

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

Date : 27th May 2026

Location : Library of James Gillespie's High School

### Present

- Co-Chair - Tiziana Basciani - [TB]
- Vice Chair - Sam Ross - [SR]
- Rising Rolls Subgroup Lead - Andrew Picken [AP]
- Head Teacher - Neil McCallum- [HT]
- Curriculum Lead for Modern Languages - Peter O'Connor [POC]
- Treasurer - Kirstin Leighton [KL]
- Secretary - Padraic Kinsella [PK]
- Julie Weller, Garrick Wagner, Fiona Dow, Lucy Picken, Sarah Bangham, Sam Ross, Shane Buckbridge, Hazel Wilkinson, Cllr Tim Pogson, Seamus Spencer, Andrew Coop, Thomas Perc, Catherine Inglis

### Apologies

Liz Hilton, Julita Burgess , Kate Pinault, Hilary Snaith.

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## 1. Welcome and Co-Chair's Update

### Speaker: Tiziana Basciani [TB], Co-Chair

- [TB] introduced the last meeting of the Parent Council for the 2025-2026 academic year.
- [TB] recapped the purpose of the Parent Council and how it represents the Parent Forum, and the logistics for the year including the schedule of online and in-person meetings.
- Those present were reminded of how to get involved and that the AGM will be held in October.
- The proposed schedule for the 2026–27 Parent Council meetings was presented and noted.

[TB] presented a summary of Parent Council (PC) activities during the year.

This included presentations and school updates from a wide range of subject areas, and emphasis on the cross-cutting themes of Student Wellbeing, Safety & Inclusion alongside Capacity & Rising Rolls.



English Reading Circles: [TB] Noted that surplus funds remain available following the initial book drive purchases. Discussions are ongoing with the English Department to finalise another book list to further support the program.

Rising Rolls Working Group Update: [TB] provided an overview of the first Council-established Working Group meeting addressing rising rolls at James Gillespie's and Boroughmuir High Schools. The update covered the first joint workshop, council projections/assumptions, future accommodation options, and upcoming next steps. [TB] noted the Rising Rolls Subgroup's correspondence with councillors and MPs and introduced Andrew Picken, Rising Rolls SubGroup Lead, who would present a detailed update on this topic later in the meeting.

### **Working Groups and Representation**

The Parent Council represented the parent body at:

- the Consultative Committee with Parents (CCwP);
- a variety of Gaelic Medium Education forums;
- citywide mainstream schools meetings;
- the Swire Chinese Language Foundation Anniversary Event;
- the Community Iftar during Ramadan at JGHS;
- the Wider Achievement Awards and the Donald McDonald Kindness Award; and
- P7 transition events.

### **Engagement and Consultations**

The Parent Council contributed to a range of engagement and consultation activities, including:

- engagement on the Mobile Phones Policy through the Short Life Working Group (SLWG);
- parent and parent council HMIE representation during the school inspection;
- a book drive for English Reading Circles in conjunction with the JGHS Trust;
- consultation and input regarding toilets and changing facilities; and
- support for refreshments at school events.

### **Issues Raised in 2025–26**

**Key issues raised during 2025–26 included:**

- teaching provision and staff shortages;
- equity in certificated courses;
- S6 study spaces and provision for senior pupils;
- communication, digital issues and online safeguarding; and
- toilet provision.

## 2. Treasurer's Report

Kirstin Leighton presented a summary of the PC finances as follows.

Bank account opening balance	£4263
Bank account closing balance	£4263
Parent Pay balance as at 1st of May 2026	£5068

Plans to collaborate further with JGHS Trust to raise funds are ongoing.

Funds are available for the regular small sums scheme which takes requests from school staff to fund various activities and purchases of equipment to support the different faculties.

