

## Proposals to deal with capacity contingency plans for 2021/22

### Parent Council – parental feedback and questions

This is a summary of comments and questions from parents on proposals to deal with capacity issues at JGHS in 2021/22 in light of the delay to in the completion of the refurbishment of the Darroch building, and in particular in reaction to documents:

- JGHS Accommodation Contingency Plan June 2021 – June 22
- AH Pupil Feedback Contingency Planning and FDL December 2020

Parents' views submitted to the Parent Council have been collated and organised into broad subject areas, although in some cases comments cover more than one subject area and have to be read across. In cases where these were part of longer submissions where comments are less easily extracted, the full submission is also included (although anonymously) at the end.

### Summary of comments and questions

#### **Other solutions**

- Can you explain why it is not possible to put temporary units in place in the car park, with parking provided in surrounding streets through local arrangements on parking permits whilst the units are in use? Temporary units were put in place quickly when last needed, and in urgent situations it should be possible to put permissions through. To decide before Christmas that this wouldn't have been possible when there was still at least 8 months remaining is not acceptable.
- We are keen to ensure that all the options for providing normal Advanced Higher contact hours next year have been explored.
  - Is there opportunity to extend the school day for AH pupils with teachers and support staff working their contracted hours more flexibly? With an increased roll, there will be provision to employ more teachers. Could some Advanced Higher classes be held between 3.30 and 5pm?
  - Are there additional rooms that could be hired in the local community? Community or church halls, meeting rooms?
  - Could increasing links with other local high schools allow AH class sizes to be optimised?
- I note that it has been concluded that there is not enough time between now and August 2021 to construct additional temporary units to cope with the increased number of pupils; but what other options to expand accommodation have been explored? Has the Council investigated the possibility of hiring other local buildings for teaching e.g. has the University of Edinburgh been asked if it has teaching space that could be used by JGHS on a short-term basis? My strong preference at this stage would be for the Council to continue looking at options for expanding classroom capacity, whatever the cost of this. This option appears to have been taken off the table on the basis that it will not be possible to build additional TUs in time, but I do wonder if there are other options that have not yet been explored.

- In-group interactions and class discussion is more vital I would imagine in Advanced Higher lessons. Is there nowhere else they could physically go? Are there other buildings that could be rented or shared (especially if Boroughmuir High School is having similar issues?). Personally I think teaming up with another school is good and works. But face to face teaching is my preference.

### **Process and consultation**

- The documents read as though this is a done deal, and that the consultation is just to tweak details. Is this the case? Do parental views matter?
- A survey of the current 6th Year does not reflect the opinions of the year group that is going to be affected.
- It is essential to consult the current S5 about these proposals that affect them directly. Our son is not enjoying online learning and is very disappointed that this seems to be destined to continue in S6.
- These pupils will only get one chance at S6. All options to maximise pupil classroom time need to be explored. The current S5 must be consulted and pupil health and well-being needs should be the priority in decision making.
- I wonder if the school might consider arranging a separate, online meeting with its current S5 pupils to discuss the plans and seek to reassure them.

### **Pupil health and well-being**

- This year has already been impacted badly by Covid and were not able to sit Nat 5s or Highers. It feels very tough that their last year at school will also be so impacted, when they already have fewer hours in school in 6<sup>th</sup> Year as it stands.
- The classroom is not just about learning and exams. It has been very apparent this year that school plays a huge role in developing confidence, relationships and generally supporting social and mental well-being. There is a very real risk that reduction of time in school could have a serious impact on pupil health and well-being as well as reducing opportunities for involvement in the wider school community, supporting younger pupils and developing leadership skills.
- Pupil health and well-being need to be the primary concern in any plans and proposals. If this was the priority, would flexible digital learning seriously be presented as a preferred option for S6 pupils, especially considering the loss of educational opportunities and experiences over the last year?
- Next year's S6 have already had such a disrupted school experience during their exam years. More online learning is not something that my child would choose. Speaking to other parents they feel this is a done deal and there is no real opportunity to vote for anything

else. We appreciate that numbers don't allow the school to offer 5 lessons in school per subject but that would be my child's preference if it was an option.

