

G S E A

The Gender Sexuality and Equality group aims to increase visibility, raise awareness and create an inclusive environment in which all pupils can feel comfortable to be themselves.

R R S

We have a pupil and staff Rights Respecting Schools Equalities group. Our aim is to increase awareness of children's rights and continue to develop a supportive ethos of inclusion and respect.

B A M E

Our staff group aims to raise awareness and celebrate diversity within Firrhill High School and its cluster primaries. It also aims to create a positive learning environment for all learners and their families.

GIRFEC & ANTI BULLYING

We are committed to the wellbeing and protection of children and young people from bullying and prejudice. This will support children to be Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving, Respected, Responsible and Included.

U N C R C

Article 2 of the UNCRC says children's rights apply to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, sex, religion, language, abilities or any other status.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

The HWB group promotes important discussion for all pupils around the topic of wellbeing. The Firrhill Mental Wellness Team aim to create visible and accessible strategies to support pupils' Mental Health and Wellbeing.

P U P I L S

Young people can express their views through Pupil Council, Senior Student Council, 1:1 Headteacher interviews, through school questionnaires and in conversations with teachers.

S T A F F

In 2021/22 staff have taken part in training workshops on dyslexia, how to support pupils with ADHD, building positive pupil relationships, managing pupil anxiety and decolonising the Curriculum.

P A R E N T S & C A R E R S

We welcome parental involvement, working in partnership to support our commitment to Equalities, and the Rights of the Child.



unicef UNITED KINGDOM



RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS

EQUALITIES AT FIRRHILL HIGH SCHOOL

INTERVIEW WITH MR HAMILTON

Jess Daly, Sara McLeod and Alisha McLeod - S5/S6

Mr Hamilton shares his thought on Equalities with RRS students as part of our Rights Respecting podcast series.

Why is equality in education important, from a personal point of view?

Equality is everything about education and I think that, by and large, you get what you deserve with academic work. If you work hard, and there are exceptions to this rule, but on the whole if you work hard you get what you deserve. So, there is an equality of reward relative to the effort you invest. In education there is a notion of the equality of opportunity – everyone gets the same chance.

You have worked in various schools throughout your career across the country. You may have worked or experienced inequality. What is your number one takeaway from those experiences?

From my experience, I look at this slightly differently. It comes from having worked in London in an inner-city girls' school for over 20 years. Most of the pupils I taught - around 80% - were BAME with 100+ languages spoken in the school. The pupils came from areas such as Brixton, Stockwell, Streatham and Norwood among other areas. These are areas that have significant or had significant social issues at that time. For example, there were quite significant gang issues and, even though it was a girls' school, the girls were part of that to an extent. I saw inequality in that sense all around me. Young girls with less of a chance. People from inner city postcodes with less of a chance. I did a lot of work around STEM and then careers progression to get pupils interested in careers that perhaps they did not consider as being for them. We worked very hard to help our students make that leap into careers where you needed good grades to achieve. One year we had 6 pupils go on to further study in medicine.

My point is that I saw inequality, I saw where the students lived was unequal. I taught a lot of youngsters who went on to do amazing things. I've spent most of my formative years as a teacher making sure that these students got what I would call a fair go. And we worked hard to ensure that and that the young people believed in themselves. To counter the kind of inequality where some would argue 'you can't because it's not for me'. My takeaway from that is that they should get this chance. Schools become so important because we need to change the mindset of youngsters, to believe they can be anything they want but they have to work hard. I used to say to the students - 'For most of your lives your circumstance will count against you – but right now – make the absolute most of it! To get on - you must make a good start at it in school.

INTERVIEW WITH MR HAMILTON

Jess Daly, Sara McLeod and Alisha McLeod - S5/S6

What is the best strategy you have found to promote equality in the classroom?

I would expect the same from everybody. I expect the same effort, a desire to do well whatever your religion, views, background etc. I know some people have it tough, but we should expect everyone to try hard. Many of the students I taught went home to estates that were scary places: violence, poverty, crime was a fact of life but when they came to school and they worked hard, they gave it their best and they went far. They excelled despite the inequality of their daily lives. It is about creating a mindset that 'we don't care where you are from - we care where you are going'.

Thanks to Mr Hamilton for taking time to discuss this with us. To hear more from Mr Hamilton on his own educational journey search 'Firrhill' in your Spotify app for his full interview in this year's series of Rights Respecting podcasts.



RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS EQUALITIES GROUP

Mrs Kerr & Chloe Shek, S5

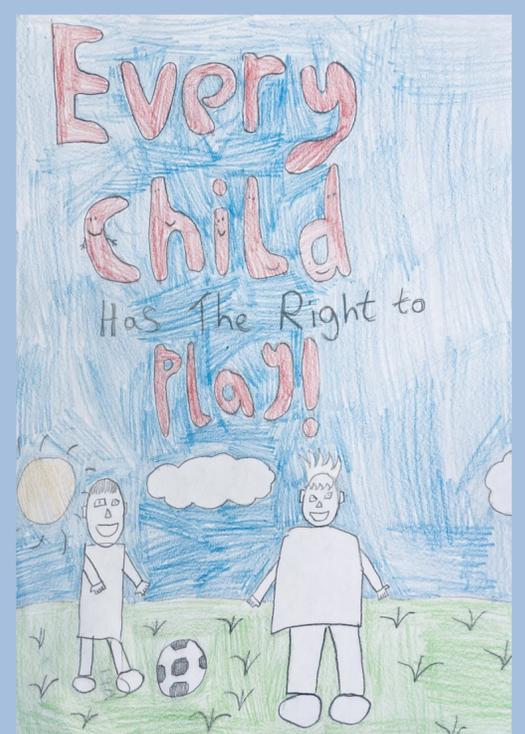
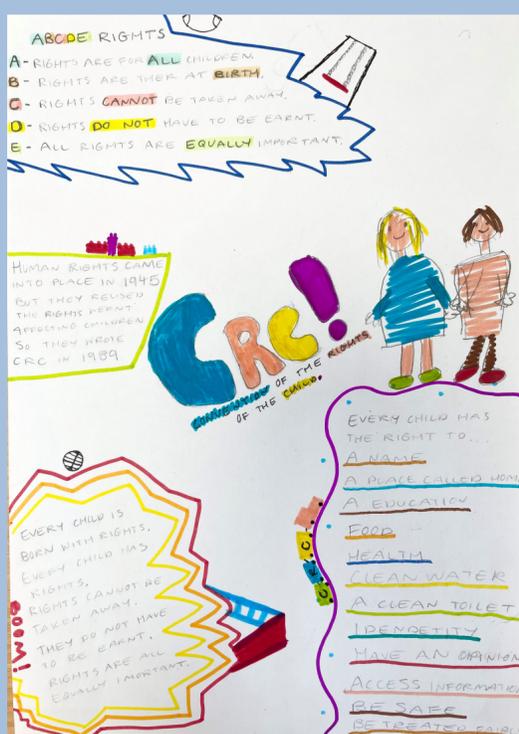
The **Rights Respecting Schools Equalities group** at Firrhill has been running for the past six years. Recently we have been exploring more ways to improve and raise awareness of 'equalities' in our school community.

In August, the group came up with a range of ideas including an RRS Podcast that currently has five released episodes relating to specific children's rights Articles and linking this to music and culture. We have also released a monthly newsletter written by pupils, and formed a new junior RRS group with a focus on discussing children's rights in the news and celebrating diversity. These activities are largely student led and have made a positive impact in our school.

We hope to build on this and make a greater impact in our school and local community. To achieve this, we have focused on Article 13 (Freedom of Expression) and reached out to students to gain a better understanding of what they think about their rights and equality issues through questionnaires in PSE and having a Rights focus for Unicef's World Children's Day. We are going to increase student involvement further through 'Diversity bunting', a simple way for students (and staff!) to freely express who they are and to show each other how unique and diverse everyone at Firrhill is.

We have also celebrated Article 2 (Non-Discrimination) during Black History Month, through a registration slide show of important BAME figures, creating a BHM library book display, designing class lessons and an art competition focusing on expressing yourself.

This term we are planning activities with our cluster primaries to share good practice and support community Rights Respecting and Equalities initiatives.



