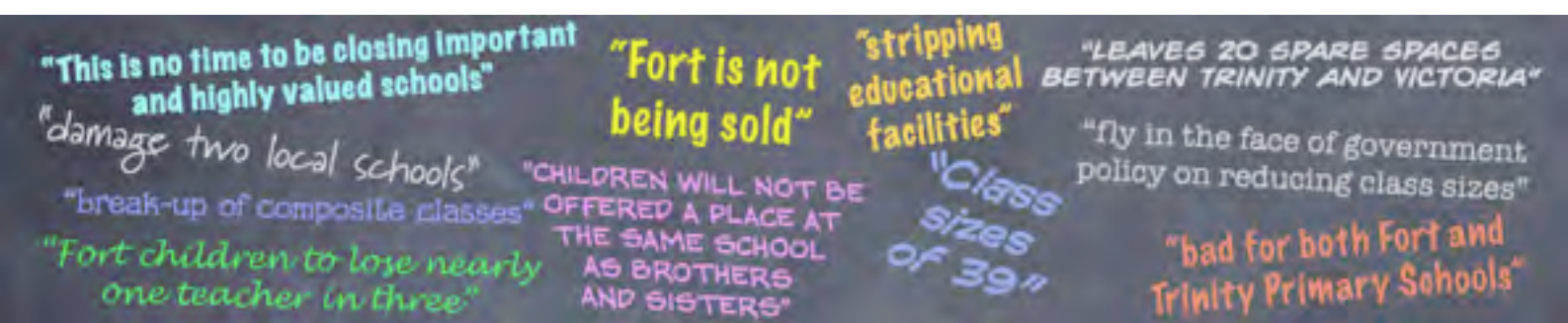




Trinity Primary School
Parent Council

Proposed Closure of Fort Primary School and Transfer of All Children to Trinity Primary School



Executive Summary

"Short-sighted policymaking that fails to take children into account has a negative impact on the future of all members of society"

United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child

This Proposal is Short-sighted

- Financially, the Closure Proposal is an extremely weak case and provides the lowest revenue savings (£192k) of the four proposed closure schools.
- The fundamental difference is that the Fort Closure Proposal is only a temporary one, and not a cost-effective, long term solution. Fort is not being sold, but is being retained to provide primary school places that will be required in this area.
- Reopening Fort, or the development of a new school in the Waterfront, with large capital costs and no more revenue savings, has been calculated by the Parent Council as being required by 2012 based upon the Council's own latest projections.
- From August 2010 there would only be 22 spare spaces between all the Trinity Academy catchment schools, Trinity (17), Victoria (3) and Wardie (2), while the Council predicts 150 new pupils from the Waterfront development. Trinity, Victoria and Wardie would *all* be between 96% and 100% occupancy.
- The revenue savings from Fort closure are a tiny proportion (around 1/2000th) of the Children and Families Revenue budget of £368.4m. Even if the savings were put directly into schools' DSM budgets, they would only contribute around £1.5k to a typical primary school budget of around £1m.

This Proposal Fails to Take Children Into Account

- The merger would cause serious harm, educationally and socially, mainly to the pupils and community at Fort, but also to the pupils at Trinity. Fort pupils would lose nearly one teacher in three and valued local support facilities.
- Fort has the highest free school meal entitlement in Edinburgh (76%), yet has attained around 10% better than the average of comparable schools. They achieved this as a result of the benefits of Positive Action Area funding, which the Council proposes to reduce after only one year of transitional funding.
- Trinity would have a P1 class of up to 39 pupils, team taught, and many large class sizes across the school years. The best academic evidence shows that small classes are of most benefit in P1 and early years. They are also particularly effective for children who are most in need academically.
- Fort pupils benefit from their current class sizes in P1 and in future years. Moving to a much larger class is very likely to result in reduced attainment. The evidence shows that the "disruption effect" would also adversely affect Trinity pupils as a result of the "step change" in class sizes if the school roll increases by almost a third.

The long-sighted solution which takes children into account

- There is a long-term and cost-effective solution to the Council's budget constraints without causing harm to two successful community-focussed schools.
- Fort Primary School's campaign group, Fighting for Fort, has produced an alternative proposal - to keep Fort open and to move the children from the Victoria Park Child and Family Centre to Fort, establishing a centre of excellence for early years within the city, and supporting seamless progression to Fort school.
- This alternative proposal will reduce surplus capacity in this area, while retaining sufficient capacity for the future pupil population growth. It would generate capital receipts from the sale of the Victoria Park Child and Family Centre and produce revenue savings from the closure.

