

James Gillespie's
High School
Parent Council



Cllr. Joan Griffiths,
Convener, Education, Children and Families
Committee
City of Edinburgh Council

Copied to:

Cllr. Steve Burgess

Cllr. Christopher Cowdy

Cllr. Euan Davidson

Cllr. Tim Jones

Cllr. David Key

Cllr. Simita Kumar

Cllr. Martha Mattos Coelho

Cllr. Kayleigh O'Neill

Cllr. Val Walker

Cllr. Louise Young

Amanda Hatton, Executive Director of Education, Children and Families

Lorna French, Acting Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning

Neil McCallum, Headteacher, JGHS

Dear Joan

James Gillespie's High School: Capacity planning

The Parent Council at James Gillespie's High School (JGHS) is writing to raise parents' concerns about meeting future accommodation requirements at the school. We hope that the points we put forward will form the basis for positive discussions on ensuring that suitable accommodation is available for all pupils at JGHS in the future.

Background

As you know, rising roll pressures have been an issue of concern at the school for some time. The school campus at Warrender Park Road was rebuilt during the period 2014-2016, and during that time the Darroch building on Upper Gilmore Place was used as a decant space for senior pupils. Even before the completion of the rebuild it was clear that steps needed to be taken to ensure sufficient space at JGHS into the future, and the Parent Council lobbied the Council for the Darroch building to be retained for JGHS use following the decant to ease that pressure. The Council did not wish to take that path and, instead, in early 2016, sought to cap the S1 intake of pupils by withdrawing offers, which had already been made, of S1 places at JGHS from a group of P7 catchment pupils. That

decision was opposed by the school community as an inappropriate response to the situation and was eventually withdrawn.

In due course it became Council policy that a new Gaelic medium secondary for Edinburgh would be established. This is in line with the Council's Gaelic Language Plan proposals, and the wishes of parents in Gaelic-medium education. This policy required time for planning, and to build up the Gaelic unit to meet the requirement to demonstrate the educational benefit to affected pupils of such transfers under the Schools (Consultation) 2010 Act. It was decided at that point to refurbish the Darroch building to use as part of JGHS, with the part-funding of the Scottish Government's Gaelic fund to support the Gaelic focus of the building's use. In 2019 temporary units were erected on campus to provide additional accommodation until the projected completion of the Darroch refurbishment in August 2021.

The Darroch refurbishment was set back for more than a year, as a result of covid, and opened eventually in October 2022. Various steps were taken to provide extra capacity at the school during that period: retention of the temporary units, rental of part of the Children 1st Building, additional use of digital learning and – with the latest delay at the beginning of this term – re-purposing of space in the school for use for teaching, including general purpose areas, the school library, theatre, canteen and even corridors.

Current position

All at JGHS are delighted that the Darroch building is now complete and has been handed over to the school. It provides a GME-focussed annexe for S1 and S2 GME as well as teaching and studying space for the senior school. It has also freed up accommodation at the main campus.

However, although the school currently has the accommodation it needs, the Council's projections show that the roll will continue to rise, and that the extra accommodation provided by the Darroch building will not be sufficient for very long. The nominal capacity of the campus (including the temporary units) is 1450. The addition of the Darroch building provides further capacity of several hundred; however, in March, the Education, Children and Families Committee considered Secondary School Roll Projections which showed that by 2027 the school roll will reach 2000.

The completion of arrangements for a GME secondary school would, over time, reduce numbers to an extent. However, there is currently not a plan for GME which is likely to be implemented in that timescale. In addition, and importantly, it has been clear for some time that factors such as the popularity and size of feeder primaries, increased numbers of families in the catchment, and the continued construction of residential accommodation in the school's vicinity, mean that the school that we moved into in 2016 will not be sufficiently large into the future to accommodate its catchment pupils. It is in the interest of all pupils at JGHS that planning for accommodation over the medium- and long-term is carried out as soon as possible, to ensure that parents, pupils and staff can have confidence both that an appropriate strategy is in place, and that ad hoc solutions and late-running construction work – both of which we have experienced as a school community in the recent past – are not a factor in the future.

It has been reported (most recently at the Education, Children and Families Committee on 20 September) that in a rising rolls situation the management options include catchment change, timetabling efficiencies, internal reconfiguration of existing accommodation, and the provision of additional accommodation. Catchment change would be an inappropriate strategy, particularly if only to deal with an interim period until a GME school is in place. Over recent years, the school has experienced different approaches to our space problems, including significant reconfiguration of

internal space, the construction of temporary accommodation and the use of third-party accommodation. We have a moment of respite now, but parents do not want the school to have to revisit the stresses and shortcomings of short-term fixes. Instead, we consider it important that work starts now to put in place solutions for the future which focus specifically on the provision of additional school accommodation.

GME planning

We note that the Council is continuing to consider options for reaching a conclusion on planning for a new GME secondary. Whatever the eventual plan, as noted above, to ensure a successful Statutory Consultation for a new school, steps will have to be taken to ensure that there is a robust case for educational benefit accruing to pupils affected.

Whilst the plan is to 'grow' the basis of a new GME school within JGHS, it is imperative that there is a proper budget for GME staffing which will allow its expansion and development to support the educational benefits of the transfer that must ultimately be demonstrated. There has historically been no specific budget for GME staffing and the result is that the school has to manage both English-medium and Gaelic-medium staffing from a single budget, although the pressures on each area are different. Without specific support during this period when JGHS is the home of both English-medium and Gaelic-medium teaching, either the GME development proposed will not take place as envisaged or that process will put strain on a school budget which is having to balance both EME and GME requirements.

I am sure that you will agree that it is in the interests of all at the school, whether within English- or Gaelic-medium that sufficient funding is in place to meet these challenges in support of the Council's aims of expanding GME secondary provision into a new secondary school.

Future planning

JGHS parents therefore seek a forum for discussion with the Council which will deal with the following:

- Clarity about the projections for the school roll into the future
- Discussions starting now to allow for planning in advance for the best way to meet the whole capacity of JGHS for the next 20 years under a variety of scenarios
- Consideration of a range of accommodation options, including future plans for the Darroch building, temporary units and other building options on the site, or adjacent to it (including the Children 1st building)

We also seek clarity on the Council's planning for GME staffing and its funding, which will support both English-medium and Gaelic-medium pupils in the school.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Sarah Scott

Chair, JGHS Parent Council