

A Friday morning at Castlebrae Community High School



Castlebrae Community High School in Craigmillar was threatened with closure until the [Save the Brae group](#) got into full swing in March 2013 and managed to persuade the council to keep it open.

At that date the school roll had fallen over the previous ten years to 198 pupils in 2012/13 and council officers recommended that the remaining pupils were moved to Liberton High School or Portobello High School with suitable transport put in place.

Following the decision to retain what activists regarded as a community asset, the council set out clear measures for assessing whether the school is a success: one of those is improved attainment and achievement, and an increase in community activity in the school.

Recently the school adopted a new uniform, which all pupils were encouraged to wear with pride when the new interim headteacher was appointed for this school year. In 2013 the council set aside additional funds to allow new staff to be recruited and to improve the physical surroundings. Part of the school buildings are closed off to pupils to allow any improvements to be concentrated on areas which are used most.

This year there was a set back in the school's progress when headteacher Derek Curran was removed from his post due to allegations of domestic abuse. He was arrested and charged in this connection in July this year.

The new headteacher, Norma Prentice who was head at Drummond Community High School in the city centre was given a warm welcome when she took charge this summer. She has a great deal of management experience of a community school and is contracted to run it until summer 2015.

The Edinburgh Reporter went along one Friday to see what goes on. There are classes for pupils as well as adult learners all going on at the same time.

[Castlebrae Community High School](#) from [Phyllis Stephen](#) on [Vimeo](#).

The council had already gone through a consultation process and had clearly listened to the community. Local politicians Sheila Gilmore and Kezia Dugdale issued a joint statement praising the action group : "Campaigners will be relieved their hard work has paid off. Save the Brae should be congratulated for their tenacity in refusing to back down. Parents and pupils kept up the pressure on the administration despite misleading claims about poor outcomes and educational performance.

"Contrary to some suggestions that few responses were received in response to the consultation, the community came together to make their views known and were able to show Councillors that the school is an integral part of local community life."

The council adopted an action plan in December 2013 highlighting the positive developments at Castlebrae during the year, and also took some steps to help the school move forward. The plan was devised by an action group made up of senior education officers, teachers and councillors.

Some of the vocational courses offered at Castlebrae appear to be good grounding for jobs after school. The pupils run a cafe called Red which allows them to plan menus, do the cooking and serving as well as add up the bill for those eating at the

lunchtime venue correctly, thus combining arithmetic, English and cooking all in one project.

There is a hairdressing salon where you can make an appointment to have your hair done at bargain prices. Local people also use the fitness suite and the craftworks area or the art department for their own projects. It is true to say that the school roll has fallen a little this year, but all the pupils we met were very polite – and mostly they were wearing their new uniforms!

The school newsletter, Mrs Prentice's first, has a wealth of information for those considering Castlebrae for their children next year, and shows much more than our snapshot of one morning can possibly do! Read it here:

<http://www.theedinburghreporter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Castlebrae-Newsletter.pdf>

In 2011 HM Inspectorate of Education had examined the school when they reported that in key areas the school was either satisfactory or weak. They believed then that young people were not making enough progress, that the quality of some courses and programmes was not consistently high enough and that better arrangements for pupils transferring from school to work should be made.

The inspectorate visited the school again in May 2013 and found that the pupils were “increasingly taking responsibility for their learning and contributing to the life and work of the school” but that there was still not enough improvement in attainment levels and the school needed to do more to plan its improvement. A further examination will be carried out within 18 months – so presumably that could well be imminent.