## 3. Rising Rolls Subgroup Update

Speaker: Andrew Picken [AP], Subgroup Lead

[AP] introduced the background of the Rising Rolls Subgroup and reminded attendees that all data and reports published to date are accessible on the Parent Council website. He noted that the group's primary focus has been evaluating pressures on the school estate and assessing the pupil experience through student surveys. The data collected validates the hypothesis that the school is experiencing functional overcrowding, with students expressing significant concern over the lack of adequate space to eat, study, and socialise.

[AP] then provided an update on a recent joint workshop focused on addressing the acute capacity issues affecting both James Gillespie's High School (JGHS) and Boroughmuir High School (BHS).

### Workshop Update - City of Edinburgh Council Data & Projections

- Population Trends: City officials presented an extensive data review indicating that the school population will peak imminently, followed by a gradual decline over the coming years.
- Shift in Forecasts: This updated forecast represents a significant departure from our understanding of previous modeling, which suggested the student population would continue to grow indefinitely.
- Subgroup Feedback: The subgroup expressed surprise at these projections, noting that a declining trend does not align with the lived experience or current enrollment realities on campus.



- Solutions Phase: The next joint meeting with the council will focus strictly on practical solutions, which the subgroup will present back to the wider forum.
- Holistic Approach: Council officers confirmed they will evaluate capacity solutions holistically across both the JGHS and BHS estates.
- Committee Submission: The Council Officers' intention is to present formal accommodation recommendations to the Council's Education Committee in September 2026.
- Pace of Progress: The subgroup noted ongoing concerns that the current pace of proposing and implementing solutions remains frustratingly slow.
- Next Steps: [AP] The Parent Council must maintain active pressure to ensure meaningful changes are made, particularly as we prepare for the solutions phase..

## Discussion on Rising Rolls

### Item 1: Presentation of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) Data

- Issue Raised: A parent, [PK], expressed a concern regarding the presentation of data shared with the group. The parent noted that certain graphs, such as those with a Y-axis starting at 1,000, made GME and English Medium Education (EME) appear on par when GME actually represents about 20% or less. Grouping GME pupils with out-of-catchment pupils could imply that GME pupils have less of a right to be in the GME high school.
- Discussion:
  - [AP] noted that council officials applied their standard logic for how non-Gaelic school rolls change over time to the Gaelic population. He explained that Gaelic pupils' behaviors are different because they follow a continuous path from primary school to high school, drawing city-wide and from the Lothians.
  - [PK] highlighted that these anomalies are likely constrained by statistical and modeling systems, such as the SEEMiS system, which records a transferring GME primary pupil as a placement request. Parents of children in GME are sensitive to these triggers due to past history and legal challenges.
  - A parent added that a primary GME school representative noted a period of pupil attrition occurred during COVID due to home learning and families moving out of the urban center, which distorted the data to look like a continuing trend when it is not.
  - [AP] suggested pushing the council to separate the data to distinguish GME as part of the school's natural catchment, noting that the council plans to stop out-of-catchment placements to both Boroughmuir and Gillespie's to stem demand.
  - Neil McCallum [HT] reassured the room that from an educational perspective, Taobh na Pàirce (TMP) is one of the school's learning community schools. Those young people are part of the catchment regardless of whether they live in Leith, Marchmont, or East/West Lothian.
- Outcome: [AP] agreed on the need to push the council to separate the GME data from out-of-catchment to provide clarity.

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## Item 2: Reliability of Enrollment Projections vs. Private School VAT Impacts

- Issue Raised: A parent questioned the data behind the council's new projections that rolls are peaking and will gradually decline, specifically asking how they accounted for the potential impact of VAT being added to private school fees in a catchment area heavily affected by it.
- Discussion:
  - [AP] replied that the council's limited data to date does not suggest a big impact so far. An official suggested the impact might be seen further down the line when parents make decisions about entering junior school, rather than moving a child already in private high school.
  - The parent asked if the council shared where they based their data. [AP] responded that the bulk of the presentation explained how they arrive at their figures and the frailties of those figures regarding new developments and population movement.

