

**Hermitage Academy Parent Council Meeting
Monday 8 February 2016
Hermitage Academy - 7pm**

Minutes

Present:

S1 Gilan MacLeod / Audrey Perella
S2: Stella Kinloch
S3: Elaine Crichton / Sheena Wain / Angela Docherty
S4: Simone MacLeod / Marnie Riding
S5: Mike Heath / Ali Beattie
S6: Juliet Corry
ASN: Val Reynard

Geoff Urie - Head Teacher:
Louise Connor - Argyll & Bute Council

1. Apologies

S3 Jane Keightly
S6 Lisa Paterson
David Kinniburgh – Local Councillor

2. Introductions

No further introductions were made.
There were a couple of resignations noted:
S2 Kevin Middleton / James Robb

3. Election of a new Chair

Since KM resignation MH (vice chair) has been acting chair. Only 1 nomination for the position of Chair - MH. AP proposed, SK 2nd
No nominations for Vice chair.
Currently 4 vacancies for year representatives on the PC, this will need to be advertised to all parents.

4. Previous Minutes

Minutes from previous meeting 11 January had been distributed to all PC members, call to ratify.
All members agreed minutes were true and accurate.

5. Matters Arising from previous meeting including actions.

- UCAS Statement and local authority letter - it was proposed to adapt the statement, Louise Connor will look at this and bring it back to the next meeting.
- Letter for pupils from A & B - as above
- New PC constitution - Fiona Johnson had said she would work with the PC on this, although as yet Fiona has not contacted the PC, LC said she will chase this up with Fiona, meanwhile PC looking at getting other secondary school constitutions to see if we can adapt them.
- PC training - dates have been given to PC members for 3 training sessions; GU will take part in this alongside the PC.
- Pupil council chair/vice chair - pupil council reps or the teacher who facilitates the pupil council were to be invited to our meetings, GU said it's a matter of timing as pupils are currently mid study. Can look at this after training and constitution all sorted out.
- Calendar of PC events on school website - this has been done
- PC contact details on school web page - this has been done except advertising our Facebook page, this was omitted as the school internet does not allow access to this.
- Email year group reports in advance of meetings - this will be done in advance of meetings.

6. Update from the Chair

2 meetings had been attended by PC representatives with A&B council, one on the review outcome and curriculum models (15 January), and a second on PC training needs (29 January).

Regarding the first, the chair provided an overview of the discussions but LC and GU objected as they had been instructed by AMK that she had not approved the minutes prepared by MH. LC stated that as there was more than just PC members present at the meeting the minute should not be presented to the meeting. An adjournment was called and MH, LC and GU left the meeting. Upon their return MH gave his recollection of the discussions to the meeting: These were that: it would appear that the 2 year higher model is still the default model; LC said that this would be on an individual basis and that it was better to refer to it as a 2 year pathway allowing for appropriate presentation at the appropriate time in consultation with parents. There was a discussion regarding the case for additional resources being put into the school to support the existing S5 and S6. AMK was dismayed at comments in the Helens burgh Advertiser on 14 January, KM assured AMK that these were personal comments and did not represent the PC, he wrote a letter to confirm this. AMK said that she wanted to see true representation for the parent forum. MH said that there will always be a silent majority and that decisions are made on the number of votes cast and not on the size of the electorate. MH and KM came away from the meeting feeling positive. In the ensuing discussion VR said that Nat5 is an acceptable level for access to a lot of things and for some pupils this was preferable to poor results in higher.

Regarding the second meeting on 29 January 2016, training needs were discussed with Fiona Johnstone: 3 sessions were agreed, introduction to PC's, office bearer's roles, and communications. MH and KM hoped this would be able to look at how the PC is able to reflect the views of parents who are willing to engage. The training is essential for the PC to know their remit, which will benefit the PC, parent forum and the school. GU confirmed he and members of his SMT would attend where possible. MH said this would help build positive working relationships between the school and the PC.

