

Meeting of James Gillespie's High School Parent Council & AGM

Date: Wednesday, October 7, 2026

Location: James Gillespie's High School (In-person meeting)

Present : Neil McCallum - [NMC] (Head Teacher), Liz Hilton [LH] (co-chair), Sam Ross [SR] (co-chair), Duncan Bell [DB] (PC Rep on JGHS Trust), Kirstin Leighton [KL] (Treasurer), Padraic Kinsella (secretary), Thomas Perc, Sarah Bangham, Nikki Graham [NG] (Depute Head Teacher), Julie Weller, Andrew Coop, Catherine Inglis, Hazel Wilkinson, Gidona Henderson, Fiona Dow, Peter Cheung, Penny Tarsia, Federice Lucertini, Anne Vashutina, Garrick Wagner

1. S6 Prom Financial Management [NG]

Nikki Graham [NG] was introduced as the DHT filling the role while Ian Porter is on career break.

Nikki then introduced a request for support with the financial admin for the S6 Prom.

- **Update / Issue:** School finances for social events face tight administrative restrictions (e.g., event charges cannot be run via ParentPay). Many other schools utilise parent bodies or parent volunteers to manage deposit collection and venue payments.
- **Staffing:** Two staff members have stepped forward as a leadership opportunity to organize the prom (selecting venue, coaches, photography, etc.).
- **Request:** The school requested 1–2 parent volunteers (or a parent with a business/accounting background) to hold/manage an account for prom finances and deposits.
- **Support:** Financial assistance processes remain in place to support any pupil experiencing difficulty with costs; no fundraising is required from the volunteers.
- **Outcome:** A parent, Andrew Coop, volunteered their services via their registered Edinburgh consulting business. Staff will liaise with the parent.

2. S6 Leavers' Ceremony & Venue Capacity

- **Overview:** The Leavers' Ceremony is held on the same evening immediately prior to the prom, with pupils taking coaches to the prom venue afterward.

- **Capacity Challenges:**
 - **Current S6 Cohort:** 289 pupils (estimated to require 900+ total attendees including family and staff).
 - **Past Venues:** Greyfriars Kirk (capacity ~500) and St Cuthbert's (capacity ~800) are no longer viable due to growing numbers.
- **Next Steps:** Venue options for both the ceremony and prom are actively being investigated; updates will follow once a suitable package is confirmed.

3. Approval of Minutes from Previous AGM

- **[LH]** Proposed the minutes from the previous year's AGM for approval noting that they have been on the website for a year with no objections received.
- **Outcome:** Approved.

4. Parent Council Overview & Year in Review

- **[LH]** recapped the purpose and activities of the Parent Council. The Parent Council acts as an interface between parents and the school/council, supports parent engagement, and conducts fundraising.
- **Key Achievements & Activities:**
 - **Book Drive:** Raised funds to purchase 235 requested books for the S1/S2 reading circle. The initiative is now closed as all requested titles were secured.
 - **Surveys:** Gathered parent feedback on school toilet and changing facilities for the council.
 - **Website & Recording:** Maintained updates, meeting minutes, and links to online meeting recordings.

5. School Estate, Capacity, and Facilities Update [NMC]

Deputation & Capacity Review

- Following council reports suggesting no action was needed on school estate issues, a student-led deputation (S5 pupils) was presented to the council to highlight space constraints.

- Parent Council representatives (Andrew Picken and Sarah Bangham) met with Headteacher Neil McCallum and City of Edinburgh Council officers.
- **Capacity Assessment:**
 - The formal school capacity formula yields 1,855. Current roll is **1,855 pupils** (at 100% capacity).
 - **Room Count Anomalies:** Several spaces counted as 30-pupil classrooms are either not standard classrooms or have reduced capacity (e.g., a temporary unit lost one classroom to create a staff base for Humanities; computing/music rooms equipped for fewer pupils).
 - Teachers do not have fixed classrooms and must move between spaces daily.
 - Council has issued floor plans to the school to re-audit actual room capabilities.

