Minutes of The Parent Council of James Gillespie's High School

Date : 28th January 2025
Location : Library of James Gillespie's High School

Present

Tiziana Basciani, Andrew Picken, Bruce Crawford, Cllr Joanna Mowat, Cllr Tim Pogson, Cllr Pauline Flannery, Amalia Amaya, Rhona Gilmour, Thomas Perc, Sam Ross, Harrie Bickle, Kirstin Leighton, Liz Hilton, Gidona Henderson, Bridgeen McCloskey, Dale Konig, Sara Ababneh, Garrick Wagner, Paul Mollahan, Sarah Bangham, Fiona Dow, Lucy Picken, Padraic Kinsella, Seamus Spencer, Neil McCallum, Ian Porter, Elisa Kerr, Rob Cockroft, Anna Parkes.

Apologies

Julita Burgess (refreshments coordinator), Kate Pinault (communications officer), Hilary Snaith

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1. Welcome and Co-Chair's Update

Speaker: Tiziana Basciani [TB], Co-Chair

- **Introduction:** Tiziana Basciani welcomed parents and carers, emphasising the Parent Council's role as a vital conduit between the parent body, the school leadership, and the City of Edinburgh Council.
- **Meeting Logistics:** The annual schedule consists of six meetings: three conducted online and three held in person (including the Annual General Meeting).
- **Annual Review:** A summary of the past year's topics was provided, including updates from various sub-groups and forums such as:
  - The Consultative Committee with Parents.
  - The Edinburgh Gaelic Collaborative Forum.
  - The Rising Rolls Subgroup.
- **Next Meeting:** The next session is scheduled for **March 24, 2026**, and will be held online. Full slides and the agenda are available on the Parent Council website.

English Reading Circles Initiative

- **Collaboration:** In partnership with the JGHS Trust, the Parent Council has successfully fundraised to purchase **150 new book titles**.
- **Impact:** These resources are specifically allocated to support Reading Circles for **S1 and S2 pupils**, aimed at fostering engagement and supporting literacy within the junior phase.

- **Fundraising:** Contributions can still be made via the dedicated **JustGiving** page. As the project is run in partnership with the JGHS Trust, all donations are eligible for **Gift Aid**.

Rising Rolls Subgroup Update

Speaker: Andrew Picken [AP]

- **Capacity Evaluation:** The meeting discussed the methodologies used by the local authority to evaluate school capacity and the necessity of reviewing these figures as the student population grows.
- **Objective:** The primary goal of the Rising Rolls Subgroup is to gather robust data and stakeholder input to support any future presentations to the Council as required to address issues arising as the school roll grows.
- **Data Insights:** [AP] reported that the group has begun receiving "Frequency of Use" data, which provides critical insights into how the current school estate is being utilised and where the most significant pressure points exist.

2. Treasure's Report

[TB] presented a summary of the PC finances provided by Kirstin Leighton, Treasurer.

Bank account opening balance	£2762
Edinburgh Council Payment (Credit)	£1501
Bank account closing balance	£4263
Parent Pay balance as at 5/1/2026	£5101

3. Pupil Support - Strategic Overview

Depute Head Teacher, Mr Ian Porter provided an overview of pupil support structures in place at JGHS.

- **Background:** Ian Porter provided an overview of his career, which began as a PE teacher at Liberton High School. The majority of his professional experience has been in Pupil Support across various educational settings in Edinburgh.

- **Strategic Framework:** The school's approach is guided by Quality Indicator 3.1 (Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality, and Inclusion) and the Scottish Government's Inclusion Statement, which serves as the cornerstone for achieving equity and excellence for all students.
- **The Three Strands of Support:** [IP] detailed how support is categori to meet different levels of student need:
  - **Universal Support:** The baseline support provided to all pupils as a standard part of their school experience.
  - **Targeted Support:** Proactive and specific interventions for students requiring additional assistance.
  - **Intensive Support:** Reactive and highly responsive support for students with complex or urgent needs.

The "Inclusion X" Vision

The "Inclusion X" vision at James Gillespie's High School (JGHS) is a collective effort involving various departments to support young people. Key components include:

- **Support for Learning (SfL) & English as an Additional Language (EAL).**
- **The SNUG & Wellbeing Hub (WBH):** Specialised spaces for enhanced support and mental health.
- **Pupil Equity Support:** Utilising Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and a dedicated Pupil Support Officer to focus on attendance and closing the attainment gap.

School Community Structure

The school is organised into four distinct communities—**Lauder, Roslin, Spylaw, and Darach**. Each community follows a consistent leadership structure:

- One Depute Head Teacher (DHT) per community.
- Pupil Support Leaders (PSLs).
- Direct links to a dedicated Support for Learning Teacher.

Evolution of Support Models

[IP] explained that the school has moved away from the "old style" of external enhanced support provisions. The current model focuses on keeping young people within their own school community by expanding internal facets like the Wellbeing Hub and mental health supports. This ensures students remain included in the school environment while receiving the speciali care they require.

Pupil Support and Neurodiversity

Speaker: Rob Cockroft [RC], Curriculum Lead Support for Learning

- **Background:** Rob Cockroft has taught at JGHS for 15 years, having begun his teaching career at Whitburn Academy in 2001. He currently leads a dedicated team of Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs).
- **Changing Landscape of Support:** The scope of additional support needs has expanded significantly from a traditional focus on Dyslexia, Autism, and ADHD. Identification of a wider range of neurodivergent students has grown from approximately 10% in 2015 to 40% of the student body today. This does not include young people who are suffering from more moderate forms of anxiety.
- **Identification Gap:** It was noted that many needs remain "hidden," particularly among women and girls, who have historically been under-identified compared to their male peers.
- **Resource and Funding Challenges:** While our understanding of young people's diverse needs has improved, [RC] reflected that there has not been a commensurate increase in funding to meet this radical change in the educational landscape.

Five Key Support Roles

The Support for Learning team operates through five primary methods to assist students:

1. **Consultation:** Providing expert advice to class teachers to help them identify needs and implement effective support strategies.
2. **Team Teaching:** A team of four PSAs works directly within classrooms to support teaching and student engagement.
3. **Direct Teaching:** Students are occasionally extracted from regular classes for focused, small-group instruction. This has included "nurture sessions" in the past.
4. **S3 Subject Support:** A targeted initiative for S3 pupils with additional support needs, providing them with dedicated time for homework and focused learning. Data indicates this program is highly effective, with student performance exceeding national averages and virtual comparators.
5. **External Partnerships:** Collaborating with external bodies such as CAMHS to provide speciali training and signposting for further student support.

Success of the SNUG: [RC] highlighted the success of the SNUG (Enhanced Support facility). The team has developed specialised expertise that allows pupils accessing the SNUG to receive the support they need while remaining within their own school environment.

Pupil Support and Personal & Social Education (PSE)

Speaker: Elisa Kerr [EK], Guidance Teacher

- **Background and Team:** Elisa Kerr moved into guidance from her previous role as a Music teacher and is now a Pupil Support Leader (PSL). She is part of a dedicated team consisting of seven Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff members.

- **Core Mission:** The primary focus of the guidance role is building long-term, meaningful relationships with pupils. **PSL teachers serve as the main point of contact for parents and carers, ensuring a consistent support link between home and school.**
- **Universal Support & Transitions:** The team manages the "Universal Support" strand, which includes:
  - Monitoring and supporting student attendance.
  - Guiding students through critical curriculum transitions, specifically course choices from S2 into S3 and from S4 into S5 and S5 into S6.
- **PSE Curriculum:** All students receive one hour of Personal and Social Education (PSE) per week. This time is used to address a wide range of topics, including personal health, wellbeing, and various social issues, all aimed at helping students achieve the best possible outcomes.
- **Caseload and Capacity:** Each PSL teacher manages a caseload of approximately 260 to 280 pupils.
- **External Partnerships:** The team frequently liaises with external agencies to ensure holistic care for students, including:
  - Health professionals and CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services).
  - Social Work and the Police.
- **Counselling Services:** While the school provides access to professional counsellors, it was noted that there is currently a waiting list for these services due to high demand.