7. Update from Head teacher

- GU said that the progress report is being presented to the area committee tomorrow. they are looking for monthly update and timescales with action plan, some items have been started but it is ongoing
- There was a meeting on Friday, met with various staff and young people, looking at the road map for S3 and are looking at the evidence gathered from the meeting. LC has been looking at the feedback and is so far pleased with the progress. LC met with Ken McCara, HMI inspector and Argyll & Bute Liaison Officer, need to co-ordinate a diary for feedback as soon as it's received. GU will update Parent Forum through the PC. Parental involvement will be via the PC and will look at enhancements. It was requested that when Education Scotland come for their visit could they meet with PC reps and other parents, LC will put this to the link worker
- The action plan was put out on 21 December, it was discussed if we could get a more user friendly document to this one, LC said this was feasible; PC can work with Fiona Johnson on this; once this has been agreed it can go on the school and PC websites. GU said he was happy to work with the PC on this, select a few pages and summarise, if this works well could be the way forward.
- There is a 1 page feedback document, thoughts were that it was a bit scant, what was more concerning about it was what it didn't say; it is pertinent what is missing from it.
- Looking at the pathways, PC offered to do joint working on this, it is essential that this is a clear document; EC said the overall theme from parents was that there is real confusion on what the actual options are. LC said it was good to get feedback on this and any other questions from parents, they can go onto the school website under the Q & A theme. The PC always direct parents to contact the school in the first instance for specific questions relating to personal issues, however VR said that sometimes the parents contact us as they have failed to get the required help from the school. GU said he would need to get these details and investigate why things are not responded to, it could be a workload issue, this feedback from PC was identified as a positive thing. Regarding representation of the parent forum AP said we are aware there is a silent majority, no-one can command them to speak up so it is essential there is a clear guide as what is expected to be the default however GU said there is no default and that the pathway was flexible to allow pupils to do exams in S4, then higher in S5 (1 year) or subjects can be changed at the end of S4. Some highers are achievable as a 1 year study course. Interviews will be held in every department to look at the options for

testing levels. The missing link in all of this is the 3rd year options. AP said we should refer to the pathway as a starting assumption rather than a default pathway. SM asked at what stage a decision was made for presentation, GU said each subject will be different; maths for example will be an ongoing assessment. Regarding the timetabling of different levels for the same year group GU is still in consultation with each department. Choices will be made through monitoring and tracking reports, At S4 levels are decided on recommendations and professional judgments. Regarding booking appointments with the school to discuss options for S4's VR said it was highlighted to the PC that there may be limited spaces and time, can the school extend the time scale to make appointments and ensure that there are enough appointments to go around those who wanted one. GU said it was a huge undertaking and was aware that some parents did get appointments after the end date. MR asked if the school would ensure that the whole syllabus was covered to enable NAT 5 presentation, GU said they would look at the structure in S3 to ensure this is all covered in the time frame. The school will work together with the PC to ensure that there is a clear starting point and through parental involvement will make changes, not like this year's model.

- Transport was discussed, parents can get info on cancelled or changed times via Garelochhead coacher's twitter page or the schools twitter or the school website
- Supported study, S4 and S5 have been given supported study and targeted study, £28000 had been ring fenced in the past for this and now in the budget it is £0, LC is committed for Easter school and will look at funding for 1 week course during Easter. As soon as this is planned communications will be sent out.
- Looking at study leave, this is not the best use of time, pupils should go to school and once exams is over use timetabled classes as study periods in school. Guidance should be available for parents, they should get texts prior to tests or when projects are due. All suggestions were welcomed regarding this.
- Regarding extra study/supported learning teachers offer their time free, but they are disappointed by the low uptake, AB said sometimes the extra study classes clash with one another and suggested perhaps alternating them. We are not sure if parents are even aware these extra study classes are available.
- Enhancements, 76 pupils dropped these, there was a query if these could or should be opened up again for some pupils, again a deadline would need to be set to enable timetabling
- Staffing – Staff have been appointed to Geography, PE and music, all classes are now fully staffed, there are still vacancies in the science department. EC from a parent, have the 7 vacancies recently advertised been filled - biology mat leave post had no applicants, any further job cuts depends on the budget meeting , there could be cuts to equipment, teaching. Staffing allocations have not yet been confirmed. MR asked how we propose to dual teach with cuts pending, GU said it varies from subject to subject, ideally have the same level in one class but there is also a shortage of supply teachers. Scottish Government is trying to

attract teachers nationally. Oban use Facebook to attract staff, having to re-advertise is costly

- Redundancies – Librarians are still under review, technical staff either cut number of staff or number of hours worked, same situation for classroom assistants and clerical staff, ASN are also under review, PC said there is still an offer on the table to assist where we are able. GU ended by assuring that he would try to ensure that any impact of the Budget decisions on Teaching and Learning is minimised

8. Updates from office bearers.

Chair - as above

Secretary - no updates

Treasurer - no money to treasure, account is as far as SW can go, she needs money to put in it to open it, can't get money until there is an account to transfer it to, SW will open with her own £1.