Specific Facilities & Reconfigurations

- **Social Spaces:** Work continues to regain social and breakout spaces that were previously converted into standard classrooms.
- **Food & Health Technology (FHT):**
 - Current provision is limited to 2 kitchens for the entire school roll.
 - Plans are underway to install a new kitchen facility at the Darroch campus. Groundwork/services are required; completion is anticipated beyond the October break (council timeline suggests up to August 2027, though efforts are being made to accelerate this).
- **Warrender Building (Former Primary School / Rising Rolls Building):**
 - Currently in partial use as additional teaching spaces; planned reconfiguration includes a Design & Technology (D&T) / Design Media workshop on the ground floor and two "compact" science labs (60 m^2 , capacity 20 pupils) upstairs.
 - Works are ideally planned to take place post-Easter through the summer term to minimize disruption during study leave/exams.
- **Gillis Centre:** The council has opened preliminary discussions regarding potential educational use of the nearby Gillis Centre site, which is also due to be put on the market for sale.

6. Constitution Review [LH]

- The Parent Council constitution and code of conduct were updated using Connect templates (not revised in over 10 years) and posted to the website.
- **Outcome:** Operating in draft form for the coming year, with formal approval scheduled for the next AGM.

7. Parent Council Finances & Small Sums Fund [KL]

Financial Position & Restructuring

- Current Parent Council bank balance is approximately **£8,000**.
- Transition is underway to route main fundraising through the **James Gillespie's Trust** (registered charity) to allow Gift Aid recovery (adding 25% to eligible donations).
- The Parent Council expects to receive its annual Edinburgh Council running grant (~£1,000/year) to cover administrative expenses and operating costs.

Funding Requests & Governance Discussion

- Two immediate funding requests were presented:
 1. **PE Department:** £800 for spare football kits (girls' and boys' sets).
 2. **Modern Languages Department:** £2,500 for updated French, Spanish, and German dictionaries.
- **Discussion on Governance:** A parent raised concerns regarding process, equity across departments, criteria, and transparency when allocating funds directly at a general meeting.
- **Outcome:** The meeting agreed to pause direct voting on these requests tonight and reinstate the formal **Small Sums Assessment Group / Committee** process (inviting parent volunteers) to review all bids against standardized criteria before allocation.

8. James Gillespie's Trust Report [DB]

- **Duncan Bell introduced the Trust, its purpose and structure.**
- **Governance:** 10 current trustees in place (including staff, parent, and council representatives). Operating under an updated trust deed.

- **2025/26 Grant Allocations:** Supported 7 grants ranging from £250 to £2,300, including:
 - Hong Kong trip travel support (£1,000)
 - STEM racing group (£500)
 - School library graphic novels (£300)
 - Chess Club tournament entry fees
 - V5 Robotics (£900)
 - Art terrace seating & equipment (£2,300)
- **Financial Statement (as of September 2025):**
 - **Bank of Scotland Account:** Balance of £6,500 following pending payments.
 - **Investment Account:** £20,000 invested at ~5% interest, yielding ~£1,000 in interest income over the past year.
 - **Total Assets:** ~£27,000.
- **Alumni Relations:** Ongoing work (led by trustee Ross) to engage the ~1,000-contact alumni database and host school showcase events.

9. Parent Council Office Bearer Elections

The existing team stood down. Elections were held for the 2025/26 session:

Role	Nominee	Proposed By	Seconded By
Chair	<i>Liz Hilton</i>	<i>Sam Ross</i>	<i>Kirstin Leighton</i>
Vice Chair	<i>Sam Ross</i>	<i>Liz Hilton</i>	<i>Sarah Bangham</i>

Secretary	<i>Andrew Coop</i>	<i>Thomas Perc</i>	<i>Padraic Kinsella</i>
Treasurer	<i>Kirstin Leighton</i>	<i>Padraic Kinsella</i>	<i>Liz Hilton</i>
Refreshments	<i>Kirstin Leighton</i>	<i>Liz Holton</i>	<i>Sam Ross</i>
Communications Officer	<i>Kate Pinault</i>	<i>Liz Hilton</i>	<i>Kirstin Leighton</i>

10. Headteacher's Update [NMC]

Staffing Changes

- **Departures / Moves:** Joan Smart (Maths), on secondment to Craigroyston / Reef Academy (Modern Languages), joint parental/paternity leaves, and PE staff changes.
- **Recruitment:** Interviews taking place this week for 2 Maths posts, 1 English, 1 Modern Languages, 1 Psychology, and 1 PE post. Updates to follow after the October break.

