

UNISON Fife

[Address]

[Date]

Dear Councillor,

Subject: Urgent Concerns Regarding the Decline of School Library Provision in Fife

We are writing to follow up on the concerns we raised at the recent Education LNCT Forum regarding the state of school library provision across Fife.

Across the estate, we are seeing libraries quietly removed from timetabled use, spaces reduced or locked, and in too many schools, no qualified librarian in post. In their place, “micro-libraries” are often supervised by teaching or support staff on a best-efforts basis. This is not a criticism of those colleagues, but a recognition that a library service without a professional librarian is not the same service.

We have also raised reports of librarian role profiles being altered without consultation, and of new-build specifications that risk reducing libraries to token spaces. We want to work with you to put this right.

Local Picture

Budget pressures have coincided with a steady decline in FTE librarian posts in Fife. The result is:

- Some secondary schools with no library.
- Some secondary schools with no librarian in post.
- Others covered part-time or left unstaffed.
- Primary schools rarely having access to a dedicated librarian, relying instead on community or mobile provision.

We understand that Fife Council continues to budget annually for FTE librarian posts, but that some schools are choosing to divert this funding elsewhere under devolved school management. The outcome is that pupils in different parts of Fife have very different levels of access to professional library support.

These inconsistent approaches across Fife schools mean some pupils benefit from well-supported, safe library spaces while others are left with minimal or no provision. This undermines fairness and risks deepening inequalities.

The impact is already clear: libraries downsized, locked, or repurposed as storage or overflow teaching spaces; fewer opportunities for reading for pleasure and structured information-literacy activities; and additional, avoidable workload for school staff who are asked to supervise stock or run “mini-libraries” alongside their main duties.

Why This Matters

Libraries are far more than book-lending spaces. They are inclusive hubs that support literacy, critical thinking, digital resilience, and wellbeing. In an age of misinformation and deepfakes, qualified librarians are essential in helping young people find, assess, and use information safely.

This is directly linked to Fife Council's *Transforming Learning* programme and the significant investment in 1:1 devices for pupils. That investment will only reach its full potential if young people also develop the skills to use digital tools critically, responsibly, and effectively. Librarians are digital learning specialists—they support staff and pupils to make the best use of online resources, embed technology meaningfully in the curriculum, and ensure pupils are equipped with lifelong skills for the digital world.

Without professional library staff, there is a real risk that devices become underused or limited to surface-level tasks, rather than transforming learning as intended.

We recognise the role of *Online Fife* and apps such as *Libby* in widening access to e-books and digital resources, but these tools alone are not the full answer to transforming learning. Without librarians to guide pupils in navigating digital platforms, to connect them meaningfully with reading, and to integrate these resources into the curriculum, the potential of such provision is not fully realised. Professional librarians enhance—not replace—these services by ensuring equity of access, encouraging effective use, and building digital literacy.

Our members see daily how librarians support curricular initiatives, encourage reluctant readers, and make a particular difference for pupils with additional support needs. Trade union evidence is clear: the loss of professional library provision harms pupils' learning and adds unnecessary workload elsewhere in schools.

What We Are Asking

UNISON Fife is seeking practical, achievable steps:

1. A clear commitment to a properly staffed library in every secondary school, with devolved budgets used for their intended purpose.
2. A pause on further reductions, relocations, or “locking” of library spaces while provision is reviewed with unions and stakeholders.
3. A local minimum standard for school libraries—covering space, safe access, stock/ICT, digital integration (including *Online Fife* and e-book platforms), and the presence of a qualified librarian with protected time—applied consistently across all schools, including in refurbishments and new builds.

We also ask that you raise this issue within your party at Scottish Government level. At present, there is no statutory requirement for a staffed secondary school library in Scotland. A national framework, backed by policy and funding, is essential to protect provision and ensure consistency.

Next Steps

UNISON Fife is building a campaign and collecting evidence from members to give councillors and the public a full picture. We would welcome a meeting with your group to discuss this further.

Our aim is simple: a fair, sustainable library service that gives every young person in Fife a welcoming space to learn, read, and think—and that helps maximise the benefit of the council's major investment in digital learning.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to hearing from you regarding a suitable time to meet.

Yours sincerely,
UNISON Fife