

EIS Submission to Scottish Parliament's Education & Skill Committee for DFM Meeting

1. The EIS (Educational Institute of Scotland), Scotland's largest teacher union representing over 60,000 teachers and lecturers, is pleased to submit this short paper to the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament in advance of the Deputy First Minister's appearance before it.
2. Events of the past few weeks have moved rapidly, particularly in the period following the announcement of school closures and the introduction of lockdown arrangements.
3. Teachers and lecturers are committed to the children and young people we teach and support. Schools and other educational establishments responded to the lockdown rapidly. These responses showed the resilience and professionalism of teachers and lecturers to respond creatively and effectively to closures. The move from learning in schools to learning at home has necessitated a massive and immediate development and implementation of online teaching materials to all pupils and students – followed up by responding to pupil work and parental queries on various online platforms. For many teachers and lecturers, these actions have been carried out whilst exercising their own responsibility as parents or carers.
4. Many teachers and other educational staff have volunteered to staff Hubs and nominated schools to support provision for children of key workers and vulnerable children, as a consequence of being defined as key workers themselves. Others have worked to provide remote learning opportunities for pupils and, indeed, some have combined both roles.

Supporting Vulnerable Pupils

5. The issue of supporting vulnerable pupils has been a significant challenge across the country.
6. The EIS view is that councils, schools and staff have responded strongly to address the identified needs in this area. The fact that volunteers to staff the Hubs has been well in excess of the actual need, is testimony to the commitment of teachers to support the most vulnerable of our pupils.
7. It is worth citing also, the strong leadership which has been shown from Headteachers and Deputies in the running of the Hubs.

8. The EIS cites examples of effective practice below:

- i. Comprehensive multi-agency strategies being drawn up by Local Authorities and 'Best Practice' advice issued to schools, Hubs and centres, utilising expertise across relevant disciplines such as Psychological Services.
- ii. Strong focus in Hubs on pastoral care role with staff keeping communication logs and reporting any concerns to the HT.
- iii. Detailed attendance logs with staff continuing to be alert to child protection concerns and reporting such in the usual way.
- iv. Schools and centres identified vulnerable pupils: CP/LAAC/Kinship/HWB or SEB concerns.
- v. Ongoing multi-agency team approaches considering and then reviewing children identified for additional support.
- vi. SMT/Pastoral support keeping in touch with most vulnerable pupils. Social work support continuing.
- vii. Childcare provision for children under 3 years of age arranged for the families who most need it.
- viii. Although uptake has not been as high as anticipated, it appears that the level of engagement and support for families where children at risk is increasing.
- ix. Google classrooms have been set up by pastoral care teachers specifically for vulnerable young people.
- x. School Hubs working beyond education and childcare e.g. food parcels and broader well-being provision, e.g. basics such toothpaste and brushes etc. have been picked up from schools through invitation.
- xi. Special learning resources have been prepared for kids without internet access.
- xii. Hubs are providing lunch for all who attend, both adults and pupils.
- xiii. Parents of pupils with Free School Meal entitlement are being given direct payments.

9. The EIS sets out areas of concern below:

- i. The single biggest concern would be around the relatively low level of uptake from families of vulnerable children to the HUB provision, unlike uptake from children of key workers. (Almost by definition some of our most vulnerable students normally find it difficult functioning in school when everyone is in, so it may not be a surprise that their attendance at hubs is low.)
- ii. This, in turn, creates a challenge around engaging with the disengaged, with some pressure on teachers/staff in some schools to phone from their own homes rather than through the agreed protocols around secure digital platforms.

- iii. Problems with lack of Wi-Fi/tech for many families, making engagement with none-HUB attendees more difficult
- iv. Specific challenges around pupils with ASN in mainstream hubs – ASD/ADHD, in particular e.g. challenges of social distancing when they are struggling with conditions.
- v. In most areas, local authorities have worked with the professional associations, through LNCT arrangements, to agree on support provision and ongoing provision but this was not universal, leading to unnecessary difficulties in some areas
- vi. Where complex needs provision has remained open, there have been issues around PPE provision (or rather lack of same), cleaning regimes, and ongoing risk assessments with staff worried about the inability to socially distance as a result of the additional support needs of the pupils. Although most staff in the Hubs have volunteered to support this provision, in ASN, as a consequence of the need for specialised support, this has not been the case, generally. PPE provision remains an unresolved issue in terms of proposed SNCT guidance.