- The current S4/5/6s will have had such a difficult time with assessments over the last two years. Shouldn't this group be a priority for face-to-face teaching if at all possible?
- This year's S5 have already had a hugely disrupted two years, having had both their National 5 and their Higher exams cancelled. My son has been very resilient and has coped well overall, but has struggled with the uncertainty and the reduced social interaction that has come with the pandemic. He was very much looking forward to a much more 'normal' S6 experience and a return to plenty of classroom time with his friends and teachers. The proposed changes have come as a severe blow to him (and I gather to many of his friends too), and he is now very discouraged. I am concerned that the proposed changes will affect both his attainment and overall wellbeing.
- 2020 has demonstrated the really important role played by schools in health and wellbeing. Even the most fortunate and mature of pupils suffered during the enforced period of digital learning. For the less fortunate, school is their safe space, which crucially includes lots of time in the company of adults who are great role models. For some children, S6 might be their last opportunity to be really well looked after and nurtured, to help their recovery after a difficult and unsettling year. I don't think we should be reducing face-to-face contact time for this year group.

### **Statutory duties and equity**

- Is the Council confident that the models proposed are in line with its statutory duty to *'ensure that there is adequate and efficient provision of school education in their area'*? My view would be that if a school building is not large enough to teach all of its enrolled pupils in person, on site, at one time, then there is not adequate provision in place.
- Are any other Schools in Edinburgh planning to use the FDL model of teaching for their Advanced Higher pupils next year?
- I am concerned about parity with other schools with similar levels of attainment to JGHS: if other, similar schools continue to offer their Advanced Higher pupils 5 periods of face-to-face teaching a week, it seems inevitable that JGHS pupils will be placed at a disadvantage. Having watched the presentation at the November 2020 Parent Council meeting, I recognise that the school is of the view that the changes proposed will not affect attainment. However, this is untested and it feels very risky to be using next year's S6 pupils as 'guinea pigs'.

### **Functioning of the proposed solution including Flexible Digital Learning**

- If moving to continued online learning, how can high standards and consistency be maintained. There is not consistency with online delivery just now, with some teachers offering a lot, and are clearly confident in what they are doing, and others are not.

- It is said that will be places for pupils to go and study when between classes. Where and what will this be, exactly? Can it be guaranteed that any place allocated to 6<sup>th</sup> Years will not be hijacked for other purposes, such as meetings (as has happened with the library)?
- How much 'hub' space will be available for pupils who want to do their FDL at school, in school time? In our case, we are well set up for my son to work from home; however, we live a 30 minute walk away from school, towards Kings Buildings, so it would be impossible for him to come home for individual FDL periods during the school day. I am concerned about potential lack of hub space, and therefore about my son wasting a lot of time during the school day because he cannot access suitable study space.
- According to the documents, kids will be able to access the teachers to ask them questions. If so, when will this be, and how will it work? These aspects don't always work well at present, so we'll be looking for a clear plan to ensure there is no backtracking on them.
- This proposal seems to over two out of five periods as self-directed study, with a device, per subject? Is this correct?
- The answers from the current 6<sup>th</sup> Years were enthusiastic, but they definitely seemed to want a teacher on hand and guidance during the study periods, as well as physical space. However if I understand it, that is not what is on offer, it's just a laptop and away you go?
- I understand that some subjects may not require 5 periods of teaching in person - e.g. Music, where the pupils might spend 2-3 periods in a practice room. I also appreciate that in subjects like History and English, there is a need for reading and research time. I'd add that a short one-to-one with a teacher to address a specific issue might be as valuable as a longer class for some pupils. The above does assume that teaching staff will remain available and accessible during any self-study periods. However, I'm not convinced that the model of self-study is appropriate for all subjects. Subjects like maths and sciences require more teaching and lab time. Looking in particular at the AH year group in 2021-22: this year group will have missed out on a number of practical aspects of their courses during Highers. You could argue that they need additional teacher and classroom / lab time to cover those areas they have missed.

