

From: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Sent: 02 October 2018 19:27
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>; [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications DFM & Education <CommunicationsDFM&Education@gov.scot>; [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] Hicks C (Clare) [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] McAllister C (Colin) [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] Nicolson S (Stuart) Special Adviser [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Subject: RE: Line to clear - MEDIA QUERY: Teacher view on state of education - Herald

Thanks [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] – will issue now.

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
 (SG duty comms)

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)] **Communications**

Senior media manager
 Scottish Government, St Andrew's House
 [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

From [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Sent: 02 October 2018 19:26
To: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>

Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications DFM & Education <CommunicationsDFM&Education@gov.scot>; [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] Hicks C (Clare) [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] McAllister C (Colin) [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] Nicolson S (Stuart) Special Adviser [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

Subject: RE: Line to clear - MEDIA QUERY: Teacher view on state of education - Herald

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
 DFM is content to clear the line.

Kind Regards

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
 [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] Deputy Private Secretary to John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills | The Scottish Government | Web: www.gov.scot |

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

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From: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Sent: 02 October 2018 18:04
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications DFM & Education

<CommunicationsDFM&Education@gov.scot>; [Redacted under S38(1)(b)] McAllister C (Colin)
[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]Nicolson S (Stuart) Special Adviser [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

Subject: Line to clear - MEDIA QUERY: Teacher view on state of education - Herald

PS Education Secretary

Andy Denholm at The Herald seeking SG reaction to this open letter (below) from an anonymous teacher published on a Facebook group for Edinburgh parents. Have checked with private office and officials and it appears no one as yet across SG has received the below letter, however, it has been copied to several other media outlets as well as opposition leaders.

Comms, policy, Education comms desk and Spads have discussed and agreed the below suggested response.

Is the Cab Sec content for this to issue?

Adding [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]from here for duty purposes.

Best,

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

Education Secretary John Swinney said: "Education is our number one priority and I recognise the pressures and challenges facing teachers, such as those highlighted by this individual's experiences. That is why we have taken action to reduce teacher workloads, clarifying and simplifying the curriculum framework and removing unnecessary bureaucracy.

"We are working closely with local government and headteacher and teacher organisations to empower teachers to improve learning outcomes across our schools and early learning centres.

"We have also taken action to recruit more teachers, investing £88 million in 2017, resulting in 543 more teachers than the previous year – the second year in a row that numbers increased. There are now more primary and secondary teachers than at any time since 2014 and the ratio of pupils to teachers is at its lowest since 2013".

"No teacher should have to suffer abuse in the workplace and we want all pupils to behave in a respectful manner towards their peers and staff. Our refreshed guidance on preventing and managing schools exclusions, published last year, includes guidance on managing challenging behaviour."

Copy of letter sent to Herald

September 2018

Dear Mr Swinney,

I am a primary school teacher in a Scottish local authority and I am writing to you regarding my **grave concerns about the way teaching in Scotland has become a nearly impossible job to do adequately**, far less to the high standard expected of us. I want to highlight to you some of the issues that I know teachers (including myself) face on a daily basis, and why so many teachers currently want to leave our

profession. As an SNP voter, I would like to think that perhaps these issues have not been properly highlighted to you. However, my concern is that the SNP and Scottish Government are **not tackling the real underlying issues in education but are rather just putting a plaster over a gaping wound** with their current policies.

First of all, let me tell you a bit about myself. I have been teaching in the same local authority for 13 years now and I love my job. I get so much pleasure seeing the children in my class grow over the space of each year and I enjoy making learning fun and exciting for them. I consider my job to be more than just a job. It is a big responsibility and I work extremely hard to achieve the results expected of me, as well as building positive relationships with the children in my care and their parents or carers.

However, I have felt a growing sense of concern over the last three or four years that the job I love is becoming increasingly impossible to do effectively, for various reasons which I have highlighted below. I am in favour of the pay campaign that the EIS is fighting at the moment, as I think that this is one of the issues that challenges teachers. Nevertheless, I think that the problems in teaching go far beyond a fall in the real level of pay over the past decade.

