

James Gillespie's
High School
Parent Council



James Gillespie's High School
120 Warrender Park Road
Edinburgh
EH9 1DD

20 December 2024

Dear Councillor,

We are writing from the James Gillespie's High School Parent Council to express our concerns about the impact of **rising rolls, school capacity and support for pupils with additional support needs at the school.**

The Parent Council (1) notes that rising rolls and estate capacity at JGHS are having significant negative impacts on pupils – both in specific subjects, and in overall school experience – and that these impacts are particularly felt by those with additional support needs, and (2) requests that the City of Edinburgh Council recognises and fully factors in these impacts, when considering the suitability of the school estate and determining school capacity.

Increasing pupil numbers

The increasing roll at JGHS over the past several years has put increasing pressure on space and teaching ratios. The school roll already exceeds its notional capacity of 1800 for 2024/25, and recent projections suggest pupil numbers will remain above 1800 until 2030. Although it was previously forecast that pressure on space at the JGHS may soon ease, the numbers of pupils registering to join S1 at JGHS in August 2025 have not dropped as far as expected, and it is anticipated that additional pupils may move into the CEC schools from the private sector. This will add pressure to an already challenging situation.

Suitability of the school estate

As the school roll has grown, this has led to growing numbers and sizes of classes. The Parent Council has significant concerns about (i) the suitability of the school estate to meet the current and projected pupil numbers; (ii) the resulting limitations in the school experience for pupils, and thus (iii) the equity of education delivery across CEC schools. We would like to highlight the following:

- Pupils entering S1 are usually streamed for maths classes. However, for new S1 pupils in 2024/25, the lack of suitable teaching capacity has prevented the school from streaming the classes. Streaming is clearly done for good educational reasons - i.e. to benefit learners in maths of all abilities and to allow tailored approaches.
- There has been particular impact on delivery of practical subjects – e.g. JGHS has only 2 classrooms available for Food and Health Technology – for pupils in the current S1 this means they are only able to undertake practical classes once per term. Space constraints have also limited delivery of practical classes in Art and Design, and there are significant impacts on science labs, with only 10 labs available for teaching across S1-S6.
- Pressure for teaching space has meant that study space for S6 pupils in non-timetabled school time, has been significantly reduced. Spaces in JGHS that were designed as flexible learning spaces for private study, are now used as classrooms. The reduced options for self-study and social engagement for S6 pupils, means they now receive less school-support at a time when they are making important onward career decisions.
- The large number of pupils in the senior phase (S4-6) has made timetabling of assessment extremely complex. The prelim timetable for S4 pupils was only available a few days before the exams were due to start,

and the schedule for the January prelim diet for S5/6 was only available immediately before the holiday break. This uncertainty adds to pupil anxiety about the exams, and reduces their ability to plan their study most effectively.

- Communal areas for pupils to move about the school and to relax during break times are significantly squeezed, especially in the very limited dining areas at lunch time.
- The two-campus estate for James Gillespie's High School places additional pressure on teachers and pupils as they travel between the main school on Warrender Park Road and the Darroch Annex in Gillespie Street – break times are effectively reduced, impacting on the time available for pupils and teachers to eat in the middle of the school day, and to lead or participate in extra-curricular activities.

Together these factors have major implications for equity of school experience and in resulting pupil attainment across the CEC estate – the Parent Council notes that space constraints at JGHS prevent creation of additional teaching spaces, thus reduces pupil access to opportunities available to pupils at other schools in our locality.

Impact of rising rolls on pupils with additional support needs

Although the crowded nature of JGHS affects all its pupils, a busy and noisy environment is particularly challenging for many pupils who have additional support needs (ASN) or who are neurodiverse. Open-space classrooms are distracting spaces for all pupils, but for neurodiverse children these spaces are a considerable challenge.

At a time when the numbers of pupils with ASN across the City of Edinburgh Council school has increased to near 50%, it is critical that consideration is taken of the impact that the school building has on the experience of these pupils. Recent discussion with Daniel Johnson, MSP for Edinburgh Southern, considered the policy for the building of new schools and whether pupils would benefit from smaller or larger campuses.

The provision of support for pupils with ASN is of increasing concern for parents at JGHS. The recent inclusion review and reorganisation of delivery of support for pupils with ASN has left parents feeling excluded from CEC processes and consultation. More effective communication by the City of Edinburgh Council to share information with families of children with disabilities who are in mainstream school would be welcomed.

The current approach to pupil support is viewed as one-size-fits-all, and parents have considerable concern about the time for children to receive the “appropriate assessment that will allow a plan put in place that would form the basis of future interventions and reviews”. The extended timeframes for assessment and the subsequent development of appropriate support for pupils with ASN, leads to significant impacts on their school experience, and their abilities to effectively engage with their learning. Providing more effective, timely support to pupils who find education harder to access, creates a more equitable learning environment where all pupils can thrive.

In conclusion, the JGHS Parent Council urges the officers of the Education, Children and Families Committee to prioritise consideration the suitability of the space within the school estate, and the impacts on pupils, especially those with ASN, when determining any future capacity for JGHS.

Yours most sincerely,

Hilary Snaith and Tiziana Basciani, Co-Chairs, JGHS Parent Council