9. Updated from year group representatives

S1 - no real issues, a few comments from P7 parents, enquiring if things will be firmed up before S1. Mrs Muir has been round all the primary schools. The P7 information evening is very important and the PC and PTA should attend this.

S2 - only issues raised were about school handbook. GU said a new template was provided by the Local authority in December but has not been approved yet. LC will action this before the next meeting and said when it is approved the school would be looking for feedback to take back to the LA

S3 - EC said there was a running theme that about class split for NAT4/NAT5/highers, LC said that classes will go through together and that there will be dual levels in classes as this happens nationally. Concerns that 6 subjects is not enough and would limit flexibility for future careers; concerns that nothing is as yet confirmed regarding pathways and system is aimed at more academic children - not all kids are; there was some dismay and worry amongst some parents at rumours of a whole class failing a prelim recently and there is still a general feeling that the school and local authority are not being honest with parents. On a positive the general feeling was that the S3 information evening was a positive meeting, Mr Urquhart's presentation was excellent; one parent said it was very helpful as she now understood NAT4/NAT 5's a bit better; less [positive was that the Q & A session was ambiguous with nothing being answered, parents want answers in plain English. Any unanswered questions are to be passed on to GU.

GU said that all kids are academic in their own way. GU was unhappy that his honesty was in question.

S4 - concerns if there is no more prelims, if kids have not done how well how will they be supported when they are all in 1 room, LC said maths use ITime for extra study; if kids are to be put forward for dual presentation in English when will parents find out. GU said that he has info for his SMT which will be shared tomorrow; some subjects will have separate studies. MR asked if they could have a pathway flow chart/diagram for each subject - LC said this is in the action plan.

MH said that the exam timetable has some pupils doing 2 subjects in one day; GU said any children with an overlap will be strictly supervised.

S5 - concerns over pupils still doing 3 enhancements. Concerns over dual presentation - 60 pupils offered this. The school has confidence in the 2 year higher but is using this as a fall back if a child is not secure or if there is uncertainty. Some parents feel their child is being under presented - GU said see the school individually, they can be upgraded. There was a concern from a grandparent who was alarmed at witnessing drug abuse - GU said he was not aware of any drug abuse incidents in the school. The school has a strict policy and all incidents are reported to the Police and LA, anything witnessed by anyone should be reported to the Police.

S6 - nothing has come through the system to be raised.

VR - a child who requires a scribe was in a room alone for exam and was constantly interrupted, can the parents be re-assured that there will be no interruption - GU asked if he could get the room number and any further information and would look into this.

10. Report from teacher in charge of Pupil Council

Awaiting elections for chair, nothing else on this.

11. Parent Council communication

Contact info for the PC is on the school website with the exception of Facebook page. The PC newsletter will go on the school website and the 1 page PC newsletter will be sent out to all parents. The Parent Forum site has 700 members; the PC Facebook page has 150 members.

12. AOCB and open comments and questions from the floor

Open forum began although GU said he may not be able to answer every question tonight, he requested would it be possible to get potential questions in advance in order to be prepared to answer.

DC has an S3, S6 and current P7 children:

Q - His S3 son is due to choose subjects and he feels inhibited in giving advice, he is concerned that there will be 2 class levels in 1 classroom, in summary would Mr Urquhart be able to advise him

A – Yes Mr Urquhart will be able to advise on level to be studied, whether 2 levels in 1 class will be dependent on the number of classes running for each subject

Q - Regarding timetabling issues, is the school adequately staffed, have enough resources available

A – GU and LC said yes

Q – Would the challenges the school currently face have any influence on the future budget cuts.

A – LC said all schools would be given sufficient staff; GU assured the meeting that he would fight this corner thoroughly

Q – Currently kids are being downgraded to be presented at appropriate level for the, will this new model prevent this last minute decision making

A – The balance will be on aspiration and attainability, this is not always a negative thing, and it can also be seen as a relief if a student is struggling. Parental choice also comes into downgrading and upgrading, it also allows students to be given the opportunity

Q – Last year 50% failed Nat5 exams, will this be repeated

A – There are improvements this year based on both professional judgment and individual results.

Q – Will there be a higher presentation level.

A - The school wants to get the balance right, higher level of presentation versus higher % pass rate

Q – Performance indicators and transparency are we comfortable that we have accurate data to compare improvement

A – Data are available in the public domain; the school presents a profile report.

A tool called Insight analyses data; it does not compare school with school.

Parent zone is also available but it does not get updated until February so it won't be accurate, the true picture is when the pupils leave after S6

Next meeting is 21 March 2016 at 7pm in the School Library.