It may be the case that this change could be implemented without a significant impact on attainment. However, I think it would have an impact on the quality of education. Many pupils might still leave with high grades, but they won't have gained the same level of skills and experience if they have missed out on teaching and practical lab time.

- Digital learning is a poor substitute for classroom learning:
  - Pupils miss out on conversations with the teacher. Teachers are expert at drawing out thoughts and stimulating curiosity; questioning understanding and deepening learning. Through direct contact they can inspire pupils in a way that is difficult to replicate online.
  - Pupils have less supported practical work and opportunity to develop subject specific skills.
  - Pupils miss out on group work and peer interactions.
  - Pupils find it difficult to engage with online chats for questions. They often do not know what they do not know or feel awkward asking a question on a group chat.
  - Teacher feedback on work completed online has so far been very limited.

- If there is seriously no other option than the proposed flexible digital learning arrangements, it is essential that:
  - Teacher time is protected and these teachers are not the first choice for any cover required in school.
  - Teachers actively engage pupils in the digital learning sessions, arranging small group tutorials and not relying on pupils to request these sessions.
  - Pupils are provided with protected dedicated space in school to study.
  - Pupils are provided with a suitable device and access to WiFi.
  - Training is provided for staff and pupils to maximise beneficial interactions in flexible digital learning sessions.
  - Classroom PSE and PE is timetabled for S6 pupils.
  - S6 pupils are actively encourage to get involved with extracurricular and leadership activities to promote health and well-being.
  
- Of the options presented, using the FDL model would appear to be the best option. This is also the view of my S5 son. However, I have the following concerns about the model:
  - My son’s view is that it is much more difficult for teachers to provide the same standard of teaching online as they do in-person. He feels that teachers are less able to identify pupils who are struggling with the material in an online setting; that pupils are less likely to ask questions; and that resolution of any issues takes longer online. My son has reported that, in the current lockdown situation, he and he friends are spending a lot of time messaging each other during and between lessons to get help with material they do not understand, which is very time consuming and therefore reduces overall learning. He has also noted that he finds online lessons lonely and demoralizing.
  - The document we have received lists preparation for Higher Education as a key benefit of the FDL model. I work for the University of Edinburgh and am concerned about the validity of this argument. I agree that independent study skills are essential for Higher Education as these allow students to read around and therefore develop a broader understanding of their subject in their own time. However, students in a university environment are not expected to self-teach core subject material. Universities place an extremely high value on delivering core material through in-person, face-to-face teaching. They recognise that, in the majority of cases, delivering core material digitally as has been required during the pandemic has resulted in students having a second-rate experience, and will be returning to providing as much face-to-face teaching as possible as soon as the pandemic is over.

### **Timing**

- Completion of the Darroch refurbishment is given as spring 2022, so is that when normal classes will resume?
  
- Will the Darroch building really be ready in time for spring 2022 – is there not a strong chance that Covid restrictions will mean that this date will slip further?

### **The Future**

- This decision appears to be being made on the basis of one year group’s feedback, but presumably younger children will then get this system when they are S6. Is this just a decision for 2021/22, or for the future indefinitely?

- I am not convinced this would be a short term thing, and although blended learning is ok as a stop gap measure I am not sure it is superior.

### **Planning for capacity problems**

- I am deeply frustrated and upset that the Council have allowed the situation to get to this point. I recognise that Covid has disrupted plans to refurbish Darroch, but overall feel that this is something of a convenient excuse. The Council has known for years that this problem has been coming: when my oldest son, currently in S5, started Sciennes Primary in 2009, the school had hoped to take 75 pupils into P1. In the end, I believe Sciennes took 111 children, and that the other feeder primaries for JGHS were similarly oversubscribed. The Council has therefore known for **12 years** that this, and subsequent year groups were very large, and yet it has not made adequate provision. The issues around GME have also been known for years and should have been tackled a long time ago. In short, I feel the Council has done too little, too late, and our children are now paying a heavy price for this.