Firstly, when I started teaching, inclusion was becoming more and more the norm within schools. Now that there are **very few specialist schools, teachers are feeling the effects of inclusion** on a daily basis. This policy, whilst admirable in its intention, does not work as it is drastically underfunded. In my school, it is **fairly common for teachers to be physically assaulted by children** whose needs cannot be met due to the inadequate level of funding. It's even **more common for our teachers to be verbally abused**. These things are happening not because of the lack of skills or effort on the part of teachers. Nor is it through a lack of support from management. But rather it is through the lack of resources and support from government level.

There are an increasing number of challenging children within our schools, and yet our resources are being continually depleted. We have **fewer classroom support worker hours, management are being pulled out of schools** more often so cannot help out and the children's needs are simply not being met. It has reached crisis level. It has become a problem for the children who need extra support as they are not coping in a large class setting. Consequently, the other children's needs are being neglected as teachers are having to spend the majority of their classroom time dealing with these more challenging children. As a class teacher, you feel like you are being pulled in so many directions because you want to do the best for all your children but it is impossible to raise attainment in your class, whilst having to deal with such challenging behaviour every day. An example of this is with my class last year, where I had to evacuate the children from the classroom on more than one occasion, while one of my children trashed the classroom. I want to emphasise, that I am very experienced in dealing with children like this but, despite my experience, I know that it gets to a point where you can use all the strategies you have been taught and sometimes it just does not work.

Another part of the problem is that these difficulties have produced a blame culture, where the blame is being laid at the feet of teachers. They need more training (true in some cases). They should have done things differently. There should be more strategies in place. It is easy for people to point the finger when they are not working in an extremely challenging situation, they are not worn down from the day to day stress of having to continually deal with these situations with very few resources to deal them. Having spoken to several teachers in different local authorities, I am very aware that this situation is not exclusive to my local authority but is a Scotland wide problem.

One of the most concerning and frustrating issues with the state of the education system is the **inability to be able to speak out about the problems we face**. Many schools have not had proper training when it comes to **logging in violent or verbally threatening incidents**, so statistics provided to government will never provide an accurate picture of what is truly going on. The most concerning thing that has happened so far, is that one of my colleagues arranged to meet with yourself, to discuss issues that were of great concern to them. However, this person was 'warned' by their manager, that if they went ahead with the meeting, they would be disciplined for this! I find this deeply concerning. We are supposed to live in a democratic society, where we have the freedom to express our views and opinions without fear of repercussions. Clearly this is not so. A situation like this does not sit well with me, thinking that an SNP

run government is not allowed to be made aware of what is actually facing **teachers on a day to day basis because we have been told to keep our 'mouths shut'**. The very fact that I am having to write to you anonymously, for fear of being pulled up by my local authority, or disciplined, shows a very worrying situation where democracy is clearly not supported.

Finally, with reference to what the SNP have been proposing to do to help teachers, I do not think that it goes anywhere far enough. **We have a teaching crisis.** This is fact. In all the local authorities that I have teacher friends in, we all talk about how impossible it is to get supply cover if a teacher is off sick. **Many schools have vacant posts that cannot be filled.** Whilst encouraging new teachers into teaching by providing incentives is a step in the right direction, it is merely a drop in the ocean. It does not solve things long term. The long-term issue is that you have lots of very experienced teachers leaving the job. There are new people coming in who do not have the relevant experience to deal with the kind of behaviours I have mentioned early on in my letter. As there is little support, these teachers are unlikely to last. It is clear that there needs to be a longer-term strategy. Perhaps having a properly funded specialist behaviour support teacher in each school would be part of a possible solution. The children with challenging behaviour need more adult support and smaller class sizes. They would thrive better if they were given this. Then teachers would be able to teach again, rather than be dealing with behaviour as much.

