

Minutes of Parent Council Meeting

Skype meeting Wednesday 22nd May 2020

Present:

Cllr. N Smith, Cllr A Simpson, L Newbould, J Mannion, EJ Whitehead, S Phimister, G Oldham, P McLean, E Preston, N Elrick, V Fowlie, L Duthie, K Osterberg

Apologies:

Cllr Ingram, Y Beagrie, S Neuman

2. Minutes of last meeting

Minor amendments were made to the wording of the budget part of the Head Teacher's report. No other amendments or errors noted. Minutes accepted as accurate.

Follow ups-

Elizabeth emailed to explain that the PTA was a sub-committee of the PC with its own accounts. Chair of the PTA was always on the PC and so reported at every PC meeting.

L Duthie informed the PC that the last chair of the PTA Diane Duncan has resigned and the PTA is now defunct.

The PC email and Facebook page have been set up

PC info on school website has been updated but will need to be updated again to reflect the fact there is now no PTA and teacher member.

3. Chairperson's report

VF welcomed everyone and said she would like to express how well she thought the staff had coped with the current situation. All agreed. LD said she would pass this on to the staff.

4. Treasurer's Report

No transactions since last meeting. Current balance is £1541.21. Following up on the auditing query from the last meeting YB has approached the trainee accountant from the company she uses and she has agreed to audit our accounts. PC agreed to this. LD said it was best to check with Christine McLennan if it was permissible. *Just after the meeting VF confirmed that Christine has said it is permissible.

LD said there is currently £4000 in the PTA account and it would be beneficial if the school were able to use it purchase badly needed IT equipment. Cllr Simpson mentioned that if no signatories were available transferring funds might be problematic. VF said our treasurer YB is also the PTA treasurer and DD is still around so it shouldn't be a problem but it was agreed to be dealt with asap.

Cllr Smith said that many oil companies were downsizing and selling off equipment. VF to discuss with LD.

5. SQA Estimates May 2020- presentation from EJ Whitehead and S Phimister

LD introduced Scott Phimister as the new (October 2019) PT of the science faculty. She explained that parents may be concerned about the SQA estimates and felt that the process should be shared to reassure them. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of schools and subsequent cancellation of all exams, the way that Nat 5, Higher and Advanced Highers are graded has been changed. Schools have to provide estimates based on previous exams and course work. There have been guidelines from SQA which were introduced on 20th April. Staff had to undertake instruction from SQA in how to do the estimations. Faculty heads are leading the discussion with class teachers and cross-faculty moderation.

• Emma-Jane Whitehead-

EJW stated she has had lots of meetings and collaborative consulting. There has been extra course work and sign off sheets. When SQA announced it was sending the info to schools on self-moderation she analysed it in advance so the school could have it early. Depute heads attended

meetings with staff to identify grades that staff were awarding to ensure they were right. SLT and Guidance also consulted for input. Shared good practice and quality of practice across school.

• S Phimister-

Staff spoke early on in the process (late March) about looking for evidence. It is essential that they have the best and most robust evidence, the best pupil work they can get from individuals. Many things were looked at to create a whole picture and greater scope to collect evidence from. How pupils improve from one year to another and leading up to exams in tests etc. Also using data from over the years the expected outcomes can be better predicted from these guidelines.

Across the faculties teachers looked at the best evidence for their pupils and discussed with other teachers. The school is trying to get the best evidence they can. SP went on to show the PC tables he has created to be more scientific about averaging scores across the years by comparing and then predicting where they are expected to be. This will be presented to the SQA. He demonstrated with an example of S3 going into Nat 5s showing previous grades and where they then expected each pupil to be.

LD added that they have to convince SQA of the veracity of their data, it will not be accepted by SQA if they don't believe it. Therefore best estimates for pupils are made but within the parameters of what is fair.

VF asked what if they did worse in their exams than pre-lims. SP answered that they would use best most robust evidence for that pupil. EJW said that if they didn't do well in their pre-lims but course work was better that would also be factored in.

All faculties are using this process which began almost immediately after lockdown. It is at a conclusion now as submission deadline closes next week. SQA are using key indicators from schools across Scotland and are checking that the evidence is good.

6. Proposed Reporting Format 2020/21. Presentation G Oldham

LD opened with- Given the current challenging situation it was decided that the standard S1 reports would not go ahead as there is too much variability with home learning and a lack of consistency across schools and with individual pupil's situations. The yearly full reports with comments don't have much individuality about them so more emphasis will be on more frequent Tracking Reports. School will not be "normal" after August and for the foreseeable future so there is a need to react to this new situation.

