



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education
T4.23 Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh EH99 1SP

9 August 2018

Dear John,

Access to Education Statistics

I am writing in regards to concerning developments in Scotland's education statistics. As I am sure you appreciate, access to statistics on schools is vital to transparency and good governance, and plays a vital role in allowing MSPs and others to hold the government to account on the area of policy described as your 'defining mission'. You will also be aware that I have asked written questions on this issue.

On 31st July statistics on support staff in schools were published on the Scottish Government website. These statistics are usually released within the Teacher Census Supplementary Data in December of every year. Last December, the Teacher Census Supplementary Data was not released, prompting me to ask a written question about it on 1 March 2018. The Teacher Census Supplementary Data was instead published in March 2018, and you explained this was due to a delay to verify data errors. However, your answer did not mention that data on support staff was omitted from this release, which prompted me to table another written question on 23 July 2018

I am disappointed in your failure to disclose that the Teacher Census Supplementary Data did not contain the data on support staff and would appreciate an explanation as to how this came to be omitted from your answer to my written question of 1 March 2018.

The statistics on support staff that were published are incomplete and not comparable to previous years. The Scottish Government website states that this is due to new quality assurance procedures that are not applied to all the categories of data that were previous collected.

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The number of categories of support staff has been reduced from 21 to 5. Let me highlight just two shortcomings this creates:

- A new category of pupil support staff has been introduced to replace additional support needs staff and classroom assistants. This means it is no longer possible to establish the number of specialist ASN support staff at a time when the number of pupils with identified additional needs has increased dramatically (and the number of specialist ASN teachers has declined).
- Data on technicians is no longer included. As TES highlighted in July, technicians are vital for delivering practical science in schools and helping pupils in STEM subjects. You will be familiar with concerns raised about the decline of technicians.

The above two examples highlight the need for statistics on schools to be available and accessible. I appreciate that the categories no longer published are available upon request. However, the changes that have been made to the statistics on pupil support staff make this data inaccessible and raise concerns that they may not be available in future years. These changes undermine the ability of MSPs and others to hold the government to account and run contrary to the principles of transparent governance. Instead, the impression is created that the government has something to hide.

I would therefore like to ask what action you intend to take to address the above concerns and ensure that statistics on support workers in schools are accessible.

Kind regards



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