GENDER, SEXUALITY & EQUALITY ALLIANCE

Ms Wallace & GSEA members

The **Gender and Sexuality Equalities Alliance** has been running at Firrhill High school for several years, focusing on Article 2 of the UNCRC: non-discrimination and Article 15: the right to join or set up groups and meet with others.

It currently runs during two lunch times per week with a significant growth in recent times, of pupils and staff volunteers. One session per week, focuses on discussions and activities to provide mutual support for group members. On the other, we have an informal hang out session where pupils can have lunch, chat and play games if they wish. These sessions have allowed pupils from different year groups to build positive relationships and has provided a space for staff to gain feedback from pupils on the experiences of young people with LGBTQI+ experiences across the school.

The group has also been key in leading LGBT History Month assemblies. The feedback for these has been excellent and the young people have conducted them with confidence and passion. The group also recently worked on gathering images of LGBTQI+ role models to portray around the school to raise awareness and increase inclusivity. Over lockdown, many staff took part in choosing their own hero to take a selfie with and the video was shared with the pupils to demonstrate solidarity.

In the past, GSEA has also been responsible for holding a fundraising 'Bake Off' where pupils took part, and the fantastic creations were sold at breaktime. It was not surprising that they sold out quickly! For Pride Month 2021, a stall was held with jewellery, flags and badges, with music and pupil helpers to create a celebratory atmosphere.

We hope to continue to increase visibility and raise awareness, and create an inclusive environment in which all pupils can feel comfortable to be themselves. We will be celebrating LGBT History Month this month and soon we will be embarking on our journey to achieve the LGBT Youth Scotland Charter.



B A M E S T A F F G R O U P

Ms Kupisz

The **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic working group** aims to raise awareness and celebrate diversity. It also aims to create a positive learning environment for all learners and their families, linking with the following Rights of the Child:

Article 2 (Non-Discrimination): The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.

Article 29 (Goals of Education): Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

As a working group, we have encouraged and supported celebrations of PoC through school departments, use of displays, more diverse resources and lesson content. This has been further supported with training on Decolonising the Curriculum to help staff better understand Anti-Racist Education and possible unconscious bias in the classroom. We have also supported awareness of Black History Month by encouraging pupil involvement in raising awareness through an exhibition of their work which celebrates what BHM means to them, along with the increasingly diverse literature available in the school library for pupils, supported by the Social Subjects department.

Since the creation of the group in 2020, we have seen greater awareness of unconscious bias, anti-racism and diverse classroom inclusion. This, alongside the positive pupil input from the RRS Pupil Equalities group, has led to teaching staff questioning their lesson resources and how they can introduce more diversity into their lessons in a respectful and meaningful way.

Our next steps are to continue to develop positive and meaningful ways to celebrate diversity and community within our school setting. We continue to try to further our understanding of the BAME experience for learners, parents and staff and how we can improve experiences for all as well as developing school community involvement and celebration through the Firrhill Heritage project.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING GROUP

Miss Neilson & S4 pupils

This past year in PE, we offered a new SQA group Award for pupils in S4 focusing on Mental Health and Wellbeing, linking to the following Rights of the Child - **Article 24:** every child has the right to the best possible health, including education on health and wellbeing, and **Article 12:** every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in matters that affect them.

As part of this SQA award, pupils designed their own logo and established themselves as the **'Firrhill Mental Wellness Team'**. We also created a Twitter page to promote positive messages around Mental Health and Wellbeing but also to share our experiences this year. The team created their own pupil voice survey to collect data and information on how our pupils feel about MHWB. Pupils have also created a MHWB advent calendar for the month of December, used during registration time. Pupils have also worked with other staff members across the school to share their thoughts and experiences. They worked with Mr Murray to discuss anxiety and the impact it can have on learning in the classroom. The team also worked with Dr Mike Forrester who delivered workshops about the brain and flight or fight responses of the body.

The Firrhill Mental Wellness Team want to create visible and accessible strategies to support pupils' Mental Health and Wellbeing. The team would like to set up a pupil led 'drop in' during one lunchtime each week whereby pupils can come along and talk about any general worries or problems they may be experiencing. The team will also look at creating visual posters and toolkits that we can share across school to help pupils identify what they could do to support their own wellbeing.