## Item 3: Financial Budgets and Capital Expansion Options

- Issue Raised: A parent asked if the council had provided any operational or financial budget for acquiring new accommodation for James Gillespie's or Boroughmuir. The parent noted that during previous meetings regarding the Darroch campus, the council reportedly had a £50 million budget to build a new secondary school for GME pupils. Because Darroch did not cost £50 million, the parent suggested money is still there to acquire nearby local buildings, noting that the Gillis Centre is currently for sale.
- Discussion:
  - [AP] confirmed that no budget has been put aside yet. He explained that while an upcoming report to the Education Committee will make accommodation recommendations for some busy primary schools, Gillespie's and Boroughmuir are on a separate channel due to their joint working group. He noted that the subgroup believes temporary solutions like renting a building exist in the neighborhood if imagination is used.
  - A parent clarified the funding history, stating their understanding was that the council did not put money in for a new build at that previous time; it was a "Wave Two" build attached to Liberton funded by the Scottish Government. The government did, however, provide around £4 million to refurbish Darroch for this campus.

The parent council subgroup will continue working on solutions ahead of the council's committee recommendations.

## 4. Modern Languages



Mr Peter O'Connor [POC], as Curriculum Lead for Modern Languages, presented an extensive overview of the faculty, curriculum, partnerships, pathways and assessment and attainment.

### **Faculty Overview & Unique Position**

- The Modern Languages faculty consists of 10 team members, including [POC], all of whom are dual linguists.
- The department offers four languages (French, Spanish, German, and Mandarin).
- Due to the school's size, it boasts the largest offering of languages and the highest subject uptake in the City of Edinburgh.
- The department provides a unique and diverse pathway of seven different qualifications ranging from National 3 to Advanced Higher (including National 3, National 4, National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher, the Scottish Baccalaureate, and Languages for Life and Work).
- It is one of the few schools to offer the Scottish Baccalaureate for students taking two Advanced Highers and one Higher in languages.
- Alternative pathways are offered, including "Languages for Life and Work" (which focuses on critical thinking skills and workplace visits), and a "Saltire Award" through the Language Ambassadors (LAmbs) programme. LAmbs actively go out into feeder primary schools for volunteering and outreach activities.

### **Partnerships and Excursions**

- Partner Schools: The department maintains active links with Colegio Luther King in North Tenerife and Hallertau-Gymnasium in Bavaria, Germany.
- Excursions: Recent immersion opportunities have included trips to Mont Saint-Michel (French), Valencia (Spanish), and a link with the English College in Beijing (Mandarin).
- Support: The department is supported by Swire, an organisation responsible for introducing Mandarin into many UK schools.
- Horizons Fund: When an international trip is run, parents are provided with an opportunity to donate any surplus or refund back to the school's Horizons Fund to financially support pupils attending future trips.

### **Primary Transition & Curriculum Integration**

- Primary Links: [POC] highlighted an exceptionally strong learning community between Gillespie's and its associated primary schools.
- L2 Pathway: Language learning (referred to as L2) begins in P5 at primary school and continues through to S2.
- Primary Teacher CPD: The department hosts primary school teachers to share good practice, inviting primary staff to sit in on lessons at the high school.
- P6 Transition: The department runs P6 transition events where pupils participate in taster sessions for all four languages to ease the move to secondary school.



### **Curriculum Design**

- The department has reviewed its curriculum and established a new mission statement based on consistently high standards in both content and delivery.
- Key Pillars: Resources are designed to be realistic and relevant, with a focus on the "responsibility of all" and "Looping Learning" (continuous reinforcement and revisiting of concepts).
- Attainment Impact: The curriculum updates have been systematically rolled out year-by-year, and the tangible impact on student attainment is already showing.