As I mentioned earlier, I am not sure of the extent to which you are aware of how bad things are. When you visit schools, people are most likely to tell you what you want to hear, through fear of repercussions. If you were able canvas teachers directly perhaps through an anonymous survey, then that would show you the real struggles that teachers are having. I sincerely hope that you take the content of this letter very seriously, because I know that I am starting to feel quite disillusioned with the SNP government's lack of concern for our failing education system at present. I do believe that this is down to a lack understanding of real difficulties schools and teachers face. I hope that this letter highlights some of the frustration that teachers are facing at the moment.

Thank you for taking your time to read this letter, and I sincerely hope that it will make a difference.

Kind regards,

A Scottish teacher.

Letter copied to:
Nicola Sturgeon MSP
Ruth Davidson MSP
Richard Leonard MSP
The Scotsman
The Herald
Forth One newsroom
Clyde One newsroom

Wed 03/10/2018 22:20

Swinney J (John), MSP John.Swinney.msp@parliament.scot

Fwd: Education in crisis, teachers at breaking point

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>

This is the first of two emails I have had of this type tonight following the anonymous teacher letter. A reply must be issued.

J

John Swinney
MSP for Perthshire North

From: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Sent: Wednesday, October 3, 2018 10:03:12 PM
To: First Minister; Swinney J (John), MSP
Subject: Education in crisis, teachers at breaking point

Dear Miss Sturgeon,

I am a secondary teacher, an SNP voter and a very proud Scot, however, I am also tired, angry and utterly frustrated with the SNP party and their disillusioned attitude towards education.

First of all I would like you to know how disappointed I am with your party's response to the current 10% pay campaign. I work in excess of 36 hours every week, some weeks I work near 60 hours. You continue to tell the nation that, as John Swinney puts it, you "recognise the pressures and challenges facing teachers" yet you are not doing enough about it. I don't know a single nursery, primary or secondary teacher who feels that the SNP party has reduced teacher workload, clarified and simplified the curriculum, and removed unnecessary bureaucracy. All of these are things John Swinney claims the SNP party has done. As I teacher who is educating our pupils everyday, standing in front of class les everyday, dealing with the dreaded SQA everyday, working with and talking to colleagues across the nation everyday, I can categorically tell you you have not done any of these things. Teaching standards across the nation continue to fall while teachers try to pick up the slack for vacancies which simply cannot be filled, while doing the job of a teacher, a parent, a social worker, a guidance teacher, a clerical assistant, a classroom support assistant, a pupil support assistant (I could go on), as the government continues to make cuts to education. In addition to this we pay to resource our own classes, out of our own pockets, pay to feed and clothe some of our pupils, yet our pay has declined in real terms by 24% in the last 10 years. A 10% pay rise doesn't even come close to what we deserve. You continue to claim that education is your number one priority yet you yourselves, the SNP party, are single handedly crippling the system. Education is in a state of crisis, when will you realise dramatic changes need to be made, not more cuts!

Secondly, as you can probably tell I am disappointed by John Swinney's response to an email sent to him by an anonymous teacher. This email reflects how the majority of teachers in the profession feel and his reply seems to imply that the SNP party have resolved many of the issues raised. You have not.

Thirdly, should the current attitude towards teachers and teachers' pay continue I will be casting my vote elsewhere at the next election. Not only this, I will move forward in pursuing a different professional path that takes me out of education entirely. Like many others, teaching is my second degree, I know many teachers who have gone back to their first degrees and been much happier for it, and been paid a lot more money - hence your decreasing teacher numbers. I cannot continue to be in a profession that has a negative effect on my mental and emotional wellbeing and leaves me feeling unvalued and unappreciated on a daily basis.

Yours sincerely,
A disgruntled voter

Sent from my iPhone

-----Original Message-----

From: Swinney J (John), MSP <John.Swinney.msp@parliament.scot>
Sent: 03 October 2018 22:20
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
<DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Subject: Fwd: Teachers

Letter no 2. Reply must be sent.

J

John Swinney
MSP for Perthshire North

From: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Sent: Wednesday, October 3, 2018 8:34:29 PM
To: Swinney J (John), MSP
Subject: Teachers

Dear Mr Swinney,

I am a teacher, an SNP voter and a proud Scot, however, I am also tired, angry and becoming increasingly disillusioned with the SNP party. So much so that I have decided to send you this email.