Pupil Support and The Wellbeing Hub

Speaker: Anna Parkes [AP], Acting Curriculum Lead

- **Core Purpose:** The Wellbeing Hub is designed to help students with social and emotional needs manage the demands of mainstream education. The primary goal is to ensure students can attend school as consistently as possible by providing a supportive environment.
- **Referral and Staffing:** Students requiring additional support are identified through a formal referral system. A Pupil Support Officer (PSO) and two Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) manage the department, creating tailored timetables for students to access the Hub's resources.
- **Regulation and Learning:** A key focus of the Hub is teaching students how to regulate their emotions. This includes:
  - **Co-regulation:** Staff working alongside students to manage stress.
  - **Self-regulation:** Equipping students with the tools to manage their own emotional states.
  - **Removing Barriers:** By focusing on emotional stability, the Hub helps remove barriers to learning, allowing students to achieve their academic potential.
- **Building Relationships:** The Hub provides a safe space for students to build positive relationships with both staff and peers. This is particularly vital for students who find the social dynamics of a full classroom of 30 peers challenging.

- **Support Model:**
  - **Early Intervention:** The model prioritises S1 through S3 students to establish support early in their secondary school career.
  - **Senior Support:** While the focus is on the junior years, the Hub continues to work with vulnerable students in S4 through S6 to ensure they remain supported through their senior phase and exams.

Q&A on Pupil Support

Q. How can parents become more aware of what happens during the school day?

- **Response:** Ian Porter [IP] advised that the community Pupil Support Leader is the first point of contact for specific concerns. Neil McCallum [NMcC] added that a staff working group is currently assisting DHT Laura Stewart in updating the school website with detailed course outlines to provide better visibility into the curriculum.

Q. Is there a university counsellor available to assist with applications?

- **Response:** Elisa Kerr [EK] confirmed that several support systems activate during S4, S5, and S6. This includes the "Achieve" platform, which helps students with course evaluation and university preparation. Neil McCallum [NMcC] noted that a wide array of additional resources is also available online to guide students through the process.

Q. Can parents help raise funds specifically for additional support needs?

- **Response:** Rob Cockroft [RC] provided a personal reflection that while donations for resources are always welcome, the primary funding challenge is a broad systemic issue requiring Scottish Government intervention.

Q. What data is used to tailor student interventions?

- **Response:** Ian Porter [IP] explained that data is used to identify specific support needs and to measure the holistic impact of interventions. Rob Cockroft [RC] highlighted that data from previous S4 support initiatives showed significant success; consequently, this data-driven approach has now been broadened to include S5 and S6.

Q. Why has there been such a significant rise in identified additional support needs?

- **Response:** Rob Cockroft [RC] attributed the rise to a better understanding of neurodiversity and improved identification methods. He also noted a sharp increase in students struggling with anxiety, potentially linked to the long-term effects of the pandemic and the influence of social media.

Q. Is feedback on PSE included in Pupil Tracking Reports?

- **Response:** Elisa Kerr [EK] clarified that PSE is not currently included in tracking reports, largely because it is not an assessed subject. However, a comprehensive overview of the topics covered in the PSE curriculum is available for parents to view on the school website.

Q: What is PSE?

- **Response:** Personal and Social Education (PSE) is a universal support subject delivered for one hour per week to all pupils. Led primarily by Pupil Support Leaders, the curriculum focuses on building strong relationships and supporting student wellbeing. It covers essential life skills, including health, social issues, and transition support for course choices and career planning, aimed at helping young people achieve the best possible outcomes.

4. Communications and Digital Updates

Speaker: Neil McCallum [NMcC]

- **Digital Working Group:** A short-life working group was established to review school communications. Although the previous lead is now on maternity leave, a new lead is being appointed to ensure the project continues.
- **Technical Support:** The school now has an IT technician on-site five days a week. This consistent support has led to significant improvements in the functionality and upkeep of the school website.
- **Communication Channels:** The school currently utilises email, the school app, and text messages. To streamline direct communication between classroom teachers and families, the school is evaluating a platform called **Class Charts**. Insights are being gathered from other Edinburgh schools already using the system.
- **Digital Tools in the Classroom:**
  - **iPads:** These are intended as one tool within a broader "learning toolkit" that includes paper and textbooks. Apps are managed via a self-service portal.
  - **Clickview:** This is available to all students, providing access to educational video resources to reinforce learning.
  - **Microsoft Teams:** The school is developing a simple guide for parents and pupils on using Teams as a digital replacement for traditional homework diaries.
  - **Educational Gaming:** Minecraft Education is used in a limited capacity. It is permitted only when it contributes directly to learning objectives and after core tasks are completed; staff are expected to monitor its use strictly.
- **Future Events:** A Digital Evening is planned for S1 and S2 parents. A newly appointed IT teacher will share resources and best practices during this session.

