

15 February 2021

cc. JGHS Parent Council
Lorna French, City of Edinburgh Council
Crawford McGhie, City of Edinburgh Council
Councillor Ian Perry
Councillor Alison Dickie
Councillor Steve Burgess
Councillor Cameron Rose
Councillor Melanie Main
Councillor Mandy Watt
Councillor Neil Ross
Councillor Nick Cook
Daniel Johnson, MSP
Miles Briggs, MSP
Sarah Boyack, MSP
Alison Johnstone, MSP
Neil Findlay, MSP
Andy Wightman, MSP
Jeremy Balfour, MSP
Gordon Lindhurst, MSP
Ian Murray, MP

Dear Mr Macdonald

Flexible Distance Learning (FDL) for Next Year's S6 Pupils

We are contacting you about the FDL proposed for next year's Advanced Higher pupils. Our sons and daughters are currently in S5 and will be directly affected by these proposals. We are aware that the Parent Council has written to you, summarising views of parents present at the Parent Council meeting on 2 February 2021. However, we would also like to take this opportunity to highlight our key concerns because we consider the proposals to put our young people's attainment and wellbeing at risk.

1. Alternative accommodation options have not been adequately explored

We think that the key question of alternative accommodation was poorly answered at the Parent Council meeting. Numerous suggestions were put forward by parents: local community buildings; private sector accommodation; University of Edinburgh accommodation; sharing classrooms with other schools; building additional temporary units. No clear evidence was produced to show that they have ever been given proper consideration. We also wonder if there is the option of revising the Darroch refurbishment plans such that sufficient, safe classroom space to accommodate next year's S6 pupils is made available in August 2021, even if the overall project is not complete?

2. Flexible Digital Learning is not as good as classroom-based teaching

We are concerned that the quality of FDL will not be high enough and that this will place JGHS pupils at a disadvantage. Our concerns stem from our sons' and daughters' experiences of online learning this year. The quality of the online teaching provided has been variable, and lower than that of face-to-face teaching overall. Our intention here is not to criticise what has happened

over the past year: what has been offered has been more than acceptable given the context of the pandemic and the speed at which schools have had to get online learning up and running. However, we do not believe that the online learning that is currently available is good enough to be offered as part of a standard teaching model, post-COVID. We recognise that teachers will be given additional time to develop and improve the offering in the coming months, but believe that it will take years, not months, to develop online teaching that compares favourably with face-to-face, classroom teaching.

Some of our young people plan to apply to English universities or highly competitive programmes at Scottish universities. They are likely to receive conditional offers based on their Advanced Higher results. We recognise that you stated at the Parent Council meeting that you are determined that the new model of teaching will not affect attainment. However, this is an untested model. If it does not work as well as planned, our sons and daughters will pay a high price for this. Our concern here is heightened by the fact that we presume universities will be looking particularly closely at the Advanced Higher results for this year group, given that these will be the only exam results they have that are not based on teachers' predicted grades.

3. The impact on the mental health of pupils

Our young people report finding online learning lonely and demoralising. They were very much looking forward to a return to full, face-to-face teaching and plenty of time with teachers and friends in 2021/22. They are now hugely discouraged by the idea that they will potentially only have nine hours of contact time per week.

Recent studies on the subject suggest that online learning and lack of socialisation over the past year have been detrimental to young people's mental health. **Next year's S6 desperately need a 'normal' year** to make up for some of what they have lost since March 2020. Instead, they are being offered another compromised school year.

4. The lack of certainty over digital hub arrangements

Clearly the 'hub' is critical to the success of the proposed model, both for those pupils who do not have a suitable place to work at home, and for pupils who live too far away from the school building to come home for individual periods during the school day.

Discussion of this issue at the Parent Council meeting was concerning. It appears that a final decision about the location of the hub has not yet been made, leaving us wondering about the likelihood of there being suitable hub accommodation, with enough space for all pupils wishing to use it, in place for the start of the 2021/22 school year.

5. Consultation process

Our understanding is that the Council and the school have known since last summer that the Darroch refurbishment work was not going to be finished in time for the start of the 2021/22 academic year. Whilst we recognise that proposals to address the problem were taken to the November 2020 Parent Council meeting, it was only in January 2021 that parents more widely were made aware of the issues. This is very disappointing given that time is clearly of the essence here. Had parents been involved earlier, it may have been possible for us to contribute to the discussions in a more meaningful way.

We were disappointed that the focus of the recent Parent Council meeting appeared to be less on addressing parental and pupil questions and comments submitted ahead of the meeting in a

direct way, and more on trying to convince parents that FDL is a positive development. We recognise that, at this stage, the school has little option but to present FDL positively given that the Council has not offered any accommodation-based solutions to the problem. However, going forwards, we believe that parents, pupils, the school and the Council are more likely to be able to work together constructively in relation to this matter if we acknowledge that what is being proposed is not a positive development, but is sub-optimal and the result of extremely poor Council planning around rising rolls over a number of years.

Based on the comments that were submitted both before and during the meeting, it would appear that the majority of parents have a strong preference for alternative accommodation being identified to allow Advanced Higher pupils to continue receiving five periods per subject, per week of face-to-face teaching. Unless the Council provides parents and pupils with clear evidence that all options around this have been thoroughly explored, and dismissed for good reason, we believe it will be very difficult for parents and pupils to accept the proposed FDL model.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Leckie and Richard Shirridan	Alasdair Shirridan	5L2
Helen and Mark Anderson	Alex Anderson	5S2
Denise Barrault	Amelie Campbell	5R1
Jenny Matrundola	Andrew Matrundola	5W1
Solveigh Lass-Evans	Aneirin Evans	5R2
Lisa and Paul Green	Anna Green	5R2
Marian Willoner	Anna Grothey	5T1
Karen Halliday	Annelie Millar	5S
Jude and Caspar Cook	Archie Cook	5T2
Lorna McGregor and Peter Ellen	Archie Ellen	5S1
Lynne and Ian Mackintosh	Archie Mackintosh	5L2
Ali Scott and Al Wood	Archie Wood	5R2
Jan Cassels and Kevin Lumsden	Cailum Lumsden	5W2
Kenny and Lorraine Begg	Caitlin Begg	5L1
Barbara and Damian Mole	Catherine Mole	5R2
Callum and Lindy McNair	Charly McNair	5R2
Dougie and Joanne Stirling	Chloe Stirling	5S2
Kate Sammon	Daisy Sammon	5S1
Barbara and Damian Mole	Elizabeth Mole	5R1
Andrea Ridley	Ella Rose Ridley	5L2
Glenn Marion and Anna Christal	Elsa Marion	5R1
Victoria and Grant Nelson	Emily Nelson	5W1
Sharon Monaghan	Erin Couper	5L2
Micol Salvetto and Peter Sandiford	Erin Sandiford	5W2
Charlie Silverton and Nina Lehrfreund	Esther Silverton	5L3
Alison and David Westwater	Euan Westwater	5L1
Penny and Massimo Tarsia	Eva Tarsia	5R2
Steph Craig	Evie Craig	5T1
Jacqui Wright	Evie Wright	5S1
Anna and Ed Hutchinson	Ewan Hutchinson	5W1

Rhona and Angus Mechen	Ewan Mechen	5R2
Jillian McFadzean and Andrew Thomson	Finn Thomson	5T1
Marie and John Kenny	Fiona Kenny	5L1
Murielle and Sam Hayles	Gavin Hayles	5L1
Jo Kelly	Hamish Rambaut	5T2
Susie and Will Slater	Harvie Slater	5W2
Nina Webb and Alan Miller	Heidi Miller	5S1
Tom and Nikki Fraser	Herbie Fraser	5W2
Rachel Davison and Andrew Abbott	Isabella Abbott	5L3
Jacqueline and John Varty	Ishbel Varty	5L1
Suzanne Mackenzie	Jacob Mackenzie	5T2
Anne and Paul Turnbull	Joe Turnbull	5W2
Helen and James Ellen	Jonathan Ellen	5S2
Sharon and Derek Steel	Jonathan Steel	5T1
Elizabeth Offerman and Philip Pinsky	Joseph Pinsky	5L1
Claire and Mark Russell	Kirsty Russell	5L3
Lidice Rueda-Cornejo	Laila Flores-Rueda	5T2
Lisa and Guy Morgan	Laurie Morgan	5W1
Cat Ramsay-Navarro and Ian Ramsay	Lili Ramsay	5R1
Jaime Finlayson	Logan Finlayson	5S2
Jeremy Pullar and Liz Flynn	Louis Flynn-Pullar	5W2
Julie Robertson	Lucy Robertson	5S1
Phil and LeeAnne Boyle	Luke Boyle	5L3
Mary Bedon and Mario Parra-Rodriguez	Mario Parra-Bedon	5S1
Mary and Graeme Ross	Matthew Ross	5W1
Stuart Forrester	Mia Forrester	5L1
Jo and Radoslaw Zadora	Milena Zadora	5T1
Claudia Bennett	Miles Bennett	5W2
Wendy and Bob Lyons	Peigidh Lyons	5R2
Phoebe Cochrane and William Newman	Rose Newman	5R2
Caroline Mekie and Michael Usher	Ruaridh Usher	5R2
Clarissa Rowe	Santosh Rowe	5W1
Caroline and Robert Sparks	Sebastian Sparks	5R2
Amelia Dorward	Snowie Parkinson	5L1
Ruth and Simon Tiplady	Stephen Tiplady	5S2
Ian and Caroline Brockbank	Stuart Brockbank	5T1
Mary and Iain Kernohan	Susannah Kernohan	5S1
Pippa and Rupert Ward	Toby Ward	5W1
Heather Campbell	Tom Campbell	5R2
Shona and Jae Hossell	Tom Hossell	5R1
Stephen Mulholland and Nazima Khan	Zaara Mulholland	5T1