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The Scottish Conservatives are calling on education secretary John Swinney to intervene in the row over the closure of a pioneering college which has given Scottish youngsters a second chance.

Newlands Junior College in Glasgow, set up by entrepreneur Jim McColl, seeks to give opportunities to teenagers who have become disengaged from mainstream education, offering them skills to succeed in life.

Mr Swinney has previously given the initiative his support – but reports today suggest the college may close amid a dispute about funding with Glasgow City Council.

Newlands Junior College offers vocational education and training suited to the particular needs of young people who do not learn well in the mainstream educational system, but who have the potential to become useful contributors to society.

Shadow education secretary Liz Smith has written to Mr Swinney today to urge action.

In the letter, she says:

“Having seen for myself, on two separate occasions, the outstanding work that was taking place in the college to inspire young people who had felt disengaged from school, I was very persuaded of the role that such an institution can play in Scottish education.

“Too often at present in Scotland, we see attempts to diversify the educational experience thwarted, even when that diversification is proving successful.

“It is the Scottish Government’s ambition – rightly – to improve the educational experience for all young people. I would be grateful for your views on how this will be possible when an institution like this is forced to close.”

Newlands Junior College was also visited by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson.