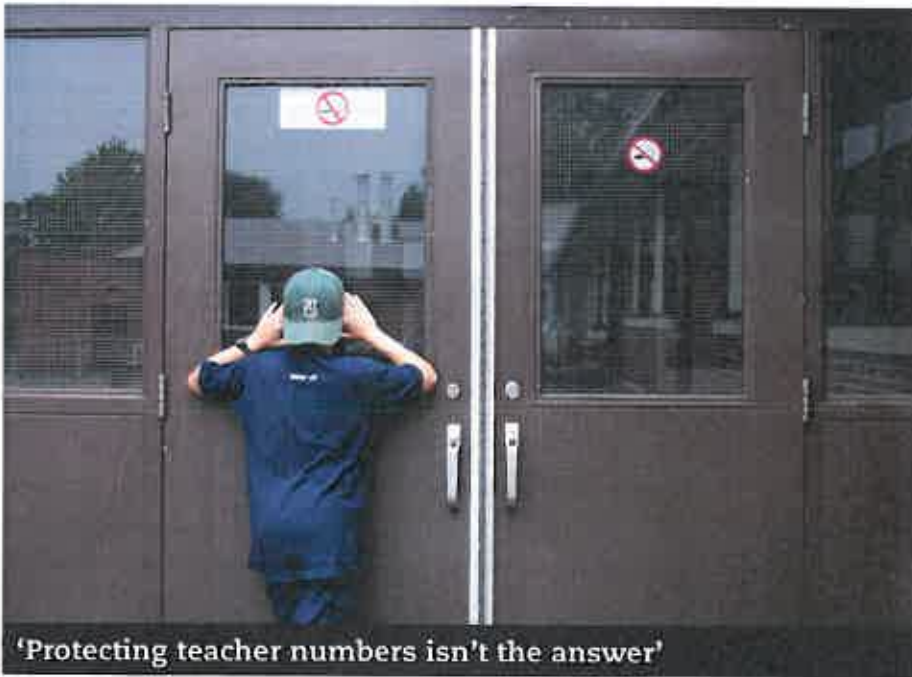


tessinsight

'Schools could be closed and children sent home'

Stark warnings about the impact of budget cuts, as support staff face the axe

HENRY HEPBURN



'Protecting teacher numbers isn't the answer'

The "vast majority" of heads do not agree with the national policy of protecting teacher numbers, a Glasgow education boss has claimed.

Teachers represent only half of the core education workforce, Ian Robertson told the Scottish Parliament's education and culture committee last week. It was "not only teachers that made a difference", he said. Mr Robertson, assistant education director at Glasgow

City Council, said: "A lot of headteachers in primary schools will tell you that they need more additional-support-for-learning workers who can work directly with young people on the interventions that need to be made, because that will have a better impact than resolutely protecting teacher numbers."

Stephanie Primrose, education spokeswoman for local authorities body Cosla, told the committee that

reductions in support staff had a knock-on effect: "If we cut back on classroom assistants and on other support that we have, teachers will be under increasing strain in dealing with complex issues."

But education secretary Angela Constance said: "I quite simply fail to see how cutting the number of high-quality teachers in our schools would help us at this time when we are galvanising our efforts to tackle the attainment gap"

CHILDREN COULD be sent home, schools closed and teachers forced to bear the brunt of the "collapse" of the support staff system, an exclusive TESS analysis of the effects of education spending cuts reveals.

The council budgets set so far reveal that no support staff role is safe, with authorities taking the axe to everything from classroom assistants to school librarians, administrative staff and attendance officers.

Councils are now relying on schools to deliver many services and some will have to delve entirely into their own budgets to find supply cover. If the money can't be found, pupils could be sent home, one council said.

Teachers in some areas will also be expected to conduct lessons once left to outside experts, such as music and PE. The extra responsibilities for teachers come at a time when unions are already complaining of unprecedented workload.