### **Assessment, Attainment, and Feedback**

- Structure: Evidence of progress is gathered regularly across all four core skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Listening is currently a major area of focus for staff reflection and improvement.
- Differentiation: Assessments feature a self-selected pace and tiers, ensuring every child has the opportunity to demonstrate progress and experience success.
- Student Reflection: The department utilizes improved self-assessment and reflection worksheets. These help students articulate their own learning, recognize their strengths, identify areas for development, and better prepare for future assessments.
- Bilingual Pupils: The school actively supports fluent, bilingual pupils who speak a language at home to sit exams off-timetable. This year, 45 pupils were presented at National 5 and Higher in this way, achieving exceptionally high grades. Italian bilingual pupils are supported in association with RHS (Royal High School).

### **Tracking, Monitoring, and Targeted Interventions**

- Tracking System: The faculty monitors progress using four award levels: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum (replacing traditional RAG/traffic light systems). This data directly feeds into the student coursing process for S3 and beyond.
- "Five @ Risk" Initiative: Teachers periodically review their classes to identify up to five pupils requiring additional support. This enables staff to work together with parents as early as possible if a pupil's achievement is at significant risk.
- Attainment Overview: The department consistently outperforms benchmarks. There were zero "No Awards" at Higher and Advanced Higher level. While there were a small number of "No Awards" at National 5, these pupils are generally dual-presented at National 4 to secure a qualification.
- Post-Prelim Target: Structured intervention approaches between the winter prelims and the final exam dates have been proven to work significantly showing an upward trend in final performance grades.

### **Future Focus**



- Enhancing parental engagement and communication.
- Prioritising inclusion and early intervention.
- Publishing the curriculum to ensure absolute clarity for families.
- Continuing the rollout and development of the Language Ambassadors (LAmbs) in feeder primaries.

## Q&A

Question: How are children chosen for exchange trips, and what are the logistics around booking them?

Response: Selection for trips is done via random selection. [POC] noted that "L2" PVG checks may be required for participating families in the future. Regarding booking logistics, a strict local authority policy dictates that funds must be fully in place before any trip bookings can be formally made.

Question: Why is Gaelic / Gaelic Medium Education (GME) not treated or considered as a modern language within the department?

Response:[POC] clarified that GME operates under an entirely separate faculty framework at the school rather than as a subject within Modern Languages. While the Modern Languages department focuses on foreign language acquisition (French, Spanish, German, and Mandarin), GME is an immersive educational stream. In GME, fluent pupils are taught core curricular subjects (such as history, geography, and art) through the medium of the Gaelic language. This structure is governed by distinct statutory policies separate from standard modern language pathways.

Question: Can the department trial or promote the availability of the Horizons fund to families in advance of taking payment for the international trips?

Response: [POC] welcomed the suggestion to promote the Horizons Fund ahead of time, to raise awareness in families who may be able to contribute in the event of excess funds being once the full trip costs have been settled.

Question: Can we have clarification for children transitioning from primary to secondary regarding in which language they continue their education in the BGE phase?

Response: A concern was raised that JGPS P7 pupils are currently under the impression that they will automatically continue in Spanish, that there is room for improvement in how this is communicated. [POC] took onboard that the formal letter could include a clearer statement regarding which language particular primary school cohorts would continue with on entering high school.

Question: How are bilingual pupils supported through national qualifications?

Response: [POC] outlined the specific, targeted exam supports in place to guide off-timetable bilingual pupils through the different qualification levels, including the collaboration with RHS for Italian speakers. Meetings are held throughout the year but the time provided is limited to these meetings and organising the facilitation of exams including marking.

## 5. Head Teacher's Update - Neil McCallum [HT]

### Staffing

- Business Manager: Elaine Donald has been appointed as the new Business Manager, replacing Lora Ward.
- Deputy Head Teacher (DHT) Retirement: Nigel Cotter is retiring this summer. The recruitment process to replace him is underway. Following 23 applications, a long list of six candidates was interviewed by staff, student, and Parent Council panels, which has now been narrowed down to a short list of two. Note: Leet is a Scots word meaning a list of eligible candidates in this context [https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/leet\\_n2\\_v1](https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/leet_n2_v1).

