

James Gillespie's High School

Parent Council Meeting

Tuesday 2nd February 2021

Note of Meeting

This meeting was held using a Microsoft Teams presentation due to ongoing limitations on group meetings related to Covid-19.

Questions from parents and carers were invited prior to the meeting and could also be added during the meeting using a moderated chat.

The following are notes of the presenter names, agenda, and action points to accompany the video of the meeting held on Teams and available to view at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6S-pQcHbxE&feature=youtu.be>

Presenters:

Donald Macdonald – DM (HT),

Sarah Scott – SS (Chair),

Lorna French – Schools and Lifelong Learning Service Manager (City of Edinburgh Council) LF,

Crawford McGhie – Senior Manager Estates and Operational Support (City of Edinburgh Council) CM,

Laura Stewart – DHT (Equity and Rising Rolls) LS

Moderators:

Graeme Davis – GD, Cath Downie – CD

Minutes:

Laura Young – LY (Secretary)

1. Welcome and note of last meeting (15th December 2020) – Sarah

Scott (0:00:00- 0:05:40)

SS welcomed everyone and outlined the format of the meeting to look at plans to deal with capacity in 2021/22, following news that the refurbishment of the Darroch building has been delayed. Formal minutes were not recorded for the previous online meeting as a video record is available at <https://youtu.be/mtpVkQj0zSA>. Sarah welcomed tonight's speakers.

SS noted that tonight's meeting is to deal with the issue of capacity only and not the usual parent Council business. The next routine Parent Council meeting will take place on Tuesday the 22nd of February 2021 and further details regarding that meeting will be sent out nearer the time.

The first outline of plans to deal with the results of the delay to the refurbishment of Darroch were given to the Parent Council in November last year and in January this year the School produced documents about the proposals, setting out the plans and giving the results of a survey of S6 pupils. These have been circulated to parents via the School and are also available on the Parent Council website ([Capacity Update](#))

[Jan 2021](#) and [Survey of Advanced Higher Pupils Dec 2020](#)) where you can also find a summary of the questions and concerns raised by parents in reaction to those documents. ([Capacity Contingency Plans - Parental feedback and questions 25.1.21](#))

The main thrust of the proposals is to increase use of Flexible Digital Learning (FDL) for our Advanced Higher classes next year and for that reason we have highlighted that those in the current S5 are likely to be particularly interested in what is being put forward. The plan for the evening is to hear from the presenters who will outline the plans, the reasoning behind them and also address the questions raised by parents already. We hope that this will be dealt with by 7:30pm or thereby and that will leave half an hour for questions. SS handed over to Lorna French, this evening's first speaker.

2. Lorna French - Schools and Lifelong Learning Service Manager (City of Edinburgh Council) (0:05:40-0:09:29)

LF thanked the Parent Council for the opportunity to attend and talk to parents and carers this evening. LF's intention is to give the strategy that sits behind the education proposals for next year and the coming sessions and hopefully this will give everyone an indication of where all schools will be headed, not just James Gillespie's, and it will also give a sense of what the Council is trying to achieve for all schools.

The strategy links directly to the City of Edinburgh Council's Vision for Edinburgh 2050, which all residents and employees, parents, carers and families have contributed to. This Vision informs the strategy for education, as well as the economic strategy and the care strategy. For all schools, and particularly those in the same positions as JGHS, there is an expectation that they will develop their learning strategy within the Edinburgh Learns for Life strategy, which sits within the business plan and articulates to the City Vision.

LF shared the vision, mission and goals that the Council will be working towards. It is a long-term piece of work that sets out very clear expectations of equity, health, sustainability. Running through all of these is a high expectation for quality. The City Vision is also heavily influenced by digital practises. This vision was created before and during Lock down 2020 and as such encompasses a view of education that reaches beyond the walls of a school. The previous vision was bound by the environment of the schools themselves, so it is no coincidence that vision for education is now much more expansive. This lends itself to what the Council wants to achieve for the children and young people of JGHS. What the Council expects all schools to do is very much what JGHS has already begun to do. Schools are being asked to review their current curriculum rationale within the context of this expanded vision for Edinburgh education. The schools are all at different stages of doing this but JGHS, and some other schools that are actively taking forward the learning estates new buildings, extensions etc have progressed further with this. Reviewing their curriculum rationale in line with the City Vision means that they are going to be particularly influenced by Covid in looking at new courses that can be delivered in the Senior Phase and the expectation is of in person learning as well as digital learning. Within this expanded vision there will be partnerships with schools locally, as in the current Consortia arrangements whereby pupils go to schools to learn

subjects that might not have been delivered in their own school, but the Council are expanding expectations there that Consortia can be the local schools, but also national schools and neighbourhood schools. The Council is also expecting greater partnership working with Colleges and Universities and staff coming in, as well as the increased expectation of digital input. Similarly, Edinburgh has so many opportunities in terms of businesses, that the Council are expecting Schools to develop and expand their vision of further higher education into the wider world of work.

In terms of digital learning, JGHS has got a head start on many schools in recent times. There will be a need to develop infrastructure for Digital Learning 1 to 1. There will be a need to get devices organised and training for young people and parents. As well as the professional learning that the teachers will take forward. All of this is currently under way. This will open things up in terms of expanded content in the curriculum. These are all pluses; they are all beneficial features of what lies ahead for our young people. LF is very aware that we are still building the steps that we are taking and although the vision for education has been accelerated because of Covid and Lock down it is very clearly there, and it does lean heavily on digital learning and an expanded vision for education. LF finished outlining the strategy at this point and handed over to colleagues to talk about the operational aspects of the contingency planning.

3. Crawford McGhie - Senior Manager Estates and Operational Support (City of Edinburgh Council) (0:09:29-0:14:45)

SS passed over to Crawford McGhie, who gave a brief update on the Darroch project.

At the point of Lock down March 2020, the Darroch construction project had been about to go out to tender. It could not have come at a worse time for a project in terms of ongoing consequences and delays. All CEC projects and all construction sites were shut down at this time. The Council stopped all tender processes and this situation continued through the summer. CM put forth four priority projects that he knew were crucial to get started at the end of the summer and Darroch was one of these projects. It has taken until now to get a contractor in place and ready to start the project. This is why the contingency, in line with the City of Edinburgh's Vision that LF has already outlined, needs to be put in place.

In terms of specific questions asked regarding other types of contingencies, such as additional temporary units on the current campus site. The answer to this is that it would be very difficult even in normal times to achieve this. Planning have said to Estates previously that they are not constructing anything further on the overall campus site. This does not mean that you couldn't put in a planning application, Estates could, but it would be very unlikely to be approved especially because of the massive risks that continue with Covid. Even if a project had been kicked off there could have been further construction lock downs and in fact there still could be. The new South African strain of Covid could lead to construction sites being closed down in a couple of weeks' time. Estates just don't know, and that risk is far too high for them to take forward. Any type of contingency that could then fail, on top of our failing project would not work and that is why we had to come up with a contingency

that would work. Another factor has been the very significant budget pressures that the Council now faces. CM is currently tasked with saving over sixty million pounds from his over all capital projects programme, which is going to be no easy task at all given all the priorities we have across the learning estate. This is why the contingency had to be something other than building. The timescale, if things stay on track, is that Darroch will be ready for roundabout Easter 2022 so there is a bit of leeway there, in terms of the building definitely being ready for the start of August 2022.

The other main questions relate to trying to find accommodation for Hub space that will fit with the Flexible Digital Learning programme and Estates are currently working on this. Though the Hub is requirement of the contingency plans there is not currently a definite solution for this, but it is something CM will continue to work on and pass forward solutions for. CM finished outlining the construction and buildings background to the contingency planning by pointing how the plans fit with the longer-term vision for learning through out the city. It also fits with the longer-term sustainability vision to not build new buildings if it can be avoided, saving both energy and construction costs etc. CM gave his thanks to the meeting.