The Parent Council strongly supports Fort's alternative proposal and urges all Councillors to support the proposal. This report should be read in conjunction with Fighting for Fort's own submission *Proposal to Retain Fort Primary School*.

Impact On The School

Overcrowding

Trinity's notional capacity, on the Council's own figures, has remained at 415 for many years. However, in the Council's June paper on the proposed Fort closure, this suddenly increased to 456, providing a further 41 notional "spaces" at Trinity. While carrying out a survey for energy performance the Council reassessed Trinity and, without advising either the school or Parent Council, decided that it can now accommodate 15 classrooms, rather than the previous 14 rooms.

The Council's Children and Families Service Plan 2008-11 (15 April 2008) has as an aim "to progress toward the national outcome of class size of 18 in P1 to P3". This is a document released just one year before the proposal to close Fort and make Trinity one of the most overcrowded schools in Edinburgh.

If all the Fort parents accept the Council's offer, Trinity's roll is projected to be 439 at which point Trinity becomes one of the most overcrowded schools in Edinburgh on the Council's own figures.

Victoria would have an estimated occupancy of 142, based on the 2009 occupancy of 129 (89%). Applying the Council's methodology to estimate next year's P1 intake leads to an occupancy of 142 for 2010, based upon a P1 intake of 24.

Trinity would be at 96% capacity and Victoria at over 98% capacity, with only 20 spare places between them, clearly insufficient to accommodate the growth of 150 more pupils projected by the Council¹. Within a few years both schools would be full and Fort would have to reopen, with consequent expense and significant disruption, or an expensive new school built in the Waterfront.

Class sizes would increase to their maximum in many year groups including even larger classes with team teaching and by the Council's own forecast, a P1 class of 39 and a P2 class of 33. Increased class sizes such as these make no sense given the Scottish Government's commitment to drive down class sizes and ensure that there is adequate staffing in classrooms to achieve it.

If this proposal is approved, the children at Fort will move from a pupil to teacher ratio of 18.2:1 to 25.5:1. This is equivalent to the *loss of nearly one teacher in three* and harms some of the most vulnerable children in the city, those who most benefit from smaller class sizes.

Both Fort's and Trinity's pupil to teacher ratios are already currently above the Scottish average of 17.1:1 as reported in the Centre for Public Policy for Regions – Spending on School Education, October 2009.

Great operational pressure would affect the Trinity kitchen and dining room, with children requiring to eat in classrooms. This is particularly significant as Fort has the highest entitlement to free school meals in Edinburgh (76%).

At the present time Trinity is able to provide two hours of physical education to each class every week. If this proposal is approved there will be no way to maintain this focus on the physical well-being of the children, owing to the increased number and size of classes and pressure on the gym space. The Council cannot seriously be considering gym lessons in school corridors.

¹ School Estate Review: Consultation on Options for Closure, Education, Children and Families Committee, 16 June 2009

Pupils at Fort currently receive additional support as a result of the Positive Action Area status of the school, with learning assistants in every classroom and small class sizes. Should this proposal be accepted academic research² shows that the children would have great difficulty in adapting to far larger class sizes and reduced levels of contact with teaching staff. The proposal does not include any provision specifically targeted at providing enhanced levels of support during this transition. In fact, it has now been confirmed that it is proposed to reduce the Positive Action Area funding after a transitional period of only one year.

We strongly believe that the transitional funding should be continued for the duration of the children's education.

Loss of facilities

The science room and IT suite will be lost and the school will suffer from smaller support for learning facilities and library facilities if this proposal is approved. At a time when there is nearly a one-third increase in the school roll, these facilities should be increased, rather than reduced. This is particularly harmful in the case for support for learning space due to the significant need at Fort (nearly 1.5 teachers for 100 children) compared to Trinity (0.6 teachers for 330 children). Fort has one full-time and one part-time SFL teacher, with less than a third of the number of pupils, which means there is *ten times as much SFL provision at Fort*.

Science teaching in existing classrooms will be much more inefficient than in a designated room where equipment is permanently available and there is support for longer-term projects that are not viable in general-purpose classrooms.

Impact on Existing Classes

Based upon the current school rolls at Trinity and Fort and the Council's 2009/2010 projections, the estimated profile of class sizes at Trinity in 2010/2011 should this proposal go through would be as shown below.