## Parent submission 1

Many thanks for sharing the update on the JGHS Accommodation Contingency Plan June 2021- June 22; the current AH pupil feedback on these plans and asking for parental feedback ahead of the next Parent Council meeting.

This is our feedback.

We appreciate that the delay in the completion of Darroch presents serious difficulties for JGHS for August 2021 and that there is no possibility of providing additional new accommodation. However, we have grave concerns about the proposals for flexible digital learning that appear to be the preferred option. As parents of a pupil who is currently in S5 and planning to take Advanced Highers in S6, our child is one of the young people directly impacted by these proposals. The most recent experience of online learning has not addressed these concerns.

Digital learning is a poor substitute for classroom learning:

- Pupils miss out on conversations with the teacher. Teachers are expert at drawing out thoughts and stimulating curiosity; questioning understanding and deepening learning. Through direct contact they can inspire pupils in a way that is difficult to replicate online.
- Pupils have less supported practical work and opportunity to develop subject specific skills.
- Pupils miss out on group work and peer interactions.
- Pupils find it difficult to engage with online chats for questions. They often do not know what they do not know or feel awkward asking a question on a group chat.
- Teacher feedback on work completed online has so far been very limited.

Moreover the classroom is not just about learning and exams. It has been very apparent this year that school plays a huge role in developing confidence, relationships and generally supporting social and mental well-being. There is a very real risk that reduction of time in school could have a serious impact on pupil health and well-being as well as reducing opportunities for involvement in the wider school community, supporting younger pupils and developing leadership skills.

Pupil health and well-being need to be the primary concern in any plans and proposals. If this was the priority, would flexible digital learning seriously be presented as a preferred option for S6 pupils, especially considering the loss of educational opportunities and experiences over the last year?

We are keen to ensure that all the options for providing normal Advanced Higher contact hours next year have been explored.

- Is there opportunity to extend the school day for AH pupils with teachers and support staff working their contracted hours more flexibly? With an increased roll, there will be provision to employ more teachers. Could some Advanced Higher classes be held between 3.30 and 5pm?
- Are there additional rooms that could be hired in the local community? Community or church halls, meeting rooms?
- Could increasing links with other local high schools allow AH class sizes to be optimised?

It is also essential to consult the current S5 about these proposals that affect them directly. Our child is not enjoying online learning and is very disappointed that this seems to be destined to continue in S6.

If there is seriously no other option than the proposed flexible digital learning arrangements, it is essential that:

- Teacher time is protected and these teachers are not the first choice for any cover required in school.
- Teachers actively engage pupils in the digital learning sessions, arranging small group tutorials and not relying on pupils to request these sessions.
- Pupils are provided with protected dedicated space in school to study.
- Pupils are provided with a suitable device and access to WiFi.
- Training is provided for staff and pupils to maximise beneficial interactions in flexible digital learning sessions.
- Classroom PSE and PE is timetabled for S6 pupils.
- S6 pupils are actively encourage to get involved with extracurricular and leadership activities to promote health and well-being.

These pupils will only get one chance at S6. All options to maximise pupil classroom time need to be explored. The current S5 must be consulted and pupil health and well-being needs should be the priority in decision making.

Thank you again for sharing these materials and organising the forthcoming meeting. We hope that these points can inform the discussion and improve arrangements for next year.

## Parent submission 2

Thank you for the opportunity to submit questions and comments in advance of the capacity planning meeting. I have four specific questions I would appreciate being answered:

- 1) Is the Council confident that the models proposed are in line with its statutory duty to '*ensure that there is adequate and efficient provision of school education in their area*'? My view would be that if a school building is not large enough to teach all of its enrolled pupils in person, on site, at one time, then there is not adequate provision in place.
- 2) Are any other Schools in Edinburgh planning to use the FDL model of teaching for their Advanced Higher pupils next year?
- 3) How much 'hub' space will be available for pupils who want to do their FDL at school, in school time? In our case, we are well set up for my son to work from home; however, we live a 30 minute walk away from school, towards Kings Buildings, so it would be impossible for him to come home for individual FDL periods during the school day. I am concerned about potential lack of hub space, and therefore about my son wasting a lot of time during the school day because he cannot access suitable study space.
- 4) I note that it has been concluded that there is not enough time between now and August 2021 to construct additional temporary units to cope with the increased number of pupils; but what other options to expand accommodation have been explored? Has the Council investigated the possibility of hiring other local buildings for teaching eg. has the University of Edinburgh been asked if it has teaching space that could be used by JGHS on a short-term basis?