First of all I would like you to know how disappointed I am with your party's response to the current pay campaign. I work in the region of 50 hours per week and find the suggestion that teachers should only work 36 hours, quite frankly, laughable. I work these hours to try to give children the education that they deserve yet I still don't feel like I am doing enough, particularly with all of the current pressures on teachers to raise attainment. When I was at university I was given one day of training about conditions such as ADHD, autism and dyslexia yet inclusion is apparently high on Scottish Education's agenda. Teachers regularly experience violent and aggressive behaviour and verbal abuse from children whilst trying to maintain the teaching standards of classes with up to 33 children yet our pay has declined in real terms by 24% in the last 10 years. I can't help but feel that this is unfair and does not represent the hard work that teachers across Scotland do every day. I am a teacher because I love helping children grow and learn but I have never felt so undervalued and unappreciated.

Secondly, I am disappointed by your response to an email sent to you by an anonymous teacher. This email reflects how many in the profession feel and his reply seems to imply that the SNP party have resolved many of the issues raised. You have not.

Thirdly, should the current attitude towards teachers and teachers' pay continue I will be casting my vote elsewhere at the next election.

Yours sincerely,
A disgruntled voter

-----Original Message-----

From: Swinney J (John), MSP <John.Swinney.msp@parliament.scot>
Sent: 04 October 2018 08:12
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
<DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Subject: Fwd: Scottish Education

A further letter.

J

John Swinney
MSP for Perthshire North

From: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Sent: Wednesday, October 3, 2018 10:40:52 PM
To: Swinney J (John), MSP
Subject: Fwd: Scottish Education

Dear sir

In response to the anonymous letter written by a Scottish teacher that has gone viral on line, I would like to share my critique with you, (as attached). Hopefully you can do something with this.

I shared my concerns with my MSP, Jenny Gilruth who forwarded them to you. I received a patronising 'pat on the back', 'there there its okay' letter back.

I would be interested to hear your thoughts as, despite the good work that is undoubtedly being done, I believe the party and government I support are in complete and utter denial about the real situation on the ground - it is a disgrace

I look forward to hearing from you with a more considered and detailed response rather than the somewhat insulting one I received previously

Regards

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

Education in Scotland – some thoughts as to why we are failing our children

(Written by a staunch supporter of the SNP and of Scottish Independence)

To say that Scottish Education has some problems at the moment is something akin to suggesting that the Titanic experienced some minor buoyancy concerns. There are critical issues and huge difficulties that need to be addressed and, as we stand, cracks are being papered over, reassuring smiles and patronising, metaphorical pats on the back are being administered to those voicing concern, money is being spent in the wrong areas and, most disturbing of all, teachers are being ignored even as the stress levels become astronomic, the workload unmanageable and rush for the exit door increases; it will soon be a flood.

The key issues, as I see them, can be split into issues under two main headings: the curriculum and inclusion, (or behaviour).

In terms of curriculum, the much heralded Curriculum For Excellence, (CfE), is like communism – a wonderful idea on paper that has failed in practice for a number of reasons, probably more than I am fully aware of. From the perspective of an experienced class teacher, I can honestly say that I have not felt this inadequate in terms of my ability to do my job since I first walked into a classroom as a newly qualified, probationer teacher nearly twenty years ago.

I have tried to analyse why this should be the case. Children have not fundamentally changed, neither have the basic skills, knowledge and understanding we look for them to develop – with the notable exception of addressing the advances in technology – and I have spent most of my career in one school; so no obvious reasons there.

It is, I have deduced, down to the shifting sands of the requirements of the job. CfE was designed and is intended to give more autonomy to teachers, and more choice to children and young people. It is intended to promote personalisation and choice and to see teachers operating more as facilitators, supporting pupils to learn through discussion and problem solving, through group work and active enquiry, thus developing their own skills, knowledge and understanding in the context of their schools, their wider communities and of themselves as individuals.

