

Peebles High School New Build Project

Parent Council Subgroup Position Statement

WHO WE ARE

A group from the Parent Council seeking to ensure that the new High School Building provides:

- The best possible learning environment for our children, and future generations, with scope to adapt to future educational needs as required.
- A teaching environment that attracts and retains excellent teachers.
- Enhanced facilities in every area of the curriculum, and the necessary space and flexibility for the school to provide a wide range of education to pupils, without being constrained by the building.
- Community use, access, and benefits, of modern, well equipped, and accessible, facilities.

We EXPECT Scottish Borders Council to spend the allocated budget wisely, to deliver a school that meets the education requirements and aspirations of future generations of students in Peeblesshire.

WHAT WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT

1. *Lack of Real Consultation*

- Limited consultation events have been held with little or no published output, and these have been generally regarded as entirely unsatisfactory in both layout, scope, audience, and notice for attendance.
- SBC have been unwilling to share the plans, information, and data about the project publically, to allow everyone to consider it for themselves so they can make their own minds up. Many other new school builds in Scotland have well-designed websites and publications of the plans for wider viewing and consideration.
- The project brief from Education, who we understand are considered the 'client', is unpublished and unclear to parents and consequently the design fails to address important requirements.
- Pupils have not been effectively consulted at all.
- Many Teachers either feel not consulted, or that their concerns are not being listened to. Their ability to speak freely is hampered by their status as SBC employees.

2. *Performance & Assembly Facilities*

- For a school with a strong tradition of performing arts, and of multiple concerts and music productions each year, why can the school building not include a full sized assembly and performance hall?
- The performance and assembly space is being reduced from what we have today (both in capacity and scope).
- The proposed hall provides only 5m³ volume per person, against a Scottish school standard of 8m³.
- Most schools (including other Borders secondary schools) don't use their assembly hall as a timetabled space, but the proposals timetable our space for drama. This means other uses (exams, music practice, study space, events, etc.), will either push drama out, or become impossible to accommodate.
- The proposed hall does not have a double height ceiling, fixed/raised stage, and limited lighting kit space, unlike all current Scottish secondary schools.

3. Open Plan design and acoustics

- Studies and evidence from other schools built recently to open plan designs, indicate it is not appropriate for secondary schools. SBC has provided no evidence of the benefits of open plan design. Academic studies we have viewed show the poor effects of such a design.
- The majority of the classrooms will not have 4 walls and a door, making it difficult to create a quiet environment for learning. SBC seem unwilling to consider more flexible use of space with options to close walls / doors if required.
- We are concerned future timetabling limitations as a result of this design will mean scope for subject choice at all levels will be reduced for future students
- Poor acoustics make it harder for pupils and staff to concentrate. This particularly affects pupils with any hearing difficulties, and teachers working in open plan spaces needing to raise their voices constantly.

4. Capacity

- The new school building is designed for a capacity of 1400 pupils, (nearly the size of the school roll today), leaving no space to expand should the school population grow.
- The proposed new building and PE Block are approximately 1000m² smaller than the school before the 2019 fire (Pre-fire 16,636m² GIA, New Build plus PE Block 15,653m²). 1000m² is the size of 16 classrooms.
- A lack of space leads to compromises across the school, and especially in subject areas like Drama and Music that require more space than average per pupil, and restricts potential to deliver national targets for more vocational options in the secondary curriculum.

5. Time

- Our Parent Council is being told there is very limited time available to make adaptations to design, and yet weeks go past where our concerns and correspondence are unanswered.
- Scottish Borders Council have failed to consult widely and early, and what consultation there has been, has not resulted in adjustments or improvements.
- The pressure of inflation, and funding availability create a risk that the project either breaks ground without a finalised design, or the design is finalised before it is right. Both will lead to poor outcomes, and the need for rework, at extra cost, in future.

SUGGESTIONS TO RESOLVE CONCERNS:

- **Real consultation** is held without delay, and feedback from the whole community must be listened to. It must allow Parents, Pupils, Teachers, and all members of the community to understand what is proposed, to share their feedback and it be recorded. Output must be widely publicised and demonstrate response to parent concerns, evidence as to why decisions have been made, and an acknowledgment of the consequences.
- **Either the Assembly Block or the Victorian Building are retained and refurbished** as part of the project, to provide additional space. Depending on which building is retained, it will create opportunities to reallocate space in the main building for curricular areas that currently lack it.
- **All teaching spaces should be provided with EITHER 4 walls and a door, OR flexible walls/doors** to enable a space to be opened up when a lesson requires it, but allow for a quieter use as needed.
- **Ongoing engagement with SBC Education is formalised** for the remainder of the project. One option for this would be for Parent representatives to join the Project Board to ensure those using the building, have a say on key project decisions as we move forward.