The Firrhill Mental Wellness Team will work towards creating a programme for pupils to follow for further mental health awareness in 2022.

The Firrhill Mental Wellness Team has been a great success so far and provided pupils who are passionate about Mental Health and Wellbeing with leadership opportunities. It has also promoted important discussion for all pupils around a topic which affects us all - Mental Health and Wellbeing.

SCHOOL LIBRARY FOCUS

Mr McCann

Throughout the year the library celebrates a number of days to help our students to feel acknowledged and included. These include Black History month, LGBT History month, Dyslexia Awareness week, and Mental Health Awareness week. The library at Firrhill is a vibrant and busy space where students from all year groups come to study, read, research and ask questions. Students engage exceptionally well with the resources available in the library, frequently providing suggestions that inform what books are bought.

We have a permanent collection of books that help with health and wellbeing (escape connect relate) by focusing on Bibliotherapy. These books help to support students who face a range of challenges and were provided by an initiative started by a group of Edinburgh school librarians.

We recently acquired a generous donation of books from Penguin when a member of staff won their 'Lit in Colour' competition. The collection features books by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic writers. Students from our Rights Respecting group worked with me to produce a permanent display to highlight this collection. Last year our Rights Respecting group also helped us to produce a fantastic display for Black History Month with some wonderful original artwork.



NURTURE GROUPS

Mr Murray and Miss Masters

You could say there are some universally accepted truths in education. One of them is the idea that relationships are important to learning and this is a focus of our Nurture provision in Firrhill High School this term.

This term, building healthy relationships is a focus in that we encourage everyone to get along with each other and enjoy school together. If we can all treat each other equally through activities and teamwork - this links with Article 4 of the Rights of the Child - we can support all our pupils to enjoy their rights and enjoy their time at school. With this in mind - our term has been a lot of fun!

One of the principles is self care and part of this has been working and caring for animals. Our S1 and S2's have been along to Swanston Farm to feed the goats, chickens and horses. Calum our Therapet handler has been walking his dog Selkie (a cocker spaniel pup) and we have been learning how to help train and care for him.

A further flavour of our programme is our home baking, and teas and coffees making. FCT colleagues have helped us make cookies and a big hit has been free hot chocolates for teachers, thanks to the generosity of the local coffee shop. We have also been busy digging up our crop of vegetables in the raised allotment – mostly different varieties of potatoes and some carrots and herbs before winter really sets in. FCT have hosted us for making the potatoes into wedges. We have planted Garlic for over the colder months.



NURTURE GROUPS

Mr Murray and Miss Masters

Article 27 of the UNCRC links to physical activity and how it can benefit pupils wellbeing and this is another focus for us. The Army Education Team kindly held teamwork sessions for pupils including physical challenges such as 'Crossing the River'. Ms Masters has led Forest walks with the S1 and the S2 have shown off and shown up the teachers in creating their football skills challenge. This was topped off with a visit to Hearts FC for some coaching via their Big Hearts Community Fund.

A big thanks must go to all our partners who have helped with this so far: Our PSA's, Sam Lockhart at Swanston ,The FCT staff, Ms Neilson, Ms Ewen, Ms Jack and all in the office, the school catering team, Craig Robinson and Aiden Bulmer and the army staff, Calum and Selkie, Connor McNally from Hearts, the Eco group for their gardening help and many more..

We would like to take this opportunity to also thank the Parents Firrhill Fundraising and Social Group who have generously funded some of our work in Nurture to be revealed next term. Additionally they have enlisted the Co-op to provide funds for our Sensory 'Pop up' - a space that will provide a calm, therapeutic space for pupils and enhance wellbeing and inclusion into the school community – as part of their local causes you can donate to. The funding period will run until October 2022. Please visit the link if you would like to help us in this way -

<https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/62787>

Finally, if you would like more information about our Nurture provision at Firrhill, or if you think you can contribute in any way, please email **rory.murray@firrhill.edin.sch.uk** or see our Twitter feed **@firrhillnurture**



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Geography with Miss Summers

Geography departments across Edinburgh schools have recently been making efforts to collectively “decolonise the curriculum”. This has involved a reconsideration of how we discuss and portray people of colour in our lessons. For example, modernising lessons to no longer use stereotypical words like “slums”.