Great you might think, this sounds like a wonderful, progressive curriculum that affords young people the opportunity to learn and develop according to their interests and ability. Oh but that were true we would be somewhere near educational Nirvana however, I would invite you to consider the following which is a more accurate reflection of the reality.

Lessons, say in maths, are often taught to a whole class at a level that all pupils, with the possible exception of pupils with special educational needs can understand. This is usually around the middle but often below the teacher's judgement of the mean ability of the class. Whilst this is not, in and of itself, necessarily bad practice in that differentiation in the lesson can be achieved in ways other than the input from the teacher, it is clear that to do so repeatedly and constantly is to remove any level of challenge to our more able children across a wide swathe of their educational experience. This is happening every day.

One way of addressing the issue of differentiation is to offer children a range of follow up or practice tasks which contain different levels of challenge from which to choose. It is surely imperatively obvious that, whilst some children will be motivated to challenge themselves, others could and will select tasks that are well within their compass with a minimum of effort, perhaps because they do not want to work, because they fear failure or because of one of a myriad of other possible reasons. If children consistently made the best choices and were able to operate independently then we would not have to look after them through childhood and adolescence, they would surely be able to bring themselves up.

The counter argument to this is one I know well. It is that schools and teachers are looking to develop the breadth of the education we offer. In other words, having mastered a concept, skill or procedure, (which incidentally also seems to be joining the list of bad things on the educational naughty step), children, and able children disproportionately so, are being tasked to revisit it in different ways and in different contexts whilst their peers attempt to catch up.

I am, once again, not suggesting that developing and consolidating learning by looking at it and applying it in different contexts is a bad idea, clearly it has its place. I am saying that to do so constantly, to follow this model slavishly is, once again, to render an enormous educational dis-service to our more able children, and for little gain. Many, if not all, of our more able children will become, in fact are becoming, bored and utterly disillusioned at the lack of challenge. If our ancestors had followed this approach then we would still be living in caves trying to figure out different ways of making clubs. It is professionally unforgiveable and is, in many schools and communities, exacerbated by peer pressure whereby educational achievement is viewed as undesirable and it can lead to pupils simply turning off. In some families as well, it is seen as unimportant and that brings problems of its own.

A parent of my acquaintance questioned her child's teacher on the level of challenge being presented, as her child repeatedly came home reporting that she was bored and that everything was too easy. The teacher became defensive and then actually said that the school was looking to create a, 'non-threatening, inclusive and non-competitive ethos in our classroom.' Taken at face value, there is little to dispute in this but take time to look behind the bald statement. It basically means that the teacher is not prepared to deal with the level of challenge required by an able pupil. Taken in conjunction with the unwillingness to recognise, far less encourage and support, excellence, the pedantry with which the, 'bring everyone on at the same pace' mentality is pursued and the resultant general dumbing down of the curriculum and it becomes a loaded and menacing statement with a clear message – excellence is to be discouraged.

Another mantra is 'active learning' – which does not mean moving about the classroom or constantly playing games – rather it means to think and actively engage with the task at hand. Yet again, surely a good idea as the more involved children are in a task the more they are likely to gain from it. Whatever it means, or should mean however, one thing has happened – pupils are becoming less able to sit, read a text and answer questions or work through a range of problems to consolidate a mathematical concept or procedure, (there's that naughty step again), and this is in the upper primary and lower secondary where it is an absolutely essential skill for examinations in almost every national qualification subject. What is happening is a demonisation of using maths schemes of work and textbooks as well

as structured, focussed resources in English. Conceptual understanding is clearly important, but so is procedural knowledge. The problem here is that procedural knowledge is in danger of becoming non-existent and rigour in pushing knowledge and understanding in mathematics and literacy has become all but extinct in many classrooms.