Last week, TESS revealed that the number of school support staff had fallen by 10 per cent in five years; today, in an analysis of 13 budgets agreed, we show what things may look like on the frontline in the near future. Overall, councils say that they will have to cut £350 million from 2016-17 education budgets.

The starkest prediction comes from Perth and Kinross. There, an official budget report says that the loss of the last remaining chunk of contingency budgets for supply cover means pupils may have to be sent home and schools closed temporarily.

Meanwhile, in North Lanarkshire a decision has been made to cut 42 classroom assistants to save £750,000.

In the Scottish Borders, the number of additional needs assistants will be reduced by 40, as part of a drive to save £1.4 million in additional support needs. Pupils with the most severe difficulties should not be affected.

Edinburgh's budget reveals that it will find \$223,000 of savings by cutting its support for pupils who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Meanwhile, Falkirk plans to claw back \$1.34 million by reducing support-for-learning assistants, as well as management, administrative and clerical posts.

Fife, however, rejected a proposed cut to classroom assistants, saying that they "fulfil a vital role in our schools" and play "a significant part in raising attainment".

Increased workload

The shifting of responsibility to teachers is a common theme in the budget reports. In addition, councils have tried to put a positive spin on their plans.

Perth and Kinross, for example, downplays the reduced input of both expressive arts and music visiting specialists with its prediction that all teachers at primary level would now become "skilled in teaching all parts of the curriculum".

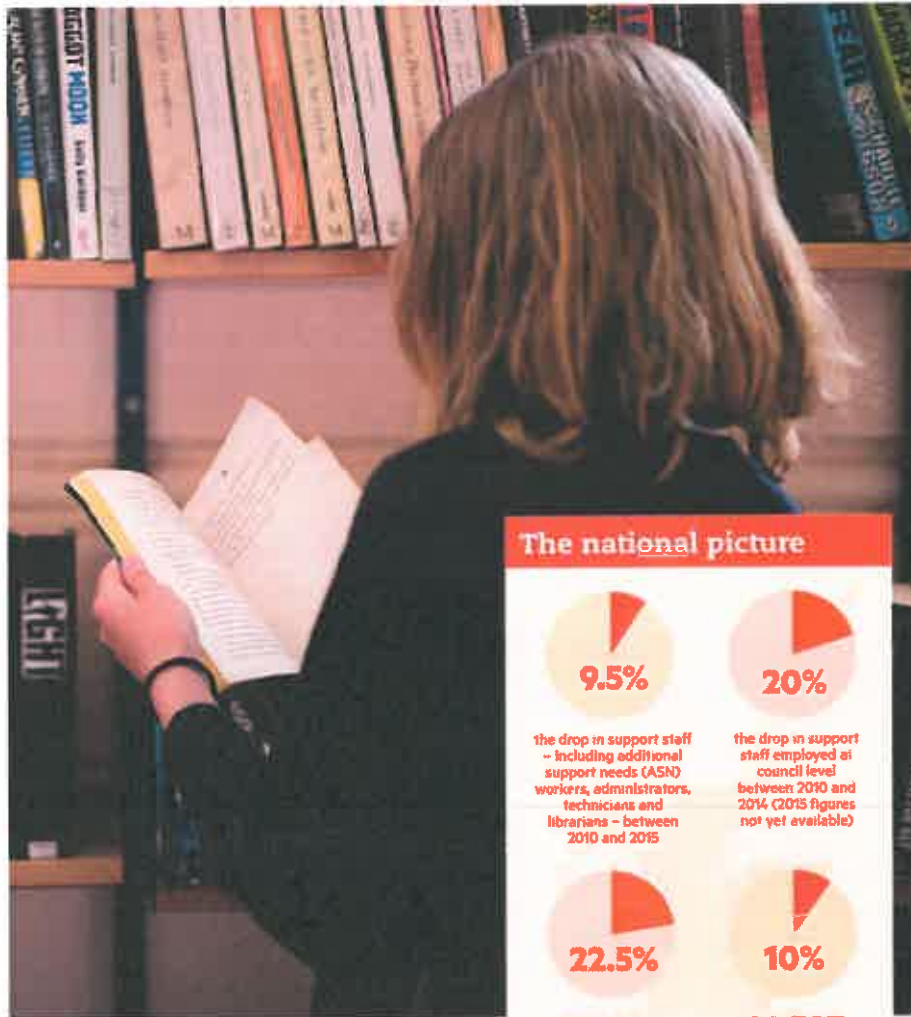
The shifting of responsibility to teachers is a common theme

