

BANCHORY ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minute of the Meeting held on 7 November 2019

Present (members): Trish Amundrud, Jacqueline Conroy, Katie Davies, Andrea Hale, Megan Hare, Colin MacLeod, Scott Newey (Chair), Jeanne Ritchie (Treasurer), Alison Smart (Secretary) and Linda Stromberg.

In attendance: Clare Barr, Cllr Rosemary Bruce, Cllr Eileen Durno, Claire Hesketh Crafts, Sharon McCann, Eleanor McIlraith and Judith Wight (Rector).

Apologies: Ruth Duddy, Vikki Duncan, Kate Ellison, Rebecca Glansbeek, Jill Matthew, Cllr Anne Ross, and Jeff Wallace.

SUMMARY OF KEY ITEMS DISCUSSED

Action

- Peer Listeners and Wellbeing Award for Schools (*items 2.1 and 2.2*)
- Chair's Report, including: BAPC membership; cost of the school day; and communication with the school (*item 4*)
- Rector's Report, including: staffing; pupil achievements; and building update (*item 5*)
- Tracking Reports (*item 11*)

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies.

2. FOCUS TOPICS

Two 'focus topics' had been agreed as substantive items for the meeting: the wellbeing award; and the current project with pupils on 'peer listeners'. Both of these were being led by the school and Eleanor McIlraith, PTG, attended the meeting to provide an update which highlighted the following:-

- The school was trying to raise awareness of mental health issues by developing a positive mental health and wellbeing policy which could be published on the school website.
- The aim was to provide universal support for all pupils as well as targeted support where this was required. This would vary depending on, for example, pupil relationships with guidance and other teachers, and the role would be widened out to other staff who were confident and comfortable talking to pupils, making referrals to guidance staff where necessary, for example, school nurse, pupil support workers etc.
- A range of training and 'upskilling' was provided for relevant staff to help them deal with a variety of issues, for example, mental health first aid training, training to deal with crisis situations, self-harm, coping strategies etc. Staff with mental health first aid training wore green lanyards.
- It was queried why the school no longer had a counsellor. It was confirmed this had been a voluntary role; it had been a long time since there had been one at the school. It was likely that any counsellor provided by the government would be a shared resource across schools. Experience demonstrated there were challenges in finding someone suitable.
- Although it was likely that in most cases parents would be contacted when an issue arose, the school preferred to do this with the consent of the pupil concerned. Guidance staff would probably also be involved at this stage.

- It was noted that a member of the PC would be invited to join the Health and Wellbeing Group in due course i.e. once a plan had been formulated, there were a lot of strands to this area of work that required to be managed properly. The pupil voice was at the heart of all ongoing developments.

2.1 **Peer Listeners**

- Twenty S5 and S6 pupils had volunteered to undertake training as peer listeners. Training included developing skills in listening, confidentially, knowing their limits etc.
- Peer listeners, available on a rota basis (2 at a time), could be approached by any pupil at both interval and lunchtime. A board with photographs and an availability schedule was posted outside the guidance base where they were situated. There was a good gender balance.
- It was likely that the system would move to having 2 based in the room and 2 out and about at lunchtimes supporting younger pupils, looking out for children on their own etc. This would complement the existing buddy system.
- Pupils were made aware of this at assembly and in PSE classes. It was agreed that it would also be worth ensuring that parents were aware of the system so they could encourage their children to seek out support at school should they ever need it.
- Further enhancements would continue to be sought.

2.2 **Wellbeing Award**

Gerrie Urquhart (English Dept.) was leading the school's work towards achieving the Wellbeing Award for Schools. The following key points were noted:

- The award focused on changing the long-term culture of the school with the aim of ensuring that mental health and wellbeing sat at the heart of school life, responding to the needs of pupils.
- Questionnaires had been issued to parents, pupils and staff in order to allow the school to gather information.
- The aim was to complete the process by June 2020 with awareness raising across the whole school community. Gerrie was liaising with all relevant school working groups.
- An independent observer from Ofsted had visited the school.