In this febrile atmosphere of progressiveness, of putting the child first and at the centre of learning, there have been casualties as the baby has been unceremoniously dumped with the bathwater. Once again, I find myself not necessarily at odds with the ideals and aims of this approach. What I cannot agree with is this – in our quest to do this, in our frantic quest for ways to make every child's experience of education equal and to create the myth that every child has the ability to achieve equally if only they are given the opportunity, we have lost sight of the simple fact that every child is different; they have, each and every one of them, a different and unique combination of attributes, interests, experiences and yes, I'll say it, ability.

What we should be looking for is EQUIVALENCE in the way we treat children but we need to accept that it is their value as individuals that we should look to view as equal and nothing else. One of the biggest wastes of time perpetrated in any primary classroom much above primary 2, is to try to conceal from pupils the abilities of, and progress being made by their peers. Pupils are well aware of 'who's best at maths' or who's the best reader', regardless of any attempted subterfuge around naming groups in a plethora of different ways or, worse still in my opinion, not having ability groups at all.

In a classroom context, lessons, tasks and groups can be organised in different ways but our brightest and best must be recognised and given the chance to work together or individually without constantly being expected to be surrogate teachers in mixed ability groups, friendship groups or whatever else they are being called across the country.

I'm going to offer an analogy. If you could imagine Lionel Messi playing for the Dog and Duck in a Sunday football league, I am absolutely certain that he would improve the performance of those around him and the team's results. The problem would be that, over time, Messi's performance levels would drop as a result of lack of challenge and in order that he could effectively play with his new team mates at a level they could cope with.

If you don't think this is happening in classrooms all across Scotland every day, go and look. We are allowing it to happen and sleep walking into mediocrity. We are turning off our brightest and best young minds, we are killing the next generation of entrepreneurs, inventors and researchers stone dead by retarding their opportunities, suffocating their abilities and cutting their enthusiasm to learn off at the knees. We are closing the attainment gap but not by increasing the opportunities of all; rather we are doing it by culling the potential of our more able pupils.

My challenge to those who promote this approach is this – ask your able children when was the last time they were actually seriously challenged in school, when was something 'hard' as opposed to being simply new. Then encourage an honest answer and then do something remarkable – actually listen to the answer.

Could all of you who hold dear the future of Scottish Education and those of our children please be brave in the face of these challenges – put your head above the parapets and say to those peddling this errant nonsense, ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

This brings me onto my second major point – the inclusion agenda. If ever there was a case of a tail, however well-intentioned but clearly motivated the twin pillars of appearance and political correctness, wagging a dog – much to the dog's disadvantage – this is it.

I'm not saying that inclusion is inherently a bad thing, of course it isn't, but the zeal with which it has been pursued, to the disadvantage of so many others, frankly beggars belief. The erroneous inclusion of children in classrooms across Scotland has resulted in nothing short of educational exclusion for a majority of pupils in many of these classrooms, to say nothing of the impact, both psychological and physical, on the adults who have to deal with these situation and the children who have to put up with them.

As I said, inclusion in main stream classes of pupils with a range of conditions and difficulties is not, in and of itself a bad thing. My argument is that we have the lines in the wrong place. Bad or disruptive behaviour for whatever reason, medical or otherwise, detrimentally impacts upon all of those around the perpetrator. That, whether we like it or not, is an empirical and unarguable fact. Head teachers must be empowered to remove children from their schools and be confident to do so and:

- There should be system doing this promptly and fairly, (for persistent and/or serious incidents or when it becomes clear that a mainstream school is simply the wrong place for a given pupil)
- The needs of the majority must always trump the right of any individual to be in a particular school
- I should not and cannot be a one-way street. I know that once children are in special education, only a small percentage return to mainstream and this must be examined

Across Scotland, incidents occur daily, education is disrupted and classrooms damaged. When a child becomes agitated, angry and uncooperative to a severe degree, this represents a threat to the child and to all around him or her. To say that incidents can be prevented or managed, or that 'things aren't that bad', because there is one to one support or an adult rather than the teacher in the room is both utterly disingenuous and utterly inaccurate. The education of others is interrupted.