General Comments Regarding Educational Aspects of the Covid-19 Lockdown

- 10. The role of the Scottish Government in 'education' is to set national education policy for schools and, to a lesser extent, colleges. The Scottish Government is also responsible for the national response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland and has, therefore, the powers to not only close and open schools but also to determine how schools should open.
- 11. The EIS believes that the Scottish Government was right to close schools when it did to safeguard the health and safety of pupils, staff and wider society.
- 12. The EIS supports the way in which the Scottish Government and its agencies have worked inclusively with regards to the Education sector during the lockdown and acknowledges that they have listened to EIS views.
- 13. The EIS has worked with the Scottish Government and COSLA to deliver SNCT agreements for teachers. The EIS has joined the National Qualifications Contingency Group at the SQA, which has met twice during the Covid-19 crisis period. It has also met the SQA to discuss assessment concerns in colleges. The EIS has engaged with Scottish Government's Education Recovery Group (and sub-groups) and with Ministerial groups dealing with the FE & HE Education. The EIS has also engaged with STUC-Scottish Government meetings on Covid-19.
- 14. The EIS welcomes the fact that the Government sought to work in a partnership approach with trade unions with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic and seems to have encouraged its agencies to do so too. The EIS hopes that this approach will

be maintained and that the teacher voice will continue to be listened to in future decisions around education. Such working must be informed and the EIS is clear that the Government must be open to sharing its data about re-opening schools and supporting the 'resetting' of education after the pandemic.

15. The EIS view is that the approach of COSLA in responding to the Covid-19 lockdown could be improved. Its ability to negotiate and sign off collective agreements seems ponderous and has delayed agreements that could have provided succour to teachers more timeously. Furthermore, COSLA seems to be frustrating the development of national procedures (e.g. supply staff), resulting in different procedures in each local authority.
16. There are several aspects of national education policy that will need to be developed in the short term, such as the process by which schools will be re-opened and how they will operate over the next academic year. Challenges include; how schools can be opened safely for pupils and staff, the nature of the phased or incremental opening, development of blended learning to complement in-school learning, targeting pupil support, supporting pupils' health & welfare, supporting pupils' education needs, staff capacity, cleaning, re-profiling classrooms, timetable issues, assessment procedures and implementing social distance regulations. The EIS would expect the teacher unions to be closely involved in these areas to deliver the best possible strategies for the sector.
17. The EIS will not support schools re-opening until it is safe to do. We would highlight the very real risk of creating a spike in the transmission of the virus by a premature opening of schools. The EIS believes that there must be an effective "test, trace and isolate" capacity established to ensure that the rate of infection remains under control. The testing part of this is important but having the resources to trace and then isolate ill people is crucial to making it work. We would argue that reopening schools before such a regime is in place, would be catastrophic to the rate of infection.
18. This process would need to sit alongside a full risk assessment around the operation of school buildings to ensure that they are compliant with all H&S requirements, including social distancing. This will mean that as schools cannot reopen as normal, a phased return will be required and priorities established around attendance, which is likely to be part-time for most pupils.
19. As part of the establishment of priorities, we would stress a third point – which is the need to consider equity. Children from poor and challenged backgrounds will undoubtedly have suffered more than others during the period of lockdown. Such vulnerable children will require significant additional support as we move slowly back to a more settled situation. We need to recognise, also, that potentially all children will have suffered a level of trauma as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic and we would urge that the initial focus when schools

reopen, in any capacity, should be on the health, well-being, and emotional resilience of our students.

20. Finally, the EIS is clear that the Government, COSLA and Local Authorities should respect existing collective bargaining machinery such as SNCT. The EIS believes that the existing collective bargaining machinery in the college sector (NJNC) also needs to be supported by the Government to ensure it can support the college sector.