

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

I'm Sarah Barlow and this is Vikki Spence and we're from the Fighting for Fort campaign committee, which was set up by Fort Parent Council and members of the local community, in response to the Council's proposal to close our school.

The document in front of you is our proposal document which elaborates further on today's presentation.

I am going to start by highlighting our thoughts on the proposal.

1. First I'd like to look at attainment figures. The purpose of attainment figures is to allow similar schools to be compared – which means using the city average for comparison in our case is an inaccurate reflection. Fort Primary school should be compared with the average of schools with similar socio-economic backgrounds. The accepted measure of this is the percentage of children with Free Meal Entitlement. Fort has the highest Free Meal Entitlement in the city at 76%. If you then compare attainment figures of all 18 schools with higher than 50% of children with Free Meal Entitlement, Fort is 10% **above** the average in reading and maths, and only 1% below average in writing.

The educational attainment at Trinity Primary **is** higher than at Fort Primary, but Fort has a high percentage of children with Additional Support Needs – and the smaller class sizes and high staff/pupil ratios give these children the extra support that they need on an individual basis – something which would be hard to provide at Trinity Primary at 96% occupancy.

It certainly does not follow that moving Fort children to Trinity Primary will lead to them achieving at Trinity's level.

2. Secondly, Fort Primary School currently has Positive Action Status – part of the reason why per pupil costs are higher than average. This status allows Fort a higher staff/pupil ratio, and other associated benefits such as a fully funded Breakfast Club, and referred places at our After School Club. *The Smart Schools Initiative: The Primary School Estate – February 2004* report states that schools with Positive Action Status should not be expected to achieve more than around 83% occupancy because it's purpose is to reduce class sizes and increase staff/pupil ratios. The Council in this years General Fund Revenue Budget in February also stated that it would 'continue to work towards a reduction in class sizes in P1-3, initially in Positive Action Schools, resources permitting.'

We don't expect an answer today but the statutory process will need to address what will happen to Fort's Positive Action Status and associated funding, as it hasn't been mentioned in the proposal.

3. Thirdly, many Councils are saying that they can't afford to implement the Curriculum for Excellence, citing the need for more teachers, more space, more time to prepare..... Yet at Fort Primary the Curriculum for Excellence is already underway because it is similar to the way the school was working to begin with. Smaller class sizes mean children are much more able to receive a personal education tailored to their specific needs. The use of non-classroom spaces, such as libraries, IT suites and project rooms are vital to the concept of 'interdisciplinary learning', and of course, Edinburgh Council's catchphrase of the moment – 'Getting it Right For Every Child'. The proposed overcrowding at Trinity is in direct contradiction of the SNP Government's guidelines on reducing class sizes, and will make the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence very difficult.

4. Fourthly, the financial savings proposed by the Council aren't actually savings, as they are all staff costs, and the staff will be re-deployed. The Council quotes the cost of only £15000 to close Fort Primary and relocate them in Trinity Primary by creating a fifteenth classroom, and adding doorways from the corridor to the project rooms. Nowhere in the Council's document does it mention the cost of converting our infant classrooms into rooms suitable for babies and toddlers from Victoria Park; nor the cost of converting the rest of the school into offices, with a view to converting them back to classrooms in a few years when the rising population means that both Trinity and Victoria Primary Schools are full.

5. Last, and by no means least, Fort Primary School has extensive links with the Nursery, Community Wing and local community – it is very much the centre of our community. If the school were to move to Trinity then the Nursery would no longer have the management structure or the benefits to staff of being part of a larger educational establishment. It would be particularly difficult for the teaching staff who currently split their full-time hours between the two.

There are many opportunities for parents to be involved in both the Nursery and the School, something which is a very important part of the Curriculum for Excellence. Both children and parents benefit from a programme of transition events when moving up from Nursery to Primary 1. Such a high level of dedication to ensuring a worry-free transition doesn't exist for children moving on to other schools because it just isn't practical. This would be lost if the Nursery was no longer part of the school.

Family Learning are also involved with the school and nursery, with parents having the opportunity to work on projects for themselves and for their children, and to take part in activities such as story telling and craft sessions within the school. Family Learning supports these parents to help with their children's education, but is only able to do so because of available rooms

within Fort School. Trinity Primary does not have the space to provide this service.

The loss of the Community Wing as part of the school would affect the children, their parents or carers, and the Community Wing itself. It is a vital component of the school and local community, offering such services as Working Links, English as a Foreign Language classes, Community Learning and Development courses, and the Fort Food Co-op. There are several after-school clubs that run, which would not be able to run in their current format if the school is moved away from the Wing. Several new clubs planned to start this year are at risk of being abandoned.

I shall now pass you over to Vikki for the second part of our presentation.

In 2004 plans were drawn up following a proposal to create space at Fort Primary School for the Citadel Youth Centre by moving the infant classes in the main building. The Citadel found alternate premises and the plan was shelved, but they could easily be reinstated to allow the accommodation of Victoria Park Child and Family Centre while retaining Fort Primary School in the main building. You will find the 2004 plans at the back of our proposal document.

We propose that:

- Fort Primary School remains in its current location but reduces its capacity by using only the main building, thereby reducing the overall surplus places in the area and city while retaining sufficient spare capacity for the projected population growth.
- Victoria Park Child and Family Centre would relocate to create the new Fort Early Years Centre in the infant wing alongside Fort Nursery.

- Fort Community Wing would continue to deliver its community programme with full use of the school building.
- The excellent links between the Nursery and the School, and the local community would continue.

There are already good links between Victoria Park Child and Family Centre and Fort Primary School. We fully support the Council's proposal to create an Early Years facility, which with our additional proposal would provide an unparalleled pre-school to Primary 3 experience providing continuous education through this crucial early-years phase.

Our proposal incurs no additional costs over the Council's proposal, and include the savings to be made by relocating Victoria Park Child and Family Centre. It also saves the £15,000 at least needed to create extra space at Trinity Primary School. There are no real savings to be made by closing Fort – only on staff costs, and they are to be re-deployed.

Our proposals will mean an immediate reduction in spare places at Fort Primary School and in the Leith area while retaining around 70 places to accommodate the projected rise in the local primary school-aged population.

The playground and building at Fort are an excellent environment for learning and play. The playground is extensive and includes a wooded area, football pitch, grassy areas, a willow bower and large areas of tarmac with games and activities. The building is on a single level and is fully wheelchair accessible.

The additional space at Fort allows outside agencies to work with children and their parents and carers in dedicated rooms. Fort is equipped to specialise in the support of children and families in exceptional circumstances and has a significant proportion of children with Additional Support Needs. One of these dedicated rooms is used for play therapy, and if the school stays open is planned to be refurbished to accommodate a new

family therapy service in conjunction with the Multi-Cultural Family Base. There is a real need for such a service at Fort, with a lengthy waiting list for the current play therapist who is retiring. This is only possible because Fort has available additional space. These children and their families could not be catered for in this way at Trinity.

The education of our children is one of the most important things we can provide as a society. It should not be compromised for the sake of limited financial savings. While we understand that the Council has to make savings in these times of financial downturn, it should not be at the expense of our children's education.

We believe this proposal offers a viable compromise between the needs of the Council and the needs of the children and the community in which we live. We look forward to the rest of the public consultation process.

Thank you for hearing the deputation from Fort Primary School.