

Parent Council Meeting Monday 18th February 2019

Present: Mike Paul, Cllr David Cameron, Adele Ashton, Sarah Christie, Louisa Davies, Ekaterina Murray, Susan Greig, Malcolm McKay, Russell Ritchie, Stephanie Jackman, Lynn Murray

Apologies: Sarah Gray, Jenny Evans, Denise Poole, Cllr Samarai and Cllr McGregor

Minutes of Previous Meeting: These were approved by Susan and seconded by Russell.

School capacity was discussed with there currently being 656 pupils at the school (built for 600 originally) with over 600 in Mainstream. There are plans/discussion around increasing the roll by a further 300 which would require an extension, in the future.

There have been issues with teaching of Biology in that there have been a few different teachers in the last 6/7 months which is not ideal but the advertisement for a temporary listing is not allowed and there are currently no locum biology teachers available. This has been ongoing so at present the Nat 5 classes have had to be prioritised but the teacher is now back on a phased return.

It should be noted that there is only a small pool of teaching staff available across Scotland and very few teachers on the supply list generally. The Authority is using a recruitment company to try and assist with this.

Head Teacher Report and School update, including ASN update.

We met with the Fire Service and ACC to look at trying to reduce the number of callouts to the school as these have been high. The Fire Service were satisfied with actions taken by the school. There has not been a fire alarm in the school since the last Parent Council meeting.

Staffing - we have three staff returning from long term absence. Each is on a phased return and these seem to be progressing well. A PT Pupil Support (Ms Birnie) is currently absent due to illness and we are looking at filling this vacancy with an acting position in school. Mr Alex Duncan has been successful in applying for a Quality Improvement Manager post in ACC on a seconded basis - we are currently asking for notes of interest from our Extended Leadership Team. Mr Greg Ewing, PTPS Ecosse House, has resigned his post after 2 years on a leave of absence in Canada. This post had been ably filled by Ms Elaine Law and I would like to thank her for all her efforts in supporting the young people in the House and across the school. Following an interview we have a preferred candidate for the post - further information will be shared when references have been shared.

Project Bucksburn 2021 - we have met with the organisation that will be tasked with extending the building to increase the capacity and monthly meetings will continue. Currently, the plan is to extend the building to increase the capacity by up to 300 to take account of rising primary rolls and increased building in the catchment area. The P7 evenings went well and many thanks to Sarah and Adele for representing the PC at these meetings.

The admissions process for places in the ASN Wing is now complete with all 96 places accounted for - there will be 19 new pupils starting in August, mostly in S1. Transition work is already underway to ensure smooth movement for pupils.

All S2 pupils had the opportunity to attend the Outward Bound course at Loch Eil at the end of January. Nearly 100 pupils enjoyed some cold weather, but their spirits were warmed by the activities they took part in - including the icy dip in the loch at the beginning of the trip. Many thanks to Mr Sherrington for organising this (and taking two dips).

2 members of staff from the ASN Wing (Astrid Patrigeon and Jemma Mills) returned yesterday from a trip to Nepal where they have established a link with another school through the Connecting Classrooms project. The British Council are sponsoring this link and the focus for the two schools is on food poverty. Both teachers will be feeding back to the whole school on their learning and the project before staff from the school in Nepal join us in Aberdeen sometime in May this year. This project links with the work we have been doing in conjunction with Aberdeen Cyrenians this year.

Assessment weeks have now ended. The format was changed this year to take account of feedback from last year as S4 students found additional pressures from completing the exams in just one week. Spreading these over two weeks was seen as desirable. There have been some mixed views over the ending of study leave, but staff have reported that, particularly for middle and lower achievers, being in class has benefited the young people. We are collating feedback from pupils and staff before making decisions on how to proceed next year.

Finally, we are continuing to focus on our improvement priorities - our in-service days in February had a strong focus on learning, teaching and assessment - in particular there was work done on assessment and moderation in the Broad General Education (S1-3) and continuing work on improving feedback across the school. The ASN curriculum is being reviewed and will be a key focus on the improvement plan for next year and we also had sessions on maths courses, Accelerated Reader and Collaborative learning that saw staff from all areas of the school work together; our closing the gap agenda continues with several groups running to support some of our most vulnerable young people; we are continuing to develop our mental health strategy for young people; and we are continuing to build links with employers to promote employability skills with some young people attending a work experience opportunity at our new partner, BAM Nuttall, in Inverurie at the end of this month.