SS invited CM to stay on for questions.

4. Overview - Donald Macdonald (0:14:45 -0:20:46)

SS asked DM to speak about how the arrangements explained so far would impact on JGHS.

DM thanked SS and wished everyone a good evening. He shared his intention to outline how the School has arrived at the solution of Flexible Digital Learning (FDL) and why they believe it is the way to deal with the current shortfall in accommodation. He prefaced this by asking who would have thought we would have had the year we have just had. It has been an incredible, rollercoaster year. Each week and each month has brought new challenges, new opportunities as well, for us to look at what we can do differently to address and deliver for our pupils. DM would like to state at the outset that from early feedback from parents and pupils that the current S5 may well be the ones that have borne the brunt of the pressure associated with the Pandemic. DM is thinking of them having had no exams in S4 nor now in S5, the continuing uncertainties around how schools will assess in S5, and how the School is are now saying they are going to make changes to learning and teaching in S6.

When DM learned, last August, of the shortfall that the school is going to experience in accommodation, he met with Laura Stewart, DHT, and initially though “yikes, how are we going to deal with this?” Several positive and solution focussed meetings followed in which the school was well supported by LF, CM and other Council Officers. A range of possible solutions were arrived at, and a paper on this was shared with parents prior to Christmas. DM has been very mindful of how any solution reached will impact on the current S5, particularly on their health and wellbeing at a time of such uncertainty. DM was also concerned about the staff and how they would respond to being asked to deliver learning and teaching quite differently in S6. The School quickly identified, for a whole variety of reasons, that if

they were going to go down a digital route with flexible learning then it would have to be with S6 and the Advanced Highers. Around 80% of S6 learners are aiming to go to University. The School needs to create opportunities for them to be more independent learners. That is key. If the School had been presented with this challenge prior to the Lock down last year then DM is not sure if they would have embraced or been so enthusiastic about the approach they have come up with. During the first Lock down the School learned quickly, there were so many things that DM feels the School got wrong, in terms of learning and teaching. This second Lock down, the current one we are experiencing, DM feels the School have done much better. Clearly there are things DM thinks the School can do even better at. Having said that DM is very aware that the contingency plan reduces face to face contact time for students as it will be based on three face to face contacts, and parents will rightly be concerned how this will impact on attainment. DM honestly believes that this will not impact negatively on attainment. In fact, DM is determined that attainment will rise. The School is not aiming for attainment to be maintained, they must aim for attainment being raised. DM drew a parallel with the decant years, 2013-2016, during which he made the same predication about attainment and people were sceptical, but the School did raise attainment through those years. In fact, the School was awarded two Scottish State School of the Year awards in 2015. That aside, DM is convinced that attainment is going to rise. He is determined that it will.

DM handed over to Laura Stewart to take us through the detail of FDL but finished by saying he understands the reservations and concerns of parents but would add that going forward it's important that we remain as positive, and solution focussed as possible. DM is genuinely excited by what the School has come up with. It is the best solution, and he is convinced that it will deliver and will raise attainment.

5. Laura Stewart - DHT (Equity and Rising Rolls) (0:20:46-0:34:30)

LS began by sharing her presentation, JGHS Capacity Planning 2021-22. The presentation will show feedback collected by the School from students, and staff on the proposal of three periods in classroom teaching balanced with two periods of Flexible Digital Learning and if this were to begin in June of this year what would the School require for it to take place. Parents have submitted quite a few questions in advance and the presentation will hopefully answer these questions. There will be opportunities to ask further questions after the presentation and also following the meeting.