- They take an interest in what is going on
- They may be physically in danger or be in the way
- They may be, and I would suggest that thousands of children are, scared due to what is going on and of the individual
- The other children may all have to leave the room if the individual cannot be persuaded so to do – that's right, a whole class has to leave their place

of learning for safety reasons due to the actions of one child. This happens, and in some classes it happens multiple times in a week

I'm at a loss as to how this can be a positive factor in our education system – it is a lose – lose situation for everyone involved, not least the child at the centre of the incident.

These incidents occur regardless of how many adults are present. Then, when the incident occurs, multiple adults are involved in dealing with it and it often – almost always – takes a long time. Who is missing out because adults, who should be working on behalf of all pupils, are required to deal with the unacceptable behaviour of one child? That's right – the majority of children. Answers on a postcard please as to how, in any logical sense, this can be described as inclusion.

These incidents result in children, young people, teachers and other adults being physically assaulted, spat on and verbally assaulted in mainstream primary and secondary schools across the country. It would be interesting to compare rates of assault against school staff with those against NHS staff, (which are, quite rightly, given a high profile and are obviously unacceptable), and even with police and prison staff. It cannot be done though because my experience is that assaults in schools are chronically under-reported, partly as there is little in the way of consequence for perpetrators of these assaults to worry about, especially when compared to the consequences of assaulting any of the other three groups I have mentioned.

We must take these incidents seriously and deal with the behaviour. As I have said, if a mainstream school is not the right place for a youngster then that youngster shouldn't be there. In one incident I know of, a child became violent in a classroom; he damaged school property; other pupils' property and their work and was screaming and shouting. Instead of backing the traumatised teacher, the head teacher's response was to ask

"What were you doing at the time? Was pupil X fully motivated by the task? Were you watching him?"

How, in any logical thought process, how can this be the teacher's fault? What gives the HT the right to ask these questions? Where is the concern for the health, well-being and, in a school setting, dare I say the education of the others? Pupils in classrooms all across Scotland are scared in school.

The other thing that happens to the disadvantage of the majority is that these pupils are given treats, or what is perceived by other pupils to be treats. I appreciate that different needs should, quite rightly, be addressed in different ways but I would pose this question. What message does it send to the majority if pupil X, who has wrecked their classroom and perhaps assaulted one of them one day, is the head teacher's 'special messenger, or playing with the Lego or 'helping' in the office the next day? They learn there are no consequences, they often develop a perfectly understandable sense of injustice and, in some cases, their motivation to learn is damaged even as their learning environment is disrupted – and in this point, I would refer back to my earlier arguments about curriculum.

I some cases, and not just one or two, this is happening to our children on a weekly or even a daily basis. I would invite people to think this through:

- Would adults be happy to go to a place of work where they feel scared?
- Would adults put up with co-workers who broke the rules being rewarded for so doing?
- Would adults accept being unable to do their job because of disruptive behaviour by others?
- Would adults accept having their working space, their own property or the work they were doing damaged by others in the workplace?
- Would adults accept being assaulted by a co-worker and then being required to work either in close proximity, or even in co-operation with that person?
- Would adults accept that there are few or no consequences for those behaving in this way?

Would you? No! I didn't think so. I don't think any right minded adult would yet this is what we expect thousands of our children to accept on every day.

To sum up, rhetorically, Scotland's teachers are fed up, demotivated and exploring their alternatives. Pupil support assistants and other adults are similarly fed up and, like teachers, feel bereft of any official support when incidents occur. Our emphasis on inclusion at all costs and on the pretence that all children are equal and can achieve equally, is demonising excellence, disadvantaging the most able and those who behave well and want to learn. It is, in many cases, perpetuating the educational exclusion of the majority in a desperate attempt to be seen as politically correct – it really is a special form of insanity. If we allow our teachers to teach, they will close the attainment gap – and in the right direction.

[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

-----Original Message-----

From: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
To: First Minister <firstminister@gov.scot>
Subject: Teaching in Scotland

Dear Ms Sturgeon,

I am a Primary School teacher and firstly I would like thank you for the invitation to contact the Scottish Government regarding the state of Scottish Education. Let my opinion be stated clearly from the offset: education in Scotland is in a dire state.