Parental Engagement: Mike and Susan attended a Parental Engagement meeting, which proved very interesting and informative. Some of the points raised giving reasons why parental engagement can be low included parents not having time to attend parents evenings, childcare and travelling costs. They may not have the confidence in themselves to feel that they can offer to help their child, and their own experiences of school may not be very positive. It may be beneficial to offer some kind of training for parents to increase their confidence in helping their child, and for them to be encouraged to attend any events which may also provide support for them, and to help get them involved in their child's education. It was also discussed that parents should be included in the school's policy. It was also mentioned that a lot of parents give up if they receive little or no feedback from their child regarding their school day/progress etc, but if they continue to keep asking for information that it proves to their child that they care, and they actually like it if you ask, even although they may not admit this. Google Classroom is a great tool for parents to access for further information.

There were only 129 responses to the parental questionnaire which was sent out however the overall feedback was good. In many areas the school seems to be providing good quality education, care, motivation and feedback to the pupils however there were areas identified as 'low' which Mike is going to focus on improving after reviewing and analysing further.

Adele suggested introducing a parental coffee morning in the canteen eg, once a month or term to endeavour to encourage parents to speak to each other and engage with PC and school perhaps (the first one has now been arranged for 22nd March).

Mike is also reviewing the newsletter length and format to perhaps shorten it but make it more meaningful and include some Parent council item(s) within.

Parents Evenings: The format of these was discussed at length, as it was felt that the current appointment system didn't really operate to the planned schedule. It was suggested that a bell could be rung in between each appointment, so that everyone knew when it was time to move on, and if extra time was required with a specific teacher/s then the parents could request a separate meeting at another time. The issue of confidentiality was also raised - the layout of the rooms meant that there wasn't a lot of space between the desks and the waiting areas, and other people's interviews could be overheard. Mike advised that it would be possible to change the location and to use classrooms instead, which may prove to be more successful, as this method has been used in previous schools where he has worked. Russell also mentioned that a plan showing the location of staff were situated would be beneficial.

This topic is to be discussed at a future Parent Council meeting.

Careers Fair: Malcolm advised that there has been around 35 positive responses for attendees, but is still waiting for some more responses before the final number can be confirmed. The format for the fair is now in place, they're just waiting for final responses to get going with advertising it.

It was suggested that the Funraisers provide the refreshments at the Fair to give them an opportunity to raise some money, and that there could be a Parent Council stall there too.

Funraisers Report: The next event is a Fundraising Quiz Night on Wednesday 27th March 2019 at The Ashvale chipper in Great Western Road. Posters are up for this and the tickets are £15 which includes an Ashvale supper.

Treasurers Report: £250 spent on school yearbook
£3000 spent on minibus
£1000 spent on TALE sailing trip
£3050 spent on year-end awards and ASN celebration
£250 spent by drama club

BALANCE: £2296.00

AOCB: Susan mentioned that the organisation of the S1 and S2 lunchbreaks were now vastly improved, due to the fact that the barriers for queueing have now been fixed and can't be moved, as they could previously.

Active Schools/Lunchtime Activities: Active schools run various classes and activities during lunch breaks for all year groups. Adele advised the meeting that the information which is held on the website regarding these is quite out of date. Mike advised that he would organise to get the website updated. It was mentioned that these activities could be quite difficult for the S1's to get involved in, as some of them are being run by the older pupils, and they can find this quite intimidating.

School Uniform: Due to the fact that two suppliers of the school uniform have closed within the last two years, there is now only one stockist in Aberdeen where uniform can be purchased from. A discussion was held as to whether it was necessary to have both polo shirts and sweatshirts/hoodies branded, or whether a plain black or white polo shirt would be acceptable as part of the uniform. To be further discussed.

School Holiday Consultation: Sarah requested that Mike puts this information on the school app.

Dates of Future Meetings: Wednesday 17th April
Thursday 30th May