselves. Whilst this places our children at risk of falling behind with important learning, this also will have an impact on their mental wellbeing. Children will find it difficult to sustain friendships with only one day a week contact with peers, essential for the healthy development of relationships. This will have a long term impact on children's wellbeing, especially on the more vulnerable within our school.

Secondly the vast majority of parents at Victoria work. We are not a school where families are in the privileged position of having one parent at home who is able to provide childcare. The current arrangements provided by the council put most of our families in an unacceptable position where they will need to choose between their employment and childcare.

We would expect the council to be ambitious for our children and provide more resources to Education and to provide childcare solutions for working families. At our Parents Council meeting held on June 9th, it was asked if the council could explore utilising other buildings in the community. In Victoria's case, we do not have an extensive playground or field for additional classrooms and have used all of the space available to us. We would expect the council to consider other accommodation options in the area, including but not restricted to, local churches, eg. Newhaven Church, and local leisure centres, e.g. David Lloyd in Newhaven. In terms of childcare, we would urge the council to consider the impact of these restrictions on our children, and adopt a measured approach.

We ask the council to assume a solution-focused approach that has been so appreciated throughout this pandemic. Our children deserve better.

Regards

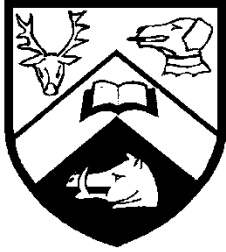
Emma Clater and Ann Wheeler on behalf of Victoria Primary School Parent Council.

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Trinity Primary School Parent Council

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22 June 2020

To all those involved in making decisions about Edinburgh pupils' return to school in August 2020.

Since Trinity Primary School closed to pupils on March 20th 2020, children have been learning at home. Our experiences are undoubtedly very similar to those of families across the UK; we are all dealing with financial and employment challenges and the loss of support networks in the form of extended family and friends, whilst trying to support and nurture our children during a time of significant change.

Throughout this period Trinity Primary School has kept us informed and supported. Parents and children have received regular updates and messages of support, schoolwork has been issued on a daily basis, children have received feedback and daily contact from their teachers, learning equipment and resources have been made available and every effort has been made to retain a strong sense of community. We would like to start this letter by thanking Head Teacher Jacqueline Scott and all of the staff for their tremendous efforts in what must have been a very challenging period. They have done a fantastic job in looking after all of us.

At a local authority and national level, we recognise that a great deal of planning will have taken place in order to try and prepare for schools reopening in August 2020. However, from a parental point of view both the process and the outcome are very disappointing. The announcement that children in Edinburgh would only attend school for 33% of the school week, despite the fact that several schools (including our own) can accommodate more children than this within the current safety guidelines, was disappointing. The lack of further clarity and the ongoing political arguments about where the fault lies has resulted in parents feeling unsupported, frustrated and anxious after a long period of incredibly intense and exhausting effort. It is hard to believe that some of these feelings are not being picked up on by our children.

We are therefore writing to you in the hope that you can, by working across the Council and with the Scottish Government, resolve the situation more satisfactorily.

Our Position

The proposals for Edinburgh as they currently stand do not fulfil the basic criteria of Getting It Right for Every Child.

It is in everyone's best interests for as many children to return to school as is safe within the current guidelines.

Every school in Edinburgh should be allowed to accommodate as many children as it can under the current safety guidelines.

Getting It Right For Every Child would, in normal circumstances, mean that every family who wants to send their children to school is able to do so. Attendance for all children for the full school week as quickly as possible should therefore be the expectation and ultimate goal of all parties. Given that these are exceptional circumstances, and taking into account the lack of time now until schools reopen in August, we feel that it is right and fair to expect to start the school year with all children attending for at least half of the school week (and more where possible).

Where a school cannot safely accommodate 50% attendance, that school should be extended into local community spaces and staffed accordingly. The additional resources required for this to happen must be made available.

Parents need clear communications so that they can plan their work and childcare. There are real and significant health and wellbeing risks of not sharing information with parents (and hence with their employers) in a timely fashion; it is likely that jobs will be lost and people may have to rely on grandparents for childcare. With the summer holidays starting tomorrow it is important to recognise that this communication will need to take place over the summer holidays when schools are closed.