I also have some more general comments (which I should note are directed at Edinburgh City Council, not at JGHS – I do not hold the school in any way responsible for the situation we find ourselves in, and regret the amount of the time the school's management team have had to devote capacity issues over the years):

- I am deeply frustrated and upset that the Council have allowed the situation to get to this point. I recognise that Covid has disrupted plans to refurbish Darroch, but overall feel that this is something of a convenient excuse. The Council has known for years that this problem has been coming: when my oldest son, currently in S5, started Sciennes Primary in 2009, the school had hoped to take 75 pupils into P1. In the end, I believe Sciennes took 111 children, and that the other feeder primaries for JGHS were similarly oversubscribed. The Council has therefore known for **12 years** that this, and subsequent year groups were very large, and yet it has not made adequate provision. The issues around GME have also been known for years and should have been tackled a long time ago. In short, I feel the Council has done too little, too late, and our children are now paying a heavy price for this.
- Of the options presented, using the FDL model would appear to be the best option. This is also the view of my S5 son. However, I have the following concerns about the model:
  - o My son's view is that it is much more difficult for teachers to provide the same standard of teaching online as they do in-person. He feels that teachers are less able to identify pupils who are struggling with the material in an online setting; that pupils are less likely to ask questions; and that resolution of any issues takes longer online. My son has reported that, in the current lockdown situation, he and his friends are spending a lot of time messaging each other during and between lessons to get help with material they do not understand, which is very time consuming and

therefore reduces overall learning. He has also noted that he finds online lessons lonely and demoralizing.

o The document we have received lists preparation for Higher Education as a key benefit of the FDL model. I work for the University of Edinburgh and am concerned about the validity of this argument. I agree that independent study skills are essential for Higher Education as these allow students to read around and therefore develop a broader understanding of their subject in their own time. However, students in a university environment are not expected to self-teach core subject material. Universities place an extremely high value on delivering core material through in-person, face-to-face teaching. They recognise that, in the majority of cases, delivering core material digitally as has been required during the pandemic has resulted in students having a second-rate experience, and will be returning to providing as much face-to-face teaching as possible as soon as the pandemic is over.

o I am concerned about parity with other schools with similar levels of attainment to JGHS: if other, similar schools continue to offer their Advanced Higher pupils 5 periods of face-to-face teaching a week, it seems inevitable that JGHS pupils will be placed at a disadvantage. Having watched the presentation at the November 2020 Parent Council meeting, I recognise that the school is of the view that the changes proposed will not affect attainment. However, this is untested and it feels very risky to be using next year's S6 pupils as 'guinea pigs'.

· This year's S5 have already had a hugely disrupted two years, having had both their National 5 and their Higher exams cancelled. My son has been very resilient and has coped well overall, but has struggled with the uncertainty and the reduced social interaction that has come with the pandemic. He was very much looking forward to a much more 'normal' S6 experience and a return to plenty of classroom time with his friends and teachers. The proposed changes have come as a severe blow to him (and I gather to many of his friends too), and he is now very discouraged. I am concerned that the proposed changes will affect both his attainment and overall wellbeing. **(I wonder if the school might consider arranging a separate, online meeting with its current S5 pupils to discuss the plans and seek to reassure them?)**

· My strong preference at this stage would be for the Council to continue looking at options for expanding classroom capacity, whatever the cost of this. This option appears to have been taken off the table on the basis that it will not be possible to build additional TUs in time, but I do wonder if there are other options that have not yet been explored (see question 4 above).