Year	2009/2010	2010/2011
P1	53	64
P2	51	64
P3	54	67
P4	43	76
P5	41	53
P6	43	56
P7	43	61
Total	328	439

Under the proposal, composite classes would be de-composited, after a commitment was made to parents affected by the composition in 2006 that this would not happen. It should be highlighted that this de-compositing comes on top of the disruption caused by the closure and will breakup existing classroom communities further.

Under the proposal, the pupil:teacher ratio for Fort pupils would increase from 18.2:1 to 25.5:1³. This is equivalent to the loss of nearly *one teacher in three for the Fort pupils*.

² The Class Size Debate – Is small better? Open University Press
<http://www.classsizeresearch.org.uk/Blatchford.%20BERJ%202003.pdf>

³ Councillor MacLaren, Trinity public meeting 29 Sept 2009

Impact on Out-of-District Families and Parental Choice

The Council acknowledges that far fewer out of catchment children, particularly from Victoria's catchment area, would be able to secure a place at Trinity. In 2008/9, there were eight out of catchment siblings who were refused a place at Trinity.

It is virtually certain that, at the same time as the Council is promising parental choice to Fort parents (while forcing their children to change school) even more out-of-catchment siblings of current Trinity pupils would be refused places in the future.

Impact on After-School Provision

Fort Primary currently provides free after-school clubs (ASC) together with a breakfast club, where Trinity Primary operates an after-school club with membership fees paid by parents. The Trinity ASC operates over two sites with children from Trinity moved to Victoria each day due to demand at Trinity exceeding capacity.

After-school provision is currently full at both clubs, 50 children per day at Trinity, 30 at Victoria, with 15 of the places at Victoria After School Club occupied with Trinity Primary children. The Care Commission, with whom the after-school club is registered, have looked at both clubs and state that there is no room to expand after-school provision further.

There are 33 children on the Trinity ASC waiting list; realistically these families could wait another two years before they will receive a place at the club (this could be longer if they specifically want Trinity ASC).

The Parent Council is concerned that children transferred from Fort would not have the opportunity to take advantage of the existing after-school clubs as additional places would have to be provided through the Fort Community Wing. Such a failure to fully consider how the children can participate in the existing Trinity support framework will inevitably undermine the process of integrating the pupils from Fort into life at Trinity Primary.

The Council has completely failed to address how the Fort Breakfast club and the after school clubs could operate, whether there will be sufficient space and the impact on the Trinity, Fort and Victoria children.

Benefits of Smaller Class Sizes

The Scottish Government has recently made a commitment to restrict maximum class sizes to 25 for P1. Clearly it is recognised that smaller class sizes provide an educational benefit.

The Scottish Government set up a Class Sizes Working Group which reported in July 2007⁴. The working group cited in particular, as most comparable to Scotland, research carried out in England by Blatchford and others (2003)⁵. Their conclusions are summarised below:

- There is a clear effect of class size differences on children's academic attainment over the Reception Year [age 4/5 i.e. P1 in Scotland], and there is a clear case for small class sizes during the first year of school for both literacy and maths.
- Small classes (below 25) work best in literacy for children who are most in need academically, that is, those with the lowest school entry scores who have the most ground to make up. These findings suggest where targeting of resources, in this case small classes, might be best directed.

This research completely justifies the Scottish Government's aim to have lower class sizes of 18 and the Council's policy to move towards lower class sizes. It also backs up the aims of Positive Action Area status – designed to allow smaller classes for children from communities such as Fort, who most need them.

It also undermines any argument that there is an educational basis for the Closure Proposal. On the contrary, it strongly suggests that this would be harmful for the younger children at both schools, and to *all* Fort pupils.

- There is what might be called a "disruption effect" when moving into a different sized class from Reception to Year 1. This effect was magnified when children moved into a bigger class. The implication seems to be that in addition to smaller classes in the Reception year it is advisable to maintain stability into future years.

A step change jump in class sizes, particularly in the early years classes will cause this disruption effect, particularly for the Fort pupils, but also the Trinity pupils. This is very different to the gradual, incremental growth experienced by pupils in other overcrowded schools such as Sciennes and South Morningside. Both such schools grew organically, rather than by merger with a Positive Action Area school.