All children will be learning at home to some extent for the foreseeable future, and this is may be the main learning method for families who are shielding or self-isolating. Whilst our experience of learning at home has been positive, it is very clear that this is not a universal experience within the city or across the country. Amongst the parents who attended the NPFS session with John Swinney, for example, only a third of children had had any form of virtual teaching (live or pre-recorded) and only 52% were receiving regular feedback on their work. Informal communications with Parent Council Chairs across the city reveals considerable disparity even within Edinburgh. Further, Trinity Primary School staff will be working in school from August and therefore less able to support those learning at home. We suggest, therefore, that the home element of blended learning must be delivered through a centralised online educational resource. This would ensure consistency across the country and allow school staff to concentrate on the children physically in their schools. This centralised learning should be delivered for as long as any child remains learning at home and should include live teaching, as has been provided in other parts of Scotland, if parents and children desire it.

Please work together to ensure that this is delivered. Parents and Parent Council volunteers do not have the time or the capacity for political arguments and blame shifting.

We very much hope that you are able to resolve this to the best of your collective abilities.

Trinity Primary School Parent Council

TRINITY ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

To the Policy and Sustainability Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to make a written deputation.

I am writing on behalf of Trinity Academy Parent Council and my points relate to Agenda Item 6.2, on Schools Re-opening.

Following the announcements last week from City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Government you will be aware of a high-level of parental concern. For parents at Trinity Academy these concerns match those of many around the city and further afield:

- the low percentage of time which pupils might spend in school on return (33%);
- home-based learning being set to change from that experienced so far, because teachers will mostly be teaching small classes face-to-face and therefore will have significantly less time to develop and support home-learning;
- the long-term effect on learning of reduced time in the classroom, particularly for those in exam years;
- the potential for a continued lower level of engagement in education for all ages, with some pupils being seriously disadvantaged by the lack of time in school and a lack of IT resources, suitable study environments and support at home;
- the lack of parity with other state schools in Scotland and around 20% of secondary pupils in the Edinburgh independent schools.

We would like to note the following points:

1. Percentage time in school: The safe return to school is in everyone's interests. The maximum return to school possible is also in everyone's interests. The difference for example between 33% and 50% will be significant in terms of pupils having face-to-face time with teachers, which we all agree is the ideal. Many schools, including Trinity Academy can accommodate 50% of pupils (maintaining the present 2 metre spacing) by utilising all spaces within their current building.

We therefore ask that the City of Edinburgh Council allow each school to work to the capacity it can achieve within the set safety limits (rather than setting a low level for all schools). Whichever schools have lower capacity should be prioritised and supported to allow them to work up to higher levels, and offered extra resources to do so. Every school should be supported to get back to as close to normal return percentages as soon as possible, as even 50% is unsatisfactory for any length of time.

2. Support with IT: The IT audit requested by City of Edinburgh Council and undertaken by Trinity Academy early in the lockdown, revealed a shortfall in many households. However, we still await to hear how that will be mitigated, although we understand that the government have ordered laptops. Families without adequate IT have therefore been disadvantaged since mid-March. Trinity Academy has recently been contacting all families where children have not been engaging with suggestions of how catch-up might be undertaken over the summer. **We ask that this inequity in IT equipment is addressed as soon as possible as part of the solution to avoid future disadvantage.**

3. Support to deliver high quality home-based learning: 'Live teaching' has been a very rare feature of the delivery of home learning thus far for pupils at Trinity Academy, partly, it appears because of a lack of direction from City of Edinburgh Council with protocols to deliver this safely. We are appreciative of all the efforts staff have made to deliver resources and to learn new skills to deliver online learning. However, with teachers heavily focusing on face to face teaching in school from August 12th, it appears that there is little prospect of home learning incorporating live teaching. **We ask that the provision of high quality central resources is developed to support teachers and ensure that pupils get the best from the home element of blended learning, and that teachers are further supported and trained to maximise the best teaching methods which can be used in home-based learning.**

Thank you for your attention and for your time in deliberating these matters.

Mike Nicholson
Chair, Trinity Academy Parent Council