

EdinburghLearns - Aspire, Transform, Engage

November-December 2025

A Home for Hamish

Theatre in Schools Scotland (TiSS) was at James Gillespie's Primary School with three performances of 'A Home for Hamish', by Just Us, presented by Scottish Theatre Producers.

Created and performed by Deaf Dance Artist, Clare Adam and Autistic Dance Artist, Lesley Howard (Just Us), 'A Home for Hamish' is a colourful, immersive, interactive adventure playfully merging dance and British Sign Language and is made for younger audiences.

Across a two-day visit to James Gillespie's Primary School over 170 children from Nursery through to P3 enjoyed the performances in the school hall.

Ian Murray MP for Edinburgh South who attended said: 'It was delightful to see the

young people completely captivated by, and participating in, the performance. The performers were utterly superb. The impact of the school's programme was encapsulated in the questions from their audience at the end. The interest in British Sign Language, the challenge of the story, and the 'can we play more with you' were all testament to the power of the show.'

Ben Horsburgh, Head Teacher, James Gillespie's Primary School said: 'We were delighted to welcome Theatre in Schools Scotland to James Gillespie's Primary School. 'A Home for Hamish' was a truly memorable experience for our younger learners. It brought theatre right into the heart of the school and gave the children a chance to engage with themes of belonging and community in a fun, imaginative way. Opportunities like this enrich our curriculum and inspire our young people to see themselves as part of Scotland's vibrant cultural story.'

**Ben Horsburgh, Head Teacher
James Gillespie's Primary School**



Edinburgh Schools Jazz Orchestra

Sunday 23 November, saw the debut performance of the newly formed Edinburgh School's Jazz Orchestra (ESJO) Senior Jazz Combo in the city's iconic Jazz Bar.

10 young musicians from Boroughmuir, Broughton, James Gillespie's, Queensferry, and Portobello High Schools performed a two-hour set as part of the iconic venues' exciting weekly programme.

Jonathan Gawn, Wider Achievement Music and Learning Manager, commented 'Our 2024–25 school session saw ESJO return to the Jazz Bar for the first time since 2019 and in July also performed as part of the Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival. Having the opportunity to perform in these festivals and iconic venues allows our young people to integrate with Scotland's vibrant jazz scene and gives them an insight into pathways within the musical profession. Kelan Rooney, our ESJO director, does an incredible job of inspiring the group and the Senior Jazz Combo is another superb opportunity for our

young musicians to strive for new levels of musical excellence under Kelan's musical leadership.'

Kelan Rooney commented: 'Forming the Senior Jazz Combo has been a dream of mine since taking the reigns of ESJO in 2022. Smaller ensembles don't provide any opportunities to hide as larger ensembles might, which encourages students to develop a sense of personal accountability. Each member must demonstrate effective communication skills, specialised knowledge of their instrument, and a level of adaptability that is difficult to cultivate elsewhere to perform in a small group setting like this. We are extremely grateful to The Jazz Bar for providing our students with the chance to perform for a public audience and put the full range of these skills to the test! Many of our students progress from ESJO to esteemed institutions including the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Royal Academy of Music, and other prestigious programmes. It's experiences like these that provide an invaluable first step towards realising their musical potential and possibly even inspiring a future in music.'

2026 will also see ESJO return to the Jazz Bar, on 10 March 2026, with another appearance at Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival in July 2026.

Jonathan Gawn
Wider Achievement Manager (Music & Learning)



From left to right we have: Rory McAfee, Milo Russon-Taylor, Simon Mercieca, Ben Sek, Alice Chen, Ruairi Glen, Fred Currie, Alfie Primrose, and Magnus Barnwell

Pilrig Park School Achieves Gold Level in Visual Support Project

Pilrig Park School has proudly achieved Gold Level accreditation in the Visual Support Project (VSP), a recognition of its on-going commitment to inclusive communication across all aspects of school life.

This achievement reflects the ethos of the school, that the voice of every learner, verbal and non-verbal, is heard and valued.

The project places Boardmaker at the centre of classroom practice, ensuring lessons, timetables, and qualifications are accessible through symbols. Staff training is a priority: eight colleagues have completed Phase 1 Signalong last session, eight have just completed Phase 2, and another cohort of ten staff will begin training for Phase 1 in the new year.

Speech and Language Therapist, Heather Roberston and Speech and Language Assistant, James Allen highlighted in their Gold Level report strong evidence of inclusive communication across all subjects. They praised the commitment of the whole-school for their work in driving the project forward and producing a whole-school symbol

Gold Level Award

This certifies that

Pilrig Park School

have taken part in the Visual Support Project and have worked hard to achieve Gold Level Award

Signed: Heather Robertson
James Allen

Date: 12th November 2025



dictionary – standardising visuals and saving staff valuable time.