Mobile Phone Policy & Pouches

- City of Edinburgh Council Education Committee has mandated a "bell-to-bell" mobile phone ban using Yondr-style pouches across all 23 secondary schools.
- **Pouches:** Two types will be issued—standard grey locked pouches which also block mobile phone signals and Velcro/clear-window pouches for pupils requiring phones for medical tracking (e.g., diabetes monitors).
- **JGHS Implementation:** Expected between late October and early November (Phase 3). Unlocking magnets will be placed at key campus exit points (ratio of ~1 magnet per 35 pupils).
- **Feedback:** Current classroom phone restrictions have already led to positive changes, reduced conflict, and improved classroom focus.

School Trips & Exchanges

- **Trips Booklet:** A forward-planning booklet covering planned UK and international trips for the next 1–2 years is being compiled for parents.
- **PVG Requirements for Foreign Exchanges:**
 - Council policy now requires PVG checks on all household members aged 16+ hosting exchange students.
 - Costs will be federated to schools rather than paid centrally.
 - Applies to the ongoing Spanish Exchange (40 pupils / host families). Conversations are ongoing with the council and other participating high schools to resolve administrative and financial hurdles.

Other items

- **Breakfast Club:** Re-launching after the October break operating on Monday and Friday mornings (08:15 start).
- **Duke of Edinburgh (DofE):** Active across cohort groups (~150 S3 pupils involved). Expeditions taking place during school time where possible. Parent volunteers/assessors are welcomed to support admin and logistics.
- **Extra-Curricular Highlights:** STEM Racing team reached the world finals in France; Senior Boys Basketball team competing; active sports teams.
- **HMIE / Inspection Follow-Up:** Shared classroom visits by senior management and Quality Improvement Officers continue ahead of the council's Easter review.

11. "Cup of Coffee" Fundraising Launch (Julie Weller - JGHS Trustee)

- **Concept:** A new recurring monthly donation scheme set up via **GoodHub**.
- **Mechanism:** Encourages parents/alumni to donate the cost of a monthly cup of coffee (£3, £5, £10, or custom amount).
- **Gift Aid:** Eligible UK taxpayers can check a box to add 25% to their donation at no extra cost to them.
- **Promotional Rollout:** QR codes and posters displayed around the school reception, at school events/concerts, and linked in school communications/newsletters.

- **Funds flow** to the James Gillespie's Trust to support future school projects and student requests.

12. Questions and Any Other Business (AOB)

Access to Teams and Outlook

- A parent asked a question about access to Teams or Email from outside the UK.
- [NMC] confirmed that this is the local authority policy that there is a geo block and this also applies to teachers.

Phone Pouches Implementation timetable

- A parent asked when the operational date for the phone pouches will be in place.
- [NMC] Explained that this is expected to be about 6 weeks from the date of the meeting, but subject to logistics.
- Are the different styles of pouches blocking and non-blocking distinct from each other?
- [NMC] - Confirmed that they are different and distinct in their styles.

S1 Residential and Alternative Timetable

- **S2/S3 Residential Opportunities:** Discussion noted that recent cohorts missed traditional S1 residential trips due to staffing/logistical constraints; alternative timetable experiences and future trip opportunities continue to be evaluated.

Medical & Allergies

- A parent raised the management of severe allergies in the school canteen and the availability of allergen information for secondary pupils. The headteacher confirmed that the canteen leadership is open to meeting with parents to ensure transparency and safety.

Council 10-Year Development Plan Consultation

- A submission ("Call for Ideas") is being prepared by Parent Council members focusing on land identification (e.g., Gillis Centre site) for community and educational space, to be shared on the Parent Council Wordpress platform. This will be aligned with the work already conducted by the Rising Rolls Subgroup and the consultation activities they have completed.

Next Parent Council Meetings:

- **November 2026:** Online
- **January 2027:** In-person