### School Operations and Communications

- Communications Working Group: The group has held two productive meetings to review the school's communication platforms and identify areas for improvement. Short-term adjustments, such as restructuring the weekly parent note to prioritise key dates, have already been implemented.
- Class Charts: The school is exploring the introduction of the Class Charts platform to improve communication regarding student progress, attendance, and homework. It is currently undergoing the Local Authority commissioning process. The Short Life Working Group (SLWG) plans to invite parent representatives to a presentation once options are finalised.
- Examinations: The exam diet is concluding successfully, with almost all assessments hosted at the Darroch Campus. The head invigilator praised the excellent conduct of the pupils. Prelims provided a helpful trial for these logistical arrangements.

### School Review and Improvement

- Standards and Qualities Report: This report is currently being prepared for completion.
- School Improvement Plan (SIP): The upcoming SIP will embed and focus on the recommendations from the recent HMIE inspection report. The Local Authority will follow up on these actions in 18 months. A parent-friendly version of the plan will be published on the school website.

### Events and Achievements



- Mobile Phone Policy Consultation: The Local Authority received over 13,000 responses to its mobile phone consultation. Due to high media interest, the Head Teacher and pupils were interviewed by STV, the BBC, and the Evening News at the Darroch Campus to discuss the school's policy.
- Malala Yousafzai Visit: The school hosted a surprise, short-notice visit from Malala Yousafzai, accompanied by the First Minister and the Education Secretary. Security arrangements were managed in advance by Scotland Yard and Police Scotland. Malala spent 45 minutes meeting with staff and students alongside Afghan medical students, who shared impactful personal stories.
- Ministerial Visit: The new Scottish Education Secretary, Mairi McAllan, is scheduled to visit the school tomorrow, 28th of May, to meet with staff and pupils.
- STEM Racing: The school team became Scottish Champions and competed in the British Championships against heavily sponsored schools. The student-funded team has qualified for the World Finals in Singapore this October.
- Robotics Finals: The Robotics team travelled to Missouri in April to compete in the World Finals, achieving commendable results and gaining valuable experience.
- Rewilding Area: The Eco Group has developed a rewilding space behind the Spark building. Memorial benches and trees have been planted in memory of two staff members, Ms Claire Fraser and Mr Paul Cummings, lost last year, and the school recently welcomed their families to view the space. Almost £1300 was donated to the British Heart Foundation as a result of fundraising efforts by a group of students.
- Public Speaking Success: Students reached the regional finals of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service Public Speaking Competition held at the High Court, debating how to make school communities more accessible for pupils with additional support needs.
- Geography Competition: The school entered teams into the Scottish Geography Quiz at George Watson's College, securing 1st and 6th place. The winning team will progress to the national final at Dollar Academy.

## Q&A

Question: What were the logistics and benefits of holding exams at the Darroch Campus?

Response: [HT] The arrangement was highly successful and significantly reduced the disruptive impact on school sports facilities. A small number of exams were still held at Warrender Park to accommodate specific additional support needs or exceptionally large cohorts.

Question: Will the Warrender Building, previously known as the JGPS Annex, be available for use by August?

Response: [HT] It is unlikely to be ready for the start of the new term. The Head Teacher shared his frustration regarding these ongoing delays, noting the significant impact on the science department. To mitigate this, a modular unit will be installed at the Darroch Campus to enable

technical subjects to be delivered, and staff will continue to work peripatetic routines across different settings. It was noted that the Rising Rolls subgroup would raise this with the Council.

Question: What is the efficacy of utilising double periods for modern languages?

Response: [POC] While double periods are not always structurally ideal for language learning, staff manage this effectively through creative curriculum approaches and by frequently switching activities. The extended block does provide distinct advantages for practical exam preparation, such as running through full papers and speaking assessments.

## **6. Recognition**

Kirstin Leighton made a presentation to Tiziana Basciani in recognition of her efforts over the past years in a variety of roles and most recently as co-chair of the parent council.

## **7. Next meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for September 1st 2026.

Please see the JGHS PC Website for details of future meetings.

<https://jghsparentcouncil.org/>