The same council will increasingly expect deputy headteachers to take classes. Headteachers in larger primary schools, it says, will then have to take on some of their deputy's responsibilities.

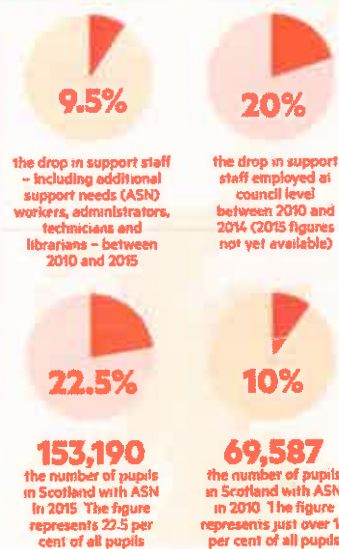
Stirling Council concedes that its target to make cuts of up to \$200,000 to devolved school management could leave heads over-reliant on parents for funds. Schools, it says, "might not be adequately resourced to support the core business of learning and teaching".

Greg Dempster, general secretary of primary school leaders' body AHDS, said: "Perth and Kinross is clearly responding to a dire budget situation. For the council to accept a proposal which makes explicitly clear that the result may be classes being sent home and schools closing is telling."

He added: "It is not sustainable for head-



The national picture



Source: Scottish government

teachers to provide sustained class cover and take forward their own duties."

Bruce Robertson, policy adviser for the education directors' body ADES, said that there was a "direct link" between the falling numbers of school support staff and the Scottish

The cuts: at a glance

- **42:** full-time equivalent (FTE) classroom assistants being cut in North Lanarkshire, saving £750,000
- **54.4:** FTE school administrative support posts also to go in North Lanarkshire
- **£440,000:** money Aberdeen will save by removing maximum class sizes of 20 in S1-2 English and maths.
- **£1.7 million:** saving Edinburgh will make if it proceeds to cut its music instructor service by 75 per cent from 2017-18.
- **10:** number of Argyll and Bute secondary school librarians, all of whom are to be made redundant, saving £194,000.
- **40:** number of additional needs assistant posts being cut in the Scottish Borders.
- **£1.54 million:** amount to be saved by Fife in the first year of an "early years review", a figure that will more than double in 2017-18.
- **£744,000:** saving in Stirling over four years through a "review of devolved school management", including reductions in secondary management and support staff.
- **11 per cent:** reduction in support-for-learning assistants in Falkirk, saving £763,000. Cutbacks in management, administrative and clerical posts will save £578,000.
- **50 per cent:** reduction in devolved school management budgets for Perth and Kinross primary schools (saving £386,000). This money is used for training as well as children's stationery and books

government's directive to maintain teacher numbers, no matter what. "It's ironic that the very staff that support learners and teachers in a whole variety of ways are the victims of the teacher-number agreement," he said.

Dougie Atkinson, professional officer for the Voice Scotland union, which represents many support staff, said: "We are becoming concerned at anecdotal evidence that the pressure on education budgets is causing support staff numbers to collapse."

He added that pupils with additional support needs would be most vulnerable, with the government's attempts to narrow the attainment gap being seriously undermined.

Voice said that it planned to ask the Scottish government to explore whether there was a link between the protection of teacher numbers and the scale of cuts to support staff. ●

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