

Sent on behalf of Aberdeenshire Secondary School Parent Councils
Contact: Claire Rennie
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27th November 2023

Jenny Gilruth MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
CabSecES@gov.scot

Dear Cabinet Secretary

We are writing as the Chairpersons of the Parent Councils representing the secondary schools of Aberdeenshire. We represent the parents and carers in our 17 secondary schools which have a combined role of around 16,000 pupils.

As with all education providers across Scotland, our hardworking teachers, headteachers, senior leadership teams, school support staff, and council employees are providing a service which faces increasing demands and expectations from pupils, parents, employers, and the communities they serve.

However, as your recent visit to Aberdeenshire will have highlighted, we live and work in a remote and rural area. This provides a variety of challenges to our secondary schools and Aberdeenshire Council, the most significant of these being the difficulty to recruit teachers to fill our teaching vacancies.

While this has been an issue for many years, it is now very much at crisis point. It is hard to determine the exact number of current vacancies as Head Teachers have stopped advertising some posts and have altered the curriculum to meet the staffing they do have, often removing or reducing valuable elements of the curriculum such as Technical or Home Economics. Some schools are also having to recruit primary school teachers to teach the S1 and S2 curriculum in key subjects. Subjects are not being offered, schools are having to rely on the goodwill of Further Education colleges to bridge the gaps and management time in schools is being lost as leadership posts are covering teaching classes. Overall, it has a detrimental impact on both pupil behaviour and staff morale.

The result of this is a rural attainment gap where pupils in rural and remote secondary schools are at an educational disadvantage compared to pupils in urban areas and areas closer to the more densely populated Central Belt.

The Teacher Induction Scheme, which should provide our local authority with teachers in their probation year, was designed to help mitigate this situation. It should, but it doesn't as the requested number of newly qualified teachers for rural and remote areas is never fulfilled.

In 2022/23 session, Aberdeenshire Council requested 48 secondary NQTs and were allocated 25. However, only 16 arrived as 9 withdrew before the session started. This session, 66 NQTs were requested, 18 were allocated and 12 started the session. We did not receive any appropriate allocation in the priority curricular areas where we have the most significant shortages.

It is quite clear that the Teacher Induction Scheme is not fit for purpose and requires urgent reform. We therefore urge you to make this a top priority.

Overall, we are disappointed that successive Scottish Governments have not appreciated the difficulties of recruiting teachers to rural and remote locations. The unwillingness to recognise the

inadequacies of the Teacher Induction Scheme or provide additional resources to help recruit teachers to rural and remote areas suggests that the Scottish Government believes that the pupils and parents of Aberdeenshire are not as important as the pupils and parents in urban Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Rennie	Chair	Fraserburgh Academy Parent Council
Heidi Ellis	Chair	Meldrum Academy Parent Council
Alies Bartelds	Chair	Inverurie Academy Parent Council
Karen Osterberg	Chair	Mintlaw Academy Parent Council
Ian Bruce	Chair	Portlethen Academy Parent Council
Sofi Izatt	Chair	Banchory Academy Parent Council
Jennifer Blair	Chair	Aboyne Academy Parent Council
Ashley Strachan	Chair	Turriff Academy Parent Council
Dawn Brown	Chair	Alford Academy Parent Council
Barzin Chinwala	Chair	Westhill Academy Parent Council
Katrina Suer	Chair	Mearns Academy Parent Council
David Wilson	Chair	Peterhead Academy Parent Council
James Martin	Chair	Kemnay Academy Parent Council
Joyce Reid	Chair	Gordon Schools Huntly Parent Council
Angela Stott	Chair	Ellon Academy Parent Council
Richard Sharp	Vice Chair	Mackie Academy Parent Council
Michelle Walker	Chair	Banff Academy Parent Council