Pilrig Park School also uses extensively aided language boards, AAC devices, Talking Mats, Colourful Semantics, and Clicker to support literacy and emotional understanding. As part of the Gold Level assessment we have welcomed visitors from other schools and services, sharing best practice and inspiring the wider adoption of VSP.

This achievement was not possible without a whole-school commitment and the support of our colleagues in SaLT. Thank you to all of you!

Ruth McLarty, Principal Teacher and Coordinator for Visual Support Project, Pilrig Park School



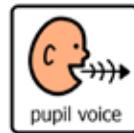
Virginia Karyfylakis, Stephanie Morrison, Chloe Fogelson, Ruth McLarty, April Forsyth, Catriona Ferguson, Kirsten Sawyer, Donna Wheat, Rosie Vennelle

Pilrig Park School Achieves Gold Level in Visual Support Project



Pupil Council Agenda 2025 / 26

Representing Pupil Voice for Rights Respecting Schools:
Gold Award



1. Lunches



2. Whole school activities



3. Playground



4. How good is OUR school?



* Our learning and teaching (theme 2)



* Our health and wellbeing (theme 4)



Sunshine in Leith!

Values: Our Pupil Council, after extensive consultation, identified that the values of Pilrig Park School are to:



Win at COSLA Awards for Construction Skills Pathways Work

The Council has been awarded the 'David Kennedy Excellent People Award' at the annual COSLA Awards. This award recognises the exceptional people who are at the heart of local government excellence. The Council were selected for their outstanding impact while rising to the challenges of day-to-day service delivery. The Construction Skills pathways were recognised for improving outcomes for young people by getting more school leavers into jobs within the construction industry. This responds to labour market

needs as well as raising attainment and improving the positive destination figures for our school leavers.

In partnership with Edinburgh College we have expanded construction courses using a place-based model with 12 school-based sites across the city, with delivery supported by Kier Construction at Currie Community High School and Balfour Beatty at Liberton High School.

Edinburgh's Old and New Town requires a workforce with traditional construction skills. Supported by funding from community benefits and in partnership with Historic Environment Scotland, Scottish Traditional Building Forum, Compass Roofing and the National Federation of Roofing Contractors we have designed and delivered courses in Stone Masonry, Roofing and the Built Environment in six schools. These courses are certificated using the National 5 Creative Industries course and are co-delivered with industry partners.

The success of this project is based on cross directorate working and the development of constructive partnerships with all sectors.

Stephen Kelly, Head of Education Curriculum & Senior Phase



Michelle McManus – she presented us with the award

Stuart Burns – CEC Developing Young Workforce (DYW) Coordinator, John McKinney – Coordinator, Scottish Traditional Building Forum, Charlotte Bennett – CEC Development Officer, Louise Frew – CEC Senior Development Officer, Stephen Kelly – CEC Head of Education, Ryan Deighan – Edinburgh College, Curriculum Team Manager, Jackie Reid – CEC Service Director for Education & Chief Education Officer, Jane O'Donnell – COSLA Chief Executive

Win at COSLA Awards for Construction Skills Pathways Work



Primary 7 Pupils Celebrate Filmhouse Reopening with Inspiring Premiere

On Thursday 4 December, Primary 7 pupils from James Gillespie's Primary School marked a special occasion by visiting the newly reopened Filmhouse, a cultural landmark at the heart of our city. This visit was part of our newly formed partnership with the Filmhouse, designed to broaden young people's access to the arts and strengthen cultural education.

The children attended the Scottish premiere of *Girls' Stories* (Dziewczyńskie historie, 2023), a critically acclaimed documentary by Polish director Aga Borzym. What made the event particularly memorable was Borzym's presence at the screening,

offering pupils the chance to engage directly with the filmmaker during a post film Q&A.

Created specifically for young audiences, the documentary is a rare example of age appropriate storytelling in the world of nonfiction cinema. Through the experiences of two teenage friends, it explores themes of friendship, identity, first love, and the challenges of growing up in contemporary Poland.

For our pupils, the screening was not only an introduction to world cinema but also a powerful reminder of the importance of cultural spaces like the Filmhouse in shaping learning and community life.

**Ben Horsburgh, Head Teacher
James Gillespie's Primary School**





New partnership with Gombwa Primary School in Malawi

Primary 4 learners from Bonaly Primary School delivered an outstanding assembly performance to learners and families, celebrating their new partnership with Gombwa Primary School in Malawi. This not only highlighted individual learners' talents but also fostered a sense of unity and pride between both schools.

