



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

Ms Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
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The Scottish Parliament
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LF/KN/Cab Sec 140322
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By email

Dear Shirley-Anne

I write following last week's CERG meeting and subsequent to our EIS Council meeting of Friday 11th March.

EIS Council was dismayed and angered to hear that CERG had effectively been wound up at its last meeting, Thursday 10th, and that this decision had been made unilaterally by the Scottish Government, perhaps in conjunction with COSLA but certainly without discussion with the trade union voices on the group. A reduction in frequency had been agreed but it was with some surprise I heard you announce the demise of CERG: Scottish Government has been clear that Covid is not over, and the EIS is clear that the education system is only in the very early stages of recovery.

There was the suggestion of a monthly meeting with officials for the sharing of data, but I note the Advanced Learning Covid Recovery Group whilst also moving to monthly meetings will continue to be Ministerially chaired.

Given the continued high levels of infection amongst pupils and teachers, the coming challenge for the SQA diet, and the need for a singular focus on education recovery, the EIS Council was clear in expressing its disapproval at the ending of CERG which, whilst not perfect, at least provided a clear forum for raising ongoing Covid related concerns.

Amongst those concerns, is growing evidence of the adoption of a "business-as-usual" approach in a number of Council areas, rather than a focus on education recovery based on pupil well-being. For example:

- Evidence of some Local Authorities pushing a dual model of SQA moderation in order to "support" Secondary staff.
- Teachers in primary schools having no additional support for learning owing to high staff absence, and the need for SfL staff to cover classes; yet there is still pressure on teachers to ensure pupils are 'on track' with regards to attainment and to complete the associated tracking paperwork.

- A local authority reverting to 'mini-inspections' in spite of the fact that Education Scotland are not currently inspecting schools, their focus being on Recovery Visits.
- Headteachers doing 'in-school inspections', featuring classroom observation by the Senior Management Team members, using quality indicators (despite all the guidance to the contrary).

Meanwhile at national level, the SQA are continuing with verification approaches in spite of the ongoing pressures in schools and Scottish Government itself maintains its expectation of SNSA completion and ACEL data collection somewhat in conflict with its own guidance on education recovery underlining the prioritisation of the wellbeing of children and young people in recognition of the social and emotional impacts of the pandemic, particularly upon the most disadvantaged.

These are all areas where an Education Recovery Group should and would have locus. Leaving aside the recovery elements of CERG's work, EIS Council also instructed me to raise directly the planned removal of asymptomatic testing arrangements for school staff. This was very much seen as a litmus test of the Scottish Government's concern for the wellbeing of staff when it was introduced by your predecessor, John Swinney, and frankly the removal of this service will send a very different message to teachers. We would urge you to reverse the apparent direction of travel on this matter.

Scottish Government's approach seems to be that schools should have no additional safety mitigations in comparison to broader society, but schools are not the same as entertainment venues; they are workplaces for staff and for students, they are places they are required to attend.

We don't even know if the enhanced cleaning regimes will be maintained as these appear to be dependent on funding streams which haven't been committed to?

You should be aware that despite the opening up of society, for many teachers with increased vulnerability this is a highly worrying time, and they continue to expect due care to their needs from both national and local government.

Clearly the EIS is capable of raising issues at LNCT level with individual Councils; we have done that throughout the pandemic. The existence of clear national guidance, however, has been critical to a level of consistency across the country which, in turn, has been important to the continuity of education.

I am happy to expand further on any of the points raised above and, in the meantime, I would urge that you reflect on the concerns raised.

Best wishes



Larry Flanagan
General Secretary