2.3 **Focus Topics for Future Meetings**

Consideration was given to focus topics for future meetings. It was suggested that parents might be interested in a session on how parents could work/communicate with the school on issues their children were facing at home and/or at school that were impacting on them. Issues around who to contact and how to interact with secondary school would be of particular benefit to parents with younger pupils; the transition from primary to secondary was often confusing. Members were encouraged to contact the Chair with any further suggestions so that a list of topics could be collated.

ALL

3. **MINUTE OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2019 were approved. There were no matters arising from the meeting not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

4. **CHAIR'S REPORT**

SN gave an oral update on the following key issues:-

- **Careers Fair:** thanks were extended to **MH** for her input to the recent Careers Fair. This had been a big success with lots of excellent feedback from parents, pupils, as well as those attending to speak to them.
- **BAPC Membership:** it was noted that there had been more than 16 volunteers (the maximum permitted in the constitution) interested in becoming members of the Parent Council. In future, the appointment process would be followed more rigorously, as part of the AGM. It was reiterated that any parent/carer could attend and contribute to meetings.
- **Cost of the school day (<https://cpag.org.uk/scotland/CoSD>):** The cost of the school day was a huge issue for families living on low incomes. Items that many took for granted were often difficult or impossible to afford e.g. uniforms, trips, school lunches, gym kits, even basics such as pencils and pens. The *Child Poverty Action Group* states that "Missing out on opportunities because of financial barriers and feeling different makes it harder for children and young people to learn, achieve and be happy at school" and "In terms of qualifications, there remains a significant and persistent gap in attainment between children from lower and higher income families." It was important that awareness around these issues was raised.
- **Communication with school:** **SN** had tabled a draft guide for parents on communicating with the school (best point of contact etc.) at the last meeting. Further staffing changes meant there would be some more amendments before this was made widely available.

5. RECTOR'S REPORT

JuW gave an oral update on the following key issues:-

- **Staffing:** several updates were given:
 - o RMPS - Eddie Cameron would start at the beginning of December.
 - o Geography - Emily Niven had been appointed as Mr Mathers temporary replacement and would start in December.
 - o PE - Morgan Davies had started and would be here for the session.
 - o Guidance - Chris Duncan was now in post as Niall Ritchie's replacement.
 - o Depute Head Teacher - Gill Bruce was now in post on a temporary basis as Acting DHT in place of Scott Phimister.
 - o Islay Stewart was now in post to replace both Gill Bruce and Michelle Skellern on a temporary basis.
 - o Business Education had been re-advertised; it was proving difficult to find a suitable candidate.
 - o Maths was now fully staffed. Previous updates to parents had been appreciated.
- **Careers Evening:** This had been a fantastic evening. Feedback had been extremely positive and credit went to Megan Hare and a thank you also to the parent helpers on the night. Pupils helped the exhibitors and this had been gratefully received.
- **Next week:** A number of activities were planned for the following week, including the annual Remembrance Service, an odd sock day to support mental health week, and supporting Children in Need day on Friday; the schools achieve group were taking overall responsibility for this.
- **Greenpower Team:** During the October break, the Greenpower Team, led by Mr Gray (Physics) participated in a race at Silverstone. They did extremely well and this had been acknowledged at the Scottish Parliament as stated below:

- o *Date Lodged: 22/10/2019*

"That the Parliament congratulates the team of five Banchory Academy pupils that took part in an international 90-minute Greenpower race at Silverstone on 17 October 2019; notes that the team's electric car, 50 Shades of Green, was placed 27th out of 100, making Banchory the top school/college team in Scotland and placing the school in top 10% of all Greenpower teams in the UK; acknowledges that participants from around the UK joined competitors from China, Portugal, Poland and Singapore to take part in the event; commends all of the teams on building their cars either from a kit or from scratch, and wishes the Banchory team members well."