The School first spoke to the S6 Pupil Voice to gather their views this lead to a survey of the Advanced Higher students currently in S6. These students were selected because they are currently doing the courses that the School is looking to teach in an alternative way. These courses are very well suited to a different way of teaching styles and strategies. This is very different to the Higher courses which the S5 are currently studying. The School is currently in the process of surveying the S5 students on their home learning experiences from round one and round two, asking about positive aspects as well as barriers to learning so that the School can build on this. An assembly has been scheduled for S5 to explain what the S6 experience could be like in comparison to what they are experiencing in S5. There is also a survey for the S5 pupils. Where they can identify any concerns and the School will be able to offer reassurance.

Some feedback from the S6 survey so far

- 69% against reducing courses.
- 51% against offering any courses all online.
- Travelling to other schools – 33% agreeable with the majority neutral
- At the start FDL had the most positive response for contingency plans with more than half voting that it was a great idea and only 1 student against it.
- Following further clarification on FDL time, e.g. clear work allocated, feedback, somewhere to go to study, teacher access during FDL time then those who agreed/strongly agreed had increased to over 90% and no students now disagreed with FDL as a suitable approach.
- 6 students stated that even though it may be their favoured option they might not cope as well with FDL – however, the reasons they gave are mitigated by the steps the school would take in preparation.

Student Concerns (S5 to follow)

- How to cover course content in time
 - Many schools deliver AH content in 3 periods with positive statistical data.
 - We will have additional FDL time to further support.
- Access to class teacher during FDL
 - FDL time protected and allocated on timetables for students and teachers.
 - Additional support time for those struggling can be accommodated.
- Work during FDL time will be directed by teachers: not self-directed study.
- School systems for tackling lack of motivation/engagement/attendance.
 - Similar system for monitoring FDL time as that used for classroom-based learning – in fact its likely this will be strengthened due to the inclusion by FDL, which will benefit all
- Quality assurance procedures in place for FDL time to prevent overloading students with work and ensure high quality learning and teaching experience.

Staff Survey

- 61% staff responses so far have experience of teaching AH in 3 classroom-based periods or less but none have with the additional protected FDL time.
- No staff currently delivering AH at JGHS are opposed to the FDL proposals and a significant number have identified positives with the extra flexibility that this could bring their subjects.
- There was some agreement for increasing neighbourhood links and creating a more efficient timetable but cutting course choice was not supported.

Preparation work is ongoing. This will involve consultation with CEC, staff, students and parents to ensure concerns are addressed; continued planning for adopting systems to suit FDL; monitoring and evaluation throughout; additional support in place where required.during FDL time as well

Differences to lockdown of AH FDL:

- Teacher contact in class for three hours weekly and support sessions in school are possible

- Tasks checked and specifically selected for FDL time so tricky content core content delivered in class time.
- Staff only using FDL time with AH classes (reducing workload of online learning with younger years which is very time consuming proportionally)

A link containing all of the information regarding capacity planning will be available on the School website shortly. This will help parents keep up to date.

Questions and answers (0:34:30-1:13:21)

SS thanked the presenters for their presentations and parents for their submitted questions. All questions will be captured after the meeting, answered, and posted to the PC website - [JGHS Parent Council website](#)

SS apologised for the delay to the previous meetings questions being posted to the PC website. The answers are incomplete because most pertained to the SQA arrangements for this year and the information regarding this has changed since the last meeting. SS and DM are expecting the complete answers to appear on the website next week but if you need your question answered more quickly then please email the Parent Council or the School so your question can be attended to as soon as possible.

6. Thanks – Sarah Scott (1:13:21-1:14:34)

At nearly quarter past eight SS closed the meeting. SS thanked the presenters for their presentations and the parents for their questions. SS noted that answers will be published for the raised to the questions and these will be posted to the PC website as soon as they are available.

SS ended by stating that what has been considered tonight is an issue of important concern to pupils and parents, especially after such a disrupted period in everybody's educational experience. SS thanked everyone who has brought forward and explained the plans. As parents we will need to regroup and consider what we have heard this evening. As ever the Parent Council can be reached by email or email address is jghscouncilcomms@gmail.com and this can also be found on our website which is linked to the Parent section of the School website. Thank you all for joining us tonight and Good Night.