The children showcased their learning about Malawi through traditional dances, a moving performance depicting a day in the life of a Malawian and singing of Chichewa songs, inspiring everyone to appreciate and celebrate the beauty of Malawi's culture.

Photos, videos, and learning experiences from Gombwa Primary school were also shared, including a heartfelt message and a song from Boniface Nakhwala, Headteacher of Gombwa

Primary School, who expressed his joy at the growing partnership between both schools.

Our Bonaly learners are demonstrating a growing understanding of their role in promoting fairness, sustainability, and well-being both locally and globally. As we continue to learn about International Aid, the Rights of the Child and Sustainable Development Goals through our UNICEF Outright Campaign and we continue to be supported by Mitch from the Scotland-Malawi Partnership, we are looking forward to further learning and collaboration across the globe.

Abaida Bashir and Alison McKinnon, Teachers Bonaly Primary School



Royal Mile Reindeer Dash for CHAS

Royal Mile Primary School seized the festive season as an engaging IDL opportunity. Pupils, families and staff took to the historic Royal Mile for a festive Reindeer Dash in support of Children's Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS). They were led by two Shetland ponies (Eeyore and Teddy) who were dressed in festive fashion and Santa.

The full school community pranced up the Royal Mile wearing reindeer antlers, before gathering at the Christmas tree outside St Giles' Cathedral to sing seasonal favourites.

It was the pupils who chose CHAS as this year's charity, after learning that one of their teachers is a CHAS parent. The school hopes to raise vital funds and awareness for the organisation's work supporting children with life-shortening conditions and their families.

'It was wonderful to see our whole school community (pupils, parents, staff, local businesses and of course tourists on the Royal Mile) prance, dance and dash together. CHAS holds a special place in our hearts as one of our teachers is a CHAS parent. The pupils were excited to support a charity that brings comfort and care to families across Scotland' said Mrs Black, Headteacher.

The school has raised over £1000 and money is still pouring in.

Billy, from P3/4 was excited but nervous about the ponies making a mess in the playground, but he told us 'Mrs Leslie told us they are wearing thunderpants, so we didn't need to worry'.

'It was great fun, the ponies were amazing and we were able to have fun and raise money at the same time' said Jack, House Captain of the Canongate Cats.

The school hopes this will become an annual tradition with even more magic next year. 'If we're lucky, maybe we can have unicorns as well as the ponies' said Erin from P2.

**Lisa Black, Head Teacher
Royal Mile Primary School**



SLT Santa (Mrs Robertson), Mr McPheeley, Mrs Peoples, Mrs Black and Teddy with his handler



Captains and ponies – Ali, Jack, ponies, Teddy and Eeyore with handlers from lunar eclipse, Lavelle and Nyah

Royal Mile Reindeer Dash for CHAS



Teddy

Royal Mile Reindeer Dash for CHAS



Eeyore

Pupils Festive Card Designs Brighten Up Princes Street

Twelve winning 'Season's Greetings' designs by school pupils from across the city brought festive cheer to shoppers on Princes Street from 4–7 December as seasonal artworks displayed on digital bus shelter screens.

We organised two competitions, in partnership with advertising company JCDecaux, which ran simultaneously offering a chance for children and young people to see their artwork displayed on Princes Street bus shelters and for their design to be selected in the annual Season's Greetings card contest.

The competition in its ninth year and is open to learners across Edinburgh schools. Children and young people were encouraged to design and submit festive artwork on the theme of 'Winter Wonders'. The winners are:

- * Louis Wood, Firrhill High School
- * Frankie Conroy, Oaklands School
- * Malin Marr, The Royal High School
- * Zarko Zarkov, Wester Hailes Community High School
- * Eva Barclay, Kirkliston Primary School
- * Zoey El Roi, Tynecastle High School
- * Gabriella Bochenska, St Augustine's RC High School
- * Elspeth Vaughn, Duddingston Primary School
- * Karima Kamal, Gracemount High School
- * Ethan Popa, St John's Primary School
- * Peter Peacock-Smith, Pilrig Park School
- * Margherita Vetrani, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce

In addition, six of the winning designs by Louis Wood, Frankie Conroy, Malin Marr, Zarko Zarkov, Eva Barclay and Zoey El Roi were selected to feature on our official festive greetings' cards.

Melanie McDonald
Executive Assistant to Jackie Reid



Pupils Festive Card Designs Brighten Up Princes Street Winners