Q&A on Communications

Q. Can the school provide more consistent and manageable information during coursing evenings? The current volume is overwhelming.

- **Response:** [NMcC] agreed that a more structured approach to sharing materials is a good idea and will be reviewed with a view to publishing this on the school website.

Q. Can parents have more control over school iPads at home, specifically regarding access to YouTube and Minecraft?

- **Response:** [NMcC] noted he was currently unaware of a mechanism for parental override on school-managed devices but committed to seeking technical clarity. **[ACTION: Follow up on parental iPad controls].**

Q. What is the progress on the "Digital Use Poster" designed to support teacher best practice on the use of iPads?

- **Response:** This is to be reviewed by the working group before being rolled out. **[ACTION: Clarify working group timeline].**

Q. There are concerns that school iPads act as a distraction even when intended for learning. How is this managed?

- **Response:** [NMcC] reiterated that iPads should only be on desks when specifically required for a task. They are a supplement to, not a replacement for, focused classroom work.
- In addition [NMcC] agreed that the use of iPads is subject to ongoing review in the teaching environment and with the local authority.

Q. Students often seem unaware of school activities and clubs. Can communication be improved?

- **Response:** The school is looking at more effective digital and physical means to ensure the "pupil voice" is heard and that activity information reaches all students.

Q. A parent raised a point that the school should learn to use technology more effectively rather than focus on banning, while another noted that iPad distractions were being cited in their child's progress reports. How is this balanced?

- **Response:** The school views technology as an essential skill but acknowledges the challenge of distraction. The focus remains on purposeful use under teacher supervision.

Q. When are the current student iPads due to be replaced?

- **Response:** [NMcC] will take this away as an action point to confirm the replacement cycle. **[ACTION: Confirm iPad replacement schedule].**

Cllr Mowat provided an update that recent reports indicate budget pressures regarding the city-wide iPad rollout. She will take these concerns and the questions about AI back to the Council for further feedback.

5. JGHS Trust Update

Speaker: Bruce Crawford, Chair of the JGHS Trust

- **Trust Overview and Purpose:** The JGHS Trust was established to provide financial support for extra-curricular opportunities and educational enhancements that exceed the school's standard budget.
- **Funding Strategy:**
  - **External Grants:** The Trust is actively applying to various charitable trusts and foundations to secure larger-scale funding.
  - **The 100 Club:** A "100 Club" lottery has been launched as a consistent fundraising initiative. Participants pay a monthly subscription, with 50% of the pot going towards prizes and the remaining 50% directly supporting school projects.
- **Key Projects and Impact:** The Trust plays a crucial role in ensuring equity of opportunity by funding diverse activities, including:
  - **Democratic Engagement:** Providing support for students involved in the Youth Parliament.
  - **International Exchange:** Supporting the Hong Kong exchange programme to ensure financial barriers do not prevent student participation.
  - **Curriculum Support:** Collaborating with the Parent Council to fund initiatives like the S1 and S2 English Reading Circles.
  - **S1 Residential:** Historically the Trust has supported pupils to attend but this has not run in recent years.
- **Community Contribution:** Contributions to the Trust are eligible for **Gift Aid**, which increases the value of every donation by 25%. Parents and carers are encouraged to support these efforts to help maintain the broad range of experiences available to all James Gillespie's pupils.

6. Head Teacher's Report

Speaker: Neil McCallum [NMcC], Head Teacher

- **Staffing and Recruitment:**

- o **Retirements:** Long-standing staff members Mr Roderick (Computing) and Mr Forrester (Business) have recently retired.
- o **Departures:** Mrs Shearer (Performing Arts) and Ms Richardson (Psychology) have commenced maternity leave, and Ms Murrison (German) has also left the school due to relocation.
- o **Challenges:** Recruitment remains ongoing, particularly in high-demand subject areas such as Maths, Computing, and Business, where there is a nationwide shortage of teachers. Staff absences due to health and mid-term retirements have added to current pressures.
- o **New Appointments:** The school has welcomed several new staff members, including Ms Steigel as the Curriculum Leader for Performing Arts covering maternity leave of Mrs Shearer, along with new appointments in Computing (Mr Steer), Maths (Mr Forward), and Psychology (Ms Mcintosh).

