



## Rhoda Grant

Scottish Labour MSP for the Highlands and Islands

11 February 2008

### **At Least 58 per cent of Mid and West Area Primary Schools Could Face Cuts to Teacher Numbers**

At least 58 percent of Mid and West primary schools could see cuts in their teacher numbers if the Council's budget is approved.

Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands Labour MSP, is branding the loss of the estimated 40-50 teachers across the Highlands as a disgrace.

The 'efficiencies' being proposed by the SNP/Independent administration at the Council include a change in formula for teacher numbers which could have a significant impact on smaller Highland schools.

The existing formula says that schools are entitled to a 0.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) teacher if their roll is 16 to 19 or 44 to 47 pupils – the council is planning to remove this.

According to council figures there are currently 46 schools in the Mid and West educational area with a role of 47 or less, and more just above that threshold.

"It seems the change in formula is a calculated way to reduce teachers in our schools.

"The Council claims there will not be compulsory redundancy – perhaps that is true but the same effect is achieved by failing to renew current teachers contracts because they have changed the staffing formula," said Mrs Grant.

"It would seem that far from implementing a principle of reducing class sizes this means that if the budget is approved small rural schools face cuts in their teaching staff compared to the conditions that they have today.

"It also means that it is physically impossible for a rural school with a small school roll to achieve the maximum class size of 18 - as they would not be entitled to even an additional 0.5 FTE teacher until the roll reached 20," said Mrs Grant.

"Education Chairman Bill Fernie's comments that the class size reduction aim only applies to Primary 1-3 is less than helpful.

"He doesn't seem to be worried that a single school teacher could have 20 kids to teach aged from 5 to 11, perhaps our smaller schools just don't matter," said Mrs Grant.  
The Council also plans to adjust the teaching staffing formula in secondary schools down by 3 percent.

It also wishes to make savings across primary and secondary by appointing probationer teachers into substantive teaching posts.

"It looks like Highland Council is proposing to cut the numbers of teachers per child at our schools and replace experienced teachers with probationers all to save money," she commented.

Rhoda believes this is a clear sign that the Concordat - introduced by the Scottish Government with such fanfare has failed at the first hurdle.

She commented: "And so it starts - the Scottish Government's policy of passing the buck to local councils is launched.

"This real cost to our classrooms demonstrates the empty headline grabbing promises that the SNP make.

"They say they want to bring down class sizes, promise that money is being made available to do this, then set no targets and remove all ring fencing allowing Councils to do exactly as they please."

Peter Peacock, former Education Minister in the Scottish Parliament said the move is disastrous.

"Here we have the SNP led Council conspiring with their pals in the Scottish Government to deprive teachers of their jobs and pupils of their education.

"This is what you get with a right wing government in Scotland.

"It is like the Tory days all over.

"Despite the fact the Government has the largest budget in the history of Scottish government and twice what Donald Dewar had, they will try and blame Westminster but the truth is the SNP is determined to cut public spending on schools and the like.

"While Labour built up education, the SNP is cutting it back.

"There is no need for this.

"Schools, parents, pupils and teachers deserve better."

## **Ends**

### Websites

Rhoda Grant : [www.rhodagrants.org.uk](http://www.rhodagrants.org.uk)

Peter Peacock : [www.peterpeacock.org.uk](http://www.peterpeacock.org.uk)

Highlands and Islands Labour : [www.handilabour.org.uk](http://www.handilabour.org.uk)