- **Gold Crest Award:** Sean Glendinning S5 had been awarded a Gold Crest Award, an outstanding achievement. This involved 70 hours recognised work at a level expected of a S6/First year pupil at University. Vincent Docherty had agreed to hand over certificates to both Sean and the Greenpower Car pupils in the near future.
- **School Uniform:** This continued to be generally very positive. With the change in weather, more pupils were wearing jackets and hoodies to school; they would be asked to remove these within the school building. Blazers could be worn at all times.
- **Building Update:** The building works started in the October holidays. Progress had been slow and due to some issues the starting date was already 7 weeks behind. The new canteen arrangements were working well and the pupils had been fantastic in terms of coping with the temporary arrangements. At the moment, completion was anticipated in term 3.

6. WORKING GROUPS

6.1 Literacy

The group was meeting the following day. An update would be given at the next meeting.

6.2 Numeracy

The group had not met yet. An update would be given at the next meeting.

6.3 Health and Wellbeing

The group had not met yet. An update would be given at the next meeting.

6.4 Careers

No careers talks were planned for this term; recent focus had been on the Careers Fair. It was noted that trades had not been as well represented as they could have been. MH confirmed that she hoped to work with Gill Bruce, Acting DHT, on talks in the future.

MH

7. FINANCE REPORT

A payment of £232.91 would be made to the school towards the Careers Fair (catering and booklets). A payment of £226.22 was owed to **MH** for compostable cups (these could be used by any group). Once those payments had been made the Treasurer would confirm the balance.

JR

8. **ISSUES ARISING FROM PARENT FORUM**

No issues had been raised.

9. **CLUSTER SCHOOLS**

As reported at the previous meeting, **MH** had started regular communication/information sharing with the cluster primary Chairs. A volunteer was being sought to take over this role which would involve: co-ordinating 2 meetings per year; reporting back at PC meetings; and reporting anything of relevance to the cluster schools on the cluster WhatsApp group. **TA** volunteered to take on this role for the remainder of the school year.

**MH to
TA**

10. **FORUMS**

Volunteers were still being sought to (i) monitor and feedback on NPF Scotland activity; (ii) monitor and feedback on Connect communications, and possibly attend the AGM. **LS** volunteered to monitor Connect and report back on anything significant.

LS

11. **TRACKING REPORTS – S4/5/6**

Tracking reports for S4-S6 had been issued recently and there had been some confusion amongst parents about how to interpret these. There was also some question about how helpful they were at this stage in the academic year. Whilst it was acknowledged that timing might be an issue, **JuW** reminded BAPC that the school year actually started in May, when pupils moved into a new academic stage; by September they were already one third of their way through the year. The school had selected what it believed to be one of the best templates available for such reporting and the letter issued with the reports had been done with the best intentions of providing appropriate guidance on how to interpret them.

12. **FUTURE OF THE PTA**

The PTA continued to struggle with membership; a number of members would leave at the end of the school year when their children left the school and, at the moment, there would not be enough members remaining to continue. This was disappointing considering the PTA raised a significant amount of funding, which the school would struggle without. Members were asked to put out calls to any local parents who might be interested in supporting the PTA in future.

ALL

It was also noted that a lot of work went in to organising fund-raising events which were then not supported and had to be cancelled. It was suggested that one big annual event might provide a better focus for raising funds.

Consideration was given to how the PC could help, for example, merging with the PTA which was not uncommon practice. It was agreed that **MH** and the PTA Chair would meet with **JuW** to discuss the situation further. Any suggestions from members should be forwarded to **SN**.

**MH/
JuW**

ALL

13. **SOUL ACADEMY**

MH confirmed that she would not be in a position to organise this event again this year.

14. **AOB**

- **Duke of Edinburgh: CM** wished to thank the school for its support; office staff had been a great help. There had been a 75% completion rate and it was confirmed that **JuW** would hand out the certificates; both **CM** and **SN** would be invited to attend to recognise the pupils' achievement.
- **Activities Week:** there was discussion about Activities Week, in particular what it was for and whether more affordable alternatives might be offered; there was a real concern about cost and how this affected pupil participation.

JuW indicated a strong desire to retain this week, acknowledging that some schools had stopped doing it and regretted doing so. The school relied on