- **HMIE Inspection Report:**
  - o The formal inspection report was published earlier this month. Details can be read on the HMIE website and a link is provided on the Parent Council website, https://jghsparentcouncil.org/2026/01/21/hmie-inspection-reports-for-jghs-published/
  - o [NMcC] expressed satisfaction with the findings, noting that while the results were positive, the school remains committed to continuous improvement and addressing the areas identified for further development.

- **Curriculum Update: A-Level Art:**
  - o Following parent queries, an update was provided on the A-Level Art qualification. Currently, the course is completed over nine months, with pupils consistently achieving high results.
  - o **Future Pathway:** The school is exploring the possibility of extending this provision into a two-year pathway across S5 and S6. This remains a vital route for students aiming for third-level Art education (university/art college).

- **Pupil Support and Engagement:**
  - o The school hosted its first **Wellbeing Hub and SNUG Coffee Morning**. This event was designed to engage parents and carers more closely with these specific areas of pupil support.

- **School Activities and Events:**
  - o **Highlights:** A summary of recent activities was provided, including the Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) competitions involving S3, Christmas Tree Lighting event for Marchmont/Sciennes, Senior Drama Productions held in December, and the successful Christmas Concert at the Usher Hall.
  - o **Memorial Fundraiser:** Fundraising efforts have raised enough for memorial benches in honour of Paul Cummings and Claire Fraser.
  - o **PSE Development:** [NMcC] a collaborative event to create new national Personal and Social Education (PSE) resources specifically focused on combating online misogyny.

    o **Guest Speaker:** Dr David Milne OBE (from Wolfson Microelectronics) recently visited to give a talk to students regarding engineering to S2 pupils and Senior Students. A letter of thanks was received from Dr Milne celebrating the high engagement of our young people.

7. Closing Questions, Answers, and Final Statements

School Capacity and "Lived Experience"

- **Question:** A parent asked if the "lived experience" of pupils, such as the overcrowding in corridors, could be used as a metric to push back against the local authority regarding school capacity limits.
- **Response:** [NMcC] acknowledged that while classroom usage is high, the school's physical design (classrooms on only one side of corridors) is advantageous in controlling such overcrowding effects.

Staffing Challenges and Impact on Learning (Maths)

- **Question:** Parents of S2 and S3 pupils expressed concern regarding the lack of consistent teaching in Maths due to a high turnover of substitute teachers, leading to gaps in knowledge before assessments.
- **Response:** [NMcC] acknowledged the difficulty in recruiting specialist Maths supply teachers. The school is currently rotating staff to ensure all classes receive a balance of specialist delivery. The leadership team is monitoring these classes to ensure they have the necessary grounding before transitioning into National 5 courses.

Course Choices and Data

- **Question:** Is data available on how many students receive their first-choice subjects and whether the rising roll has an impact on this, and are choices limited by the number of practical classrooms (Science/Tech)?
- **Response:** [NMcC] noted that while the Council does not provide comparative data across different schools, JGHS tracks this internally. Practical subjects (Science, Food Technology, etc.) are limited to 20 pupils per class, unlike others which take 30. To address this, the school is continuing to plan with the Council to use the reallocated JGPS Rising Rolls building to provide additional science labs and technology spaces.

HMIE Inspection and School Improvement

- **Question:** When will the findings of the recent HMIE inspection be integrated into the School Improvement Plan?
- **Response:** The school will begin embedding these actions after the February break. While HMIE will not return based on the outcome of the report the Council will conduct a

"Supported Self-Evaluation" within 18 months to ensure the recommendations are being met.

Digital Strategy and iPads

- **Update:** A representative from the Parent Digital Reference Group shared that parents across Edinburgh are concerned about the lack of a replacement plan for iPads after March 2026. Frustration at apparent lack of use of text books was also relayed as a theme.
- **Observation:** It was noted that teachers feel undersupported in managing the iPads. There is a collective call for the Council to provide better guidance on their use to avoid them becoming a distraction.

Community and Inclusion

- **Statement:** A parent thanked the school for the successful Ramadan event held last year, noting its massive impact on inclusion and community feeling.
- **Response:** The school confirmed that a similar event is being planned for the upcoming Ramadan, led by staff members who were inspired by the previous year's success.

Announcements and Closing

- **Mobile Phone Consultation:** Parents were encouraged to participate in the specific mobile phone consultation surveys (tailored for parents, staff, and students) available on the school website.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meetings of the Parent Council will be on Wednesday 24 March 2026 (online).