Quite frankly, I find it laughable at best, but in truth entirely unbelievable, that you are contacted positively by teachers regarding the education system in Scotland. Do not misunderstand me, I entirely believe that individual teachers- and even schools are doing their best in these troubling times, however, I do not know a single teacher who has a positive word to say about education in general. We are all struggling to keep our heads afloat, and below the water we are drowning.

The pressure we are under to redesign the curriculum every single year at every single stage is absolutely ridiculous. Where is the sense in having thousands of employees across the country reinventing the wheel every academic year? Financially, it's an absolutely disaster. And it is no wonder that new teachers like myself burn out and leave the profession, particularly those of us who are qualified to work in a different (private) sector.

Couple this with the behaviour issues raised by The Anonymous Teacher and it is no wonder that experienced teachers are leaving the profession in their droves. I do not wish to reword the eloquent letter written by my anonymous colleague, I simply wish to state that I wholeheartedly agree with their sentiments. Further, I believe I can confidently state that every single teacher at my present school feels exactly the same.

We remain at present for the love of teaching and the love of children. But this love cannot be limitless, for it would rob us of our mental health if it were. As it stands, I see the mental health of myself and my colleagues eroding on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Education in Scotland must change, or else we will soon find ourselves in a state of emergency.

I sincerely hope that other teachers respond to your invitation to contact you directly. And I hope that our education system is subject to a rigorous overhaul as a result.

Regards,
[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]

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From: [Redacted under S38(1)(b)]
Sent: 04 October 2018 19:34
To: First Minister <firstminister@gov.scot>
Subject: Teaching in Scotland

Dear Nicola,

I am a teacher and SNP member. I watched FMQs this afternoon and thought you answered Ms Davidson's questions competently. I am writing since you urged teachers to get in touch to voice their concerns.

Like yourself, I am from Ayrshire, but have worked in Fife since 2009 when I started as a probationer. I love being a teacher but found myself agreeing with a lot of the concerns raised in that anonymous letter. I think it's fair to say we are on our knees at the moment. When I first started in my school almost 10 years ago, there was a sense that, as teachers, we were valued and we had the necessary tools and support to do our jobs well. The school I work in now is almost unrecognisable to that. A new head teacher has recently started and his trying his best but has been forced to make massive cuts. Ours is one of the schools worst hit in Fife.

This August I returned to work from maternity leave. While apprehensive about leaving my daughter, I was excited to be back in the classroom. Since my daughter has started nursery she has picked up practically every bug going, and I have been called home to collect her on three occasions this term. Today, I had to leave work because she had been sick and two of the three classes I had to leave did not have cover. As of this morning, there were no teachers left to cover classes for the rest of the week. I have now used up the two full days paid leave I am entitled to in order to look after my daughter so any subsequent absences this session will be unpaid. That, on top of paying £50 per day for my daughter not to be in nursery.

I went to Pittencrieff Park in Dunfermline to listen to you speak a few years ago and it was clear that education is something that is close to your heart. Like yourself, I am from a working class background and have benefited from an education system which rewards talent and hard work. You said that you benefited from that system and wouldn't deny others that privilege. I truly think that you believe that. I believe that has always been one of the defining features of our education system; no matter where you are from, everyone has the chance to achieve.

In the past ten years there has been a lot of change and I am enjoying delivering the new courses but I think in order to see the benefits we need to go back and tackle the basics. We need to encourage experienced staff not to leave the profession, and I think that starts with making sure they feel valued and supported. We need support teachers, psychologists, attendance support officers, sufficient off-campus facilities. We need time to think about how we can deliver our lessons and how best to support the pupils in our classrooms, instead of being bogged down in box-ticking tasks. I think your government is doing a great job in a lot of areas and I welcome your policy to double childcare for 3-4 year olds, that will be a massive help for us.

I hope this finds you well,

Kind Regards,
[Redacted under S38(1)(b)]