• G Oldham

S1 need a full report as soon as possible into S2 which is being planned for. There will be an increase in frequency of tracking reports with less comments -unless absolutely necessary- enabling parents to know how their child is doing. Teachers will share more about the courses and what skills are being developed. Standardised comments often generically describe this rather than individual personalised comments. Improvement guidelines for pupils and how their families can help them can be handed out along with the tracking reports. They would like to do this with S1-3 asap and S4-6 a bit later.

LD said that S4-6 reports would contain working grades and target grades as well as Behaviour, Homework and Effort. S1-3 is based on Behaviour, Homework and Effort.

NE asked what sort of frequency. 3-4 times a year is the aim but next session is a little unknown at present so at least termly.

PMcL said she prefers the reports with comments.

GO stated the ratings for behaviour, effort and homework must be the calculated same way across the school. Outstanding will only be awarded to a few pupils to make it genuinely outstanding. With less comments in reports the appropriate ratings become more important. The school will survey parents after a running this a while to see how it is being received.

The PC gave a general consensus of approval.

Head Teacher's Report

A quick follow up from the last pre-lockdown meeting in January. Pre-lims went well, happy with overall performances. They were pleased they managed to have the seniors Burns night before lockdown and it was very successful.

It is currently a very challenging and difficult situation but there have been some positives to come out of it. They surveyed pupils and families early on to see how they were coping with working from home and two points came from it

- 1) some children were really overwhelmed with the volume of work
- 2) some parents found Twitter too much of a challenge to set up and use so they couldn't access the school's Twitter feed.

Once it was explained the feed can be viewed without a Twitter account the views have steadily gone up. The school has recalculated the number of hours children should ideally spend on school work (3 hours / 4 hours a day) and work loads should be appropriate to this.

- This week has been Health and Well-Being Week and the uptake has been good from pupils. Staff are now feeling the drain of the workload and having their own children to home school and LD said she is encouraging them to take care of their own wellbeing.
- The school's IT resources have all been handed out and all laptops have been assigned to staff and pupils.
- Three major events have been achieved during lockdown- change of timetables; Health and Wellbeing Week and a virtual awards ceremony for S4-6 is due soon.
- There have been new staff appointments- Jackie Arbuthnott is now permanent PT of Creative Arts, Mr Kelly (previously a History probationer) is now also permanent. There are also three new probationers one each for English, Maths and Biology. With the new social distancing regulations and the need for classes to be split into two or three the extra teachers will be a huge advantage.
- The future-so many questions . Staff will begin a phased return to the building in June to start preparations for start of school on 11th August. The school year should have re-started on 18th August and the lost week will be reclaimed at some point in the future year. The 4 local authorities that would all have been back on the 18th are in discussion about it. A concerning issue is that fairly uniquely Mintlaw has 80% of pupils bussed in and this is going to be a huge challenge with social distancing. Knowledge of the school estate is helping staff calculate the amount of pupils permitted in any one area at one time. Janitorial staff will enforce the one-way system throughout the school and arrows will be painted on the floor. Books will have to be closed off to pupils for hygiene reasons so this area can be used as a teaching area. There will be staggered start times, breaks, lunch etc and not all pupils in classes will be at school, there will be a mix of school and home school. Very little is clear yet and guidelines change continuously. Fluid planning will start in June and parents will be kept informed.

KO said her son had found the workload too much and that 3 hours a day would not give him enough time. LD responded that on any occasion that it becomes too much pupils should contact their guidance teacher. KO said that the guidance teacher had got in touch the next day offering support. LD said that guidance were working flat out to keep all pupils and families supported through this phase.

EP asked what will be happening with practical subjects. LD said there is no answer to this yet. It is currently a big challenge to be worked on.

Cllr Smith- pleased to see the school's plans so well ahead and thanks the school for its work and efforts on behalf of all the councillors. He also said if there is anything they can do to help they are there to support.

NE expressed concern for the mental health of the teachers and how important it is. They must be feeling the challenge especially with their own children at home too. She said if they can't get all their work set that it should not be an issue and they deserved a break too. LD replied that current challenges are unprecedented. As of next week there will be a "no post Wednesday afternoon" to give both pupils and staff (and parents!) a rest from online activity. PC all agreed that staff are doing a great job and they should take care of themselves.

EP said flashing school signs are still going off on the timers. Cllr Simpson said drivers are now ignoring them which could be dangerous when the schools go back. LD said she would get it looked into. Cllr Simpson passed on her good wishes to the staff and commended them.

NE asked about the college courses that run along with the senior phase. LD said that they are not sure what's happening yet, they may start later on and possibly virtually certainly at first. They are currently still on the time table. Sharon Noble (Depute Learning and Teaching) has the specifics.

AOCB

No items.

Date of next meeting

It was decided not to set a date until more is known once school begins in August.

VF closed the meeting.