Only nine Bonnington pupils joined Trinity in January 2009, and Trinity's attainment remained very good. This smaller number was more easily integrated, causing little change in class sizes. Nearly 100 children joining, an increase of almost one-third of the school roll, all of whom are used to much smaller class sizes (losing nearly one teacher in three) would be a completely different magnitude of disruption.

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/16094326/8>

⁵ The Class Size Debate – Is small better? Open University Press
<http://www.classsizeresearch.org.uk/Blatchford.%20BERJ%202003.pdf>

- There was no clear evidence for any year for either literacy or maths that additional staff or additional adults in the class had an effect on children's progress in literacy and mathematics and there is no apparent "compensation" effect of having extra adults in the class.

This is a worrying finding in view of the Council's proposal to have up to 39 children in a P1 class, team taught. It backs up the evidence of the much-quoted Tennessee STAR study, that larger classes cause lower attainment, and that an additional teacher in class does not improve this.

- In larger classes teachers found that there was often a difficult choice between larger or more numerous groups, and that larger groups could have an adverse effect on the amount and quality of teaching and the quality of pupils' work and concentration.
- Class size is related to teaching in three main ways: teacher task time with pupils, teacher support for learning, and classroom management and control. Overall it is proposed that in smaller classes there is more likelihood of what we call teacher support for learning.
- It was found that in smaller classes there is more active involvement with teacher, in terms of initiating and responding, there was less pupil inattentiveness and off-task behaviour, especially in terms of being disengaged from allocated work, and children in larger classes spent more time interacting with peers. Social relations between children were not strongly related to class size.

In early October the Centre for Public Policy for Regions (CPPR) released a report intended to be the first of a series of briefing papers which will look at the potential for maintaining the quantity and quality of public services in Scotland as the Scottish Government manages the upcoming real terms budget reductions.⁶

Although the report suggests that "attempting to improve teacher quality as opposed to reducing class sizes may offer the best returns", it also acknowledges that this is very difficult to achieve and that "this finding is very much provisional as the comparability of data across nations is subject to much uncertainty". CPPR acknowledges that their findings have not been validated and further evidence is required. This report is therefore not considered further within this paper.

The Educational Institute of Scotland in their report⁷ on reducing class sizes state that it is important not to assume that a reduction in pupil:teacher ratio or in average class size is in itself sufficient. What matters to pupils is the size of the class in which they are placed.

EIS state that large class sizes are not merely associated with lower attainment: they impact negatively on pupil behaviour, on pupil motivation, on pupil self- image.

They describe as "simply foolish" suggestions that the placing of comparatively large numbers of pupils within a typical classroom with two teachers present is equivalent to creating two smaller classes, each with its own space.

⁶ Scottish Government Budget Options - Briefing Series No 1 (Spending on School Education), October 2009

⁷ The Case For Reducing Class Sizes In Scotland's Schools
<http://www.eis.org.uk/images/pdf/the%20case%20for%20reducing%20class%20sizes.pdf>

Financial Case

Financially, the Council's proposal recognises that the proposal to close Fort is significantly different in financial terms from the proposals to close three other Primary Schools in Edinburgh. The Fort Closure Proposal is only a temporary one, and not a cost-effective, long term solution. This temporary nature is expressly recognised by the Council. Fort is not being sold, but is retained to provide future primary school places required following the regeneration of Leith Docks/Western Harbour and the need to re-provide additional school places.

There are no capital receipts available to the Council from closing Fort. There are, however, capital costs, estimated by the Council at £30k, of converting Trinity into a 15 classroom school, carrying out alterations associated with the provision of an Integrated Early Years Centre at Fort ⁸, estimated at £133k, costs of conversion of the walled garden estimated at £25k and (unspecified) additional capital costs to convert Fort into office accommodation.

School	Capital Receipts	Net Receipts	Revenue Savings
Royston	773k	682k	240k
Drumbrae	768k	163k	260k
Burdiehouse	908k	108k	346k
Fort	> -188k	> -188k	192k

The predicted revenue savings from the closure of Fort are only £192k p.a., the smallest savings of any of the schools proposed for closure. These savings are a tiny proportion (around 1/2000th) of the Children and Families Revenue budget of £368.4m. Even if the savings were put directly into schools' DSM budgets, they would only contribute around £1.5k to a typical primary school budget of around £1m, less than one twenty-fifth of the predicted 4% savings required next year.

Fort is the only closure school that incurs significant capital costs, and does not produce any capital receipts. The Fort revenue savings, as well as being the lowest of all the schools, will only be available for a very short period, estimated as being as little as two years.