At Firrhill the Geography department has recently updated our course content to be more inclusive of diverse voices and less Eurocentric. We are excited to tell you about the following changes we have made to our curriculum:

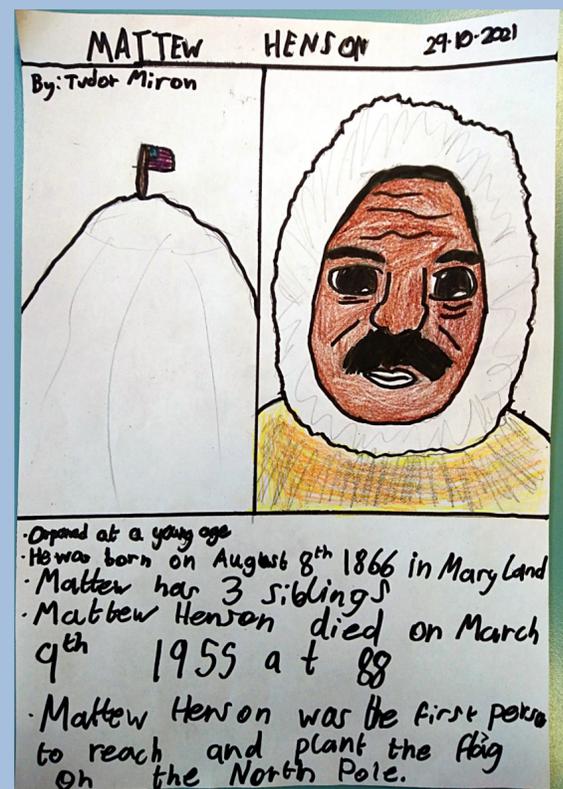
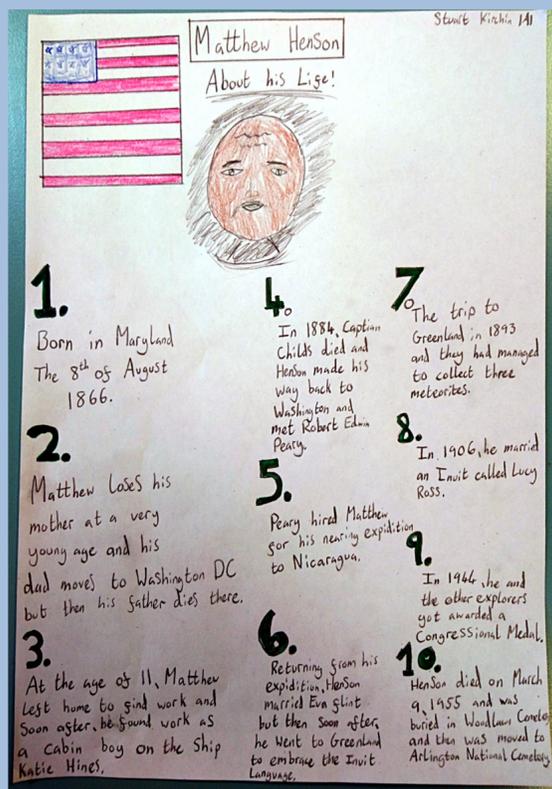
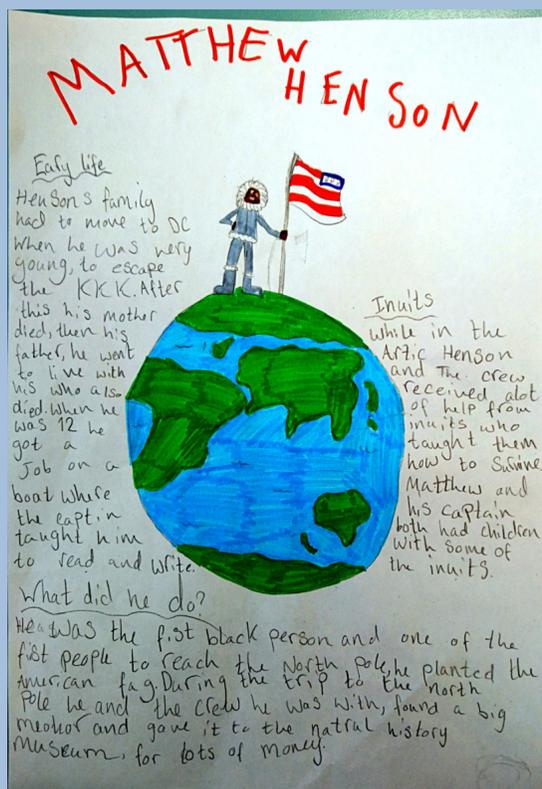
In S1 Geography, pupils are given the chance to learn about Matthew Henson, the first person to ever reach the North Pole. Pupils discovered his significant contributions to geographical discovery despite the racial barriers he faced in America. Furthermore, pupils learned about how Henson learned to survive the harsh Arctic conditions with help from the indigenous Inuit people.

