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

Deputation from Rising Rolls group of James Gillespie's High School Parent Council

Introduction:

James Gillespie's High School (JGHS) has the largest roll of a state school in Edinburgh. The JGHS main building's FOU is at 90% and rising. It is the only school in Scotland operating across a split site, with two facilities which are a fifteen minute walk apart for pupils and staff. It is not uncommon for staff and pupils to make this commute more than once a day.

We recognise the hard work and dedication of both staff and pupils, who are recording impressive academic results in very challenging circumstances.

However, we strongly believe that the impact of rising rolls and the complexities of operating across two sites have not been adequately addressed for several years. Whilst the establishment of a short term working group is welcome, it is not a solution in itself. The pressures now being experienced by pupils and staff require greater recognition and a significant increase in urgency.

The challenge at JGHS also sits within the wider context of increasing demand for Gaelic Medium Education and wider capacity pressures across secondary provision in South Edinburgh. Long term strategic planning is therefore essential, but immediate action is equally necessary.

Background:

A school is more than just a collection of classrooms.

The roll at JGHS has risen significantly in recent years and this has not been matched by a commensurate increase in the study, social, dining, practical teaching and sports facilities for pupils. The main building was designed to accommodate fewer than 1200 pupils but now has to accommodate substantially higher numbers.

Whilst the Darroch annexe provides some additional capacity, the travel time involved and the shortage of practical classrooms place clear limits on how far the split-site arrangement can be expanded.

Our concerns:

- The school's main building is severely overcrowded

Across the city, the council has adopted a target Frequency of Use (FOU) rate for schools of 70% meaning, at any one time, 30% of the teaching space in a school may not be in use. (This was an increase in 2024 from the previous FOU rate of 65%). The headline JGHS figures previously showed an FOU of 74%, but this figure was reached by combining the main campus and the Darroch annexe.

The JGHS main building's FOU is at 90% and rising. [A breakdown is available here.](#)

The main building at JGHS represents nearly 80% of the school's total capacity. It is where the vast majority of pupils and staff are based, so the impact of this exceeding the council's FOU target is huge. The EIS union recently surveyed its members at JGHS about the impact of rising rolls and received 65 responses. The findings show a marked impact on both staff and pupils.

More than 80% of those surveyed said the overcrowding was negatively impacting pupils' academic performance and their ability to concentrate. 75% said they did not feel supported by the council in dealing with the problem. More than 80% of those surveyed said the overcrowding impacted pupils with ASN. We urge the councillors to read the attached feedback, including the teacher comments:

- Capacity calculations

We have concerns about the way the capacity for JGHS was calculated. For example, the Eliza Wigham temporary building is recorded as containing 6 classrooms, each with 30 pupil seats. In fact, there are 5 classrooms and a staff room (essential for staff working). So this is 30 non-existent seats.

Elsewhere, two 'plazas' are counted as having a class capacity of 30 each. These areas were designed as flexible breakout, study and social spaces and should not be regarded as permanent classroom space.

We therefore request an urgent review of the JGHS capacity calculations.

- Pupil equity of access to practical subjects

There are only 2 classrooms available for Food and Health Technology. As a result, current S1 pupils are only able to undertake practical classes once per term, whereas pupils in other Edinburgh schools can access practical lessons weekly.

Space constraints have also limited delivery of practical classes in Art and Design, and there are significant impacts on science labs. The school currently has 20 full time science teachers but only 10 laboratories.

There are plans to add a temporary science, CDT and food technology spaces to the school - this is welcome but these are not sufficient for the current needs and will not all be in place until August, 2027.

- Equity of access to wider school experiences

The size of the school roll means the S1 residential and the activities week for S1-S3 pupils has ceased to operate.

Such activities should not be an optional extra, they are a valuable extension of the curriculum that our pupils no longer have access to.

- Lack of study and social space

Spaces in JGHS that were designed as flexible learning spaces for private study are now used as temporary classrooms. There are not enough spaces for senior pupils to study. Efforts to address this with study 'pods' are still at the exploratory stage years after the issue was first raised by the parent council.

- Impact assessments

We request details of any impact assessments that have taken place in relation to managing rising rolls and split sites. If such assessments have not been undertaken, we request that they be commissioned.

This should include the impact on recruitment, staff workload, leadership time and the resources required to establish and manage additional accommodation.

We would welcome clarification as to whether JGHS has been resourced appropriately to ensure that teaching quality and strategic leadership time has not been compromised

- Suitability of reconfigured spaces

Many of the internal spaces in the main building which have been converted to teaching spaces lack any meaningful form of separation from neighbouring corridors. They are noisy and cramped spaces which are not conducive to learning.

- Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision

In 2024, 45% of young people at JGHS were recorded as having ASN, with the majority facing neurodiversity challenges. Although the crowded nature of JGHS affects all its pupils, a busy and noisy environment is particularly challenging for many pupils who have ASN.

- Dining and social space

Dining and social facilities remain broadly unchanged from those provided when the school served approx. 1200 pupils. Current provision is wholly inadequate for the number of pupils now attending, leaving many with few indoor spaces in which to eat, meet or spend break times.

- Impact on pupils' education and wellbeing

A survey of more than 300 pupils shows the vast majority believe overcrowding at the school is impacting their education, ability to study and socialise.

[Full results of the survey](#)

[Summary of the pupils own comments](#)

- Streaming of classes

Pupils have previously been streamed for Maths, but this has now been stopped. We request clarity on the extent to which rising roll pressures, limitations on accommodation and timetabling constraints influenced this decision.

- Timetabling pressures

The two-campus estate places additional pressure on pupils and staff, reducing break times, increasing stress and making time-tabling significantly more complex. We also understand that JGHS has the highest number of double periods of any Edinburgh secondary school, reflecting the extraordinary pressures on timetable construction.

- Exams

Scheduling of prelims and exams at both Darroch and the main building is a hugely complex task for the school. 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. Such uncertainty adds unnecessary stress for pupils at already demanding stages of their education.

In summary:

Pupils attending Edinburgh's largest secondary school should not experience reduced access to practical subjects, study space, social space, residential opportunities and wider experiences simply because the estate has not kept pace with roll growth.

The resilience and professionalism of staff and pupils should not obscure the fact that the present situation is unsustainable.

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We therefore request:

- A full written response addressing the issues raised in this deputation.
- Details of what additional measures, beyond those already planned for 2027, are being actively pursued to increase temporary accommodation and reduce pressure on the school.
- That this report be brought to the ECF meeting on 1st September, with an opportunity for representatives of the parent council to address councillors and answer questions in person.

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