

James Gillespie's High School New School Update

11 May 2010

Dear Parent or Guardian

Welcome to the latest issue of the James Gillespie's High School New School Update. This newsletter aims to update you with progress on the plans to build a new James Gillespie's High School. This issue outlines the decant proposals to allow the construction of the new school to be progressed and the work taking place to develop the strategic educational design brief for the new school.

Why is the Council considering a decant?

The new school will be built in the existing school grounds but the size of the site means that part of the existing school building will need to be demolished first to allow construction work to take place.

To ensure that enough space is freed up on site, to avoid placing restrictions on the design of the school and to allow construction to take place, either a full or partial decant would be required. The move to decant accommodation will be at times to suit the school diary and the construction programme. The earliest the decant is expected to start is in the 2012/13 Academic Year and it would be in place for two to three years, depending on the final options for

both the decant arrangements and the school design.

A number of options were considered:

- A full decant off site to the former Tynecastle High School
- A temporary decant village fully on site at James Gillespie's High School
- A partial decant off site to Darroch with a decant village created on site to provide the balance of accommodation required (our recommended option).

Why is the Tynecastle option not recommended?

A feasibility study was carried out into the possibility of moving the entire school population to the former Tynecastle High School during the construction period.

This study has identified a number of issues which means we do not believe this option would work.

The Tynecastle building could not provide the number of class spaces required which would mean an additional decant location being used

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or sharing some class space in the new Tynecastle High School.

Both schools believe there would be management issues by having two high schools directly across the road from each other and the numbers could have an impact on the local community.

In addition there are also road safety concerns due to the number of children that would be in the area at the one time.

Why is a decant village accommodating all the pupils on the existing James Gillespie's site not recommended?

The feasibility study has highlighted that the logistics of creating sufficient decant space for the entire school roll on site would be very complex to achieve and would severely limit the design of the new school and make its construction far more complex.

What are the advantages of the Darroch option and what would it involve?

Darroch has previously operated successfully as a decant building for a secondary school (while St Thomas of Aquin's High School was being built). In addition it has been used for a number of primary

school decants. Darroch is based in Gillespie Street, just off Gilmore Place and is within walking distance of James Gillespie's, just half a mile from the existing High School site.

School staff were asked to examine the potential of using Darroch as decant accommodation alongside a decant village on the existing school site and believe it would be feasible to manage the school over the two sites.

The proposed decant would see S4 to S6 students being based at Darroch. S1 to S3 students would remain on the existing Gillespie's site, using some of the existing accommodation (Warrender, Spylaw and Thirlestane buildings). There would also be some temporary classrooms installed at the south end of the site next to the Lauderdale Street entrance. This area of the site can operate completely separately from the proposed construction area. Sports accommodation would be provided in Edinburgh Leisure and other facilities, possibly other schools.

By removing almost half the student roll from the main site we believe this would diminish

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the impact of having to operate the full school alongside a construction site.

The Council has extensive experience of managing a decant alongside a construction site and this experience will ensure any disruption to students remaining on site will be minimised.

What are the next steps and timescales for any decant?

The Council will follow the statutory consultation model on this aspect of the project and will take a report to the Education, Children and Families Committee on 18 May seeking permission to consult.

Consultation will then take place from 20 May to 1 July. Parents and other interested parties will receive copies of the consultation papers on 20 May. A public meeting will also be held on 17 June in James Gillespie's High School where Council officers will be present to answer questions and respond to any concerns.

Progress update on the Strategic Educational Design Brief

A strategic briefing process has taken place over the past four months led by Barry Best/DEGW.

Education design briefing sessions have been held with the Head Teacher, Depute Head Teacher, Department Heads and the full staff and these have formed the basis of the Strategic Educational Design Brief.

This Brief aims to outline the school objectives for learning, teaching and organisation, and this will be translated into a set of design criteria to underpin the final design solution, ensuring that the school's aspirations for learning and teaching are effectively delivered by the new school.

The aspirations for the Curriculum for Excellence have also been considered as part of the process and the strategic brief has been discussed with HMIE.