

Submission on the future of Fort Primary School from Mark Lazarowicz MP:

I strongly oppose the closure of Fort Primary school as part of a merger with Trinity Primary school. The proposal has united parents of both schools in opposition and with good reason. As well as being a mistake on educational grounds, the financial case for closure is also flawed.

The closure would adversely affect the education of children from both Fort and Trinity Schools. Overall attainment at Fort is 10% higher than at schools with a similar profile. Many of the children come from families on low income and they benefit from the lower pupil-teacher ratio at Fort which means teachers are able to offer more attention to students.

Edinburgh already has the second-highest pupil-teacher ratio out of all the 32 local authorities in Scotland and class sizes at Trinity would rise sharply as a result of the closure of Fort. Not only would they exceed the Scottish Government's stated target of 25 pupils per class, but they would reach 38 in Primary 1.

It is true that there would be two teachers for that size of class but at present the classrooms at Trinity would just not be suitable for so many pupils. If teachers are made redundant, Fort pupils will, nevertheless, find themselves in larger classes and that is bound to have a negative effect on those children with special needs.

On the other hand, if Fort teachers are simply to be redeployed rather than made redundant it is hard to see where money will be saved on salaries. Building work to enable Trinity to accommodate a large number of new pupils would further reduce the cost savings that the Council hopes to make by closing Fort.

It is not planned to sell the building either but simply to mothball it for the moment – it would in any case have been difficult to sell in the current economic climate. This means that the Council would have to pay the cost of safeguarding it which would eke even further into any cost savings. When Lismore, Westburn and Bonnington Primaries were shut during the last round of closures, it cost £150,000 to board up and secure them and a further £108,000 a year to protect them from theft or vandalism.

The proposal seems short-sighted to say the least given that the primary school population of Edinburgh is set to increase by 20% over the next ten years and the main growth in the city's population is projected to be in North Edinburgh. Fort House is due to be demolished but most residents are likely to be rehoused in new housing developments locally, and there are plans for many more housing developments in the area.

The closure of Fort and its merger with Trinity does not make sense on educational or financial grounds. It also demonstrates the Council's failure to plan properly for the future. I have been impressed by the strength of feeling of parents and staff of Fort for their school. To close a failing school might be one thing but not one which is succeeding in providing a good education for its pupils against sometimes difficult odds. It should be allowed to continue that work.