In S2 Geography, we teach a series of lessons called “Africa, not a Country” to break down potential misconceptions about the region. We ask pupils to question their preconceived notions about the continent by critiquing popularised images from the media. We show that these 54 countries are advanced economies with a diverse range of cultures and landscapes.

In S3 Geography, pupils complete a case study on Brazil. We teach about how the country was colonised by Portugal, the lasting impacts of slavery and current issues of police brutality in Rio.

Please look at the following website if you would like to find out more:

decolonisegeography.com



PUPIL VOICE OPPORTUNITIES

Lewis Kerr, S6 Head Boy

There are many opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions at Firrhill High School and to contribute to matters that they are passionate about. This in turn, can result in positive changes to the school. We recognise the Right of young people to give their views freely, and pupil voice is heard are through our Senior Student Council, Year Group Councils and pupil voice email address.

Our Senior Student Council is made up of eighteen students in sixth year, selected through an interview process to represent the school. The Senior Student Council meet every Monday lunch time and are led by Depute Head Teacher, Mrs Clegg, with occasional visitors such as the Business Manager, Pupil Support Leaders and the Headteacher. They discuss many decisions facing the school and talk about the views of pupils and their own experiences. Any major decisions will be raised in the meetings so that they can talk to other members of the school and give feedback on the responses received.

In all year groups, the opportunity for pupil voice is promoted via Year Group Councils, made up of representatives from each register class. The class representatives meet with three members of the Senior Student Council once a fortnight in year groups to discuss issues in school and to give an opportunity for pupil feedback. These groups are extremely effective because of the diversity of pupils attending, so hopefully there are no groups of pupils in the school who are left without a voice.

Finally, there are posters around the school with details of a pupil voice email address. This email address is monitored by the Head Boy and Head Girl and checked daily. This address is entirely confidential, and pupils can email any concerns they may have about the school or if they need advice or feel more comfortable getting in touch with someone of a similar age. The address is inclusive of all and there are no restrictions to who can get in contact.

All opportunities are the efforts of the school to ensure pupil voice is heard, but there are more subtle opportunities available, such as talking to any senior student or Prefect who are all happy to help. If a pupil has a trusted teacher, they can also take any feedback and relay that to the appropriate member of staff to deal with.

When I started at Firrhill there were less opportunities for pupils to voice any thoughts or opinions, but that has changed for the better. The development of these opportunities have enhanced relationships between younger and senior pupils and made the school a much more engaging community to be a part of. No school can be perfect but having the opportunities available to have your voice heard can make the difference between a good school and a great one.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING DIVERSITY, EQUALITY & REMEMBRANCE EVENTS

February - LGBT History Month

Article 2: Non-discrimination, Article 13 – freedom of expression

21st March - International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Article 2: Non-discrimination

31st March - International Day of Transgender Visibility

Article 13 – freedom of expression

2nd April - Autism Awareness Day

Article 2: Non-discrimination

7th April - World Health Day

Article 24: Health and health services

Courtesy of Unicef's Rights Respecting Schools website
highlighting the real-world relevance of the UNCRC.

For more information, visit www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/



Thank you to Firrhill staff and pupils who have contributed to our Equalities newsletter this term. Follow our Rights Respecting and Equalities updates on our Twitter feed - @firrhillrrsa