

On the 3 March 2021 the Education, Children and Families Committee received a deputation from the James Gillespie's High School Parent Council in relation to the contingency arrangements being out in place because the Darroch Annexe accommodation will not be available in August 2021. The Committee asked for the following three actions to be undertaken.

1. To provide a written response to James Gillespie's High School Parent Council to the points raised in their deputation.

The points the Parent Council asked Committee to consider and responses are provided below:

**Acknowledge the Council's fundamental obligation to provide appropriate classroom space for the pupils in schools within its control**

*The Committee acknowledges it is the Council's responsibility to ensure a sufficient learning estate in Edinburgh for the school's within its control. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant delay to the planned capital programme which will have long lasting implications and contingencies for various schools have had to be developed. There are six early years projects, five primary school projects and eight secondary school projects significantly delayed by the pandemic where contingencies are being developed. The other secondary schools are Trinity, Castlebrae, Boroughmuir, Royal High, WHEC, Liberton and Portobello.*

**Examine the process whereby it has been decided that JGHS will not be provided with sufficient accommodation for 2021/22**

*At the point of lockdown in March 2020, all the Communities and Families capital programme was put on hold as part of the overall response to the pandemic. This affected all projects at various stages of the design, procurement, and construction process. Between March 2020 and the beginning of the 2020-21 session in August 2020, all activity focused on the return to school and preparation of immediate contingency requirements for August 2021. The Council, throughout this time, was operating in emergency response mode. Once arrangements were in place for the return to school in August 2021, it was possible to turn attention to the longer-term implications of the COVID pandemic.*

*For the Communities and Families capital programme, this included an assessment of projects which were due to be delivered and operational by August 2021. At this point, the Council's capital programme remained paused, so the initial focus was to get the necessary approval for any project which urgently required to be progressed and then to begin consideration of what contingency arrangements would be required. Darroch was one of the projects which was considered essential to progress and approval was sought to progress with the tender process for the project. At that point, the consideration of providing additional temporary classroom accommodation at James Gillespie's High School, as a contingency for Darroch not*

*being completed on time, concluded that it was not a realistic option. The main contributing factors to this conclusion were:*

- *The extra classroom accommodation could not have been guaranteed to be delivered on time due to the ongoing pandemic.*
- *The substantial risk of a second and significant lockdown. (The second lockdown has further impacted on several other projects).*
- *The continued pausing of the Council's capital programme for all but essential projects and, aligned to that, the unavailability of extra capital funding due to the overall implications to the capital programme caused by the COVID pandemic and lengthy approval timescales which would be required to secure any additional significant capital spend.*
- *The need to provide a contingency plan for James Gillespie's High School that could be guaranteed to be delivered and provide the necessary quality of learning and teaching, and*
- *The continued impact of the pandemic across the wider Council which has required continued intensive working to ensure all essential services are maintained.*

**To recognise the significant concerns raised by parents about this failure and its potential effects on pupils**

*Given the significant implications of the COVID-19 pandemic the contingency plans being arranged for 2021-22 are not considered a failure and will ensure pupils continue to receive quality learning and teaching. In a letter to parents and carers on 26 February 2021 the Head Teacher of James Gillespie's High School confirmed the preferred proposal will facilitate the continuing successful delivery of Advanced Highers for all pupils attending James Gillespie's High School.*

**To acknowledge that it is undesirable to introduce new methods of learning in a situation of significant periods of disrupted learning and uncertain assessment arrangements**

*All S6 learners are expected to increase their skills for independent self-study in readiness for leaving school. This is particularly true to those studying Advanced Highers who are most likely to study at university. It is not therefore seen as undesirable, rather the reverse. Most important is the quality of teaching and learning and significant care and planning has been put into enhancing the quality assurance of this with increased class visits, monitoring and tracking periods and key adult time to discuss learning. The option of reducing course choices is not acceptable to the school and this model, with the mitigations in place, is seen as appropriate arrangement.*

*Delivery of Advanced Higher (AH) courses in 3 periods of face-to-face teaching is common in many schools and, on occasion, in JGHS when subject uptake has been low. However, the large class sizes at AH level in JGHS generally ensure a further 2 periods remain timetabled for staff to provide flexible directed learning to students. The AH courses are very well suited to this model.*

**request the provision of additional accommodation sufficient for the whole JGHS roll for 2021/22**

*The answer above explains why it was not possible to guarantee that additional accommodation could be provided on time as a contingency. At the Committee's request the option for providing temporary units has been given further consideration. All the reasons listed above for not being able to guarantee delivery of temporary units remain. However, even when putting to one side the availability of temporary accommodation then the only location the units could be placed would be on the all-weather pitch within the campus. This is not an acceptable solution for the school who need the pitch to be available for learning during the 2021-22 session. The pitch is an essential asset to deliver PE as part of the core curriculum. Without it the ability to offer the required minimum 2 hours of PE to all in S1-S4 would be lost. It would also lead to significant damage to the pitch and the facilities management company for the school would demand a new pitch is laid after the units are removed which would cost approximately £300,000. The pitch would also be unavailable to the school for part of the 2022-23 session. The Council will continue to work with suppliers to assess whether the availability of temporary units can resolve some of the accommodation issues we are facing at a number of schools.*

**To seek assurances that the 2022/23 session will not be affected by a lack of basic provision of accommodation with even more widespread detrimental effects on the school.**

*The refurbishment works at Darroch have commenced and are scheduled to be completed by April/May 2022. The main risks of further delay to the projects relate to further lockdowns related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and all of the usual risks for any construction projects. Regular updates on progress will be provided.*

**To ask the Head Teachers of James Gillespie's High School and Boroughmuir High School to consider exploring physical consortia of in-classroom teaching of advanced higher subjects.**

*JGHS and Boroughmuir have, over many years, developed strong partnership working as part of the Council's wider consortia arrangements involving all 23 secondary*

*schools. The Depute Headteachers tasked with developing the schools' timetables work closely to accommodate pupils from each school. This work will continue and be developed further for session 2021/22 as both schools have much to gain from pooling resources to mitigate challenges relating to accommodation.*

*By way of example, in session 2019/20 we had pupils benefiting from consortia arrangements in the following subjects:*

*Boroughmuir pupils →JGHS*

- *AH French*
- *AH German*
- *AH Stats*
- *AH History*
- *Higher Psychology*

*JGHS pupils →Boroughmuir*

- *AH Mechanics*
- *AH BM*
- *Higher Economics*
- *NPA Photography*
- *AH Drama*

*In session 2020/21 we have remotely maintained the following reciprocal arrangements:*

*Boroughmuir→JGHS*

- *Higher psychology*

*JGHS→Boroughmuir*

- *Higher HFT*
- *AH Mechanics of maths*
- *Higher Economics*
- *NPA Photography*
  - *NPA digital media*

**To explore additional classroom accommodation solutions for James Gillespie's High School in consultation with the Head Teacher and to circulate a briefing note to Committee members and relevant local Ward Members on any viable options identified including information on delivery timescales and any associated planning or regulatory issues.**

*Alternative options continue to be explored for the learning hub accommodation that has always been required as part of the contingency plan. Updates will be provided when further information is available.*