The Council acknowledges that the primary school population will require additional space in this area in the near future and are proposing to reopen Fort to provide these spaces.

⁸ Integrated Early Years Centre at Fort - works, costing and savings, September 2009

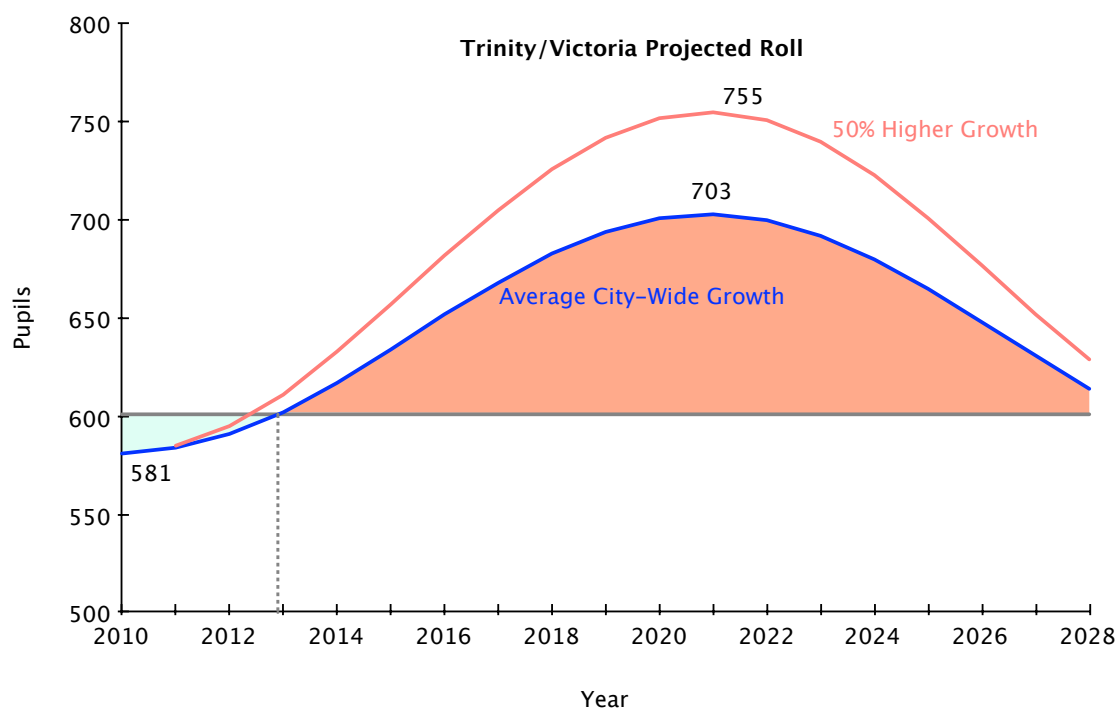
Population Growth

The Closure Proposal acknowledges that the school population will start to grow again in the near future, speculates that there will be pockets of low population remaining after this growth. Given the proposed waterfront developments in North Edinburgh, including Western Harbour where development is continuing, this area will continue to grow at a much faster rate than the rest of the City.

the number of primary school aged children (aged 5-12) will rise from 33,367 in 2009 to 40,167 in 2020: a rise of around 20%. This level of growth applied to this sector shows that after just a few years the combined capacity of Trinity and Victoria will be exceeded⁹.

The Council anticipates that this will be the fastest growth area in the entire City but are proposing leaving just 20 spare places for a projected 150. This would require Fort to reopen as soon as 2012.

The initial combined school roll below is derived from the Council's most recent projected school roll for Trinity following merger with Fort (439) plus the anticipated school roll for Victoria (142)¹⁰ derived from the 2009 school roll. This would leave just 20 spare places available between Trinity and Victoria to accommodate future growth in this area, anticipated by the Council to be 150 pupils.



It should be highlighted that these growth figures are average city wide figures but the Council report on Strategic Management of Falling School Rolls in October 2005 confirmed that the largest developments in the whole City expected are in the Waterfront and Western Harbour, with 30% being family style and 25% affordable housing. The future school roll in this area will therefore grow faster than the average.

⁹ All figures are derived from 2009 Interim School Roll Data, published September 2009

¹⁰ Following the Council's usual methodology for projecting class sizes forward, the projected 2010 roll should be 13 higher than 2009 as it assumes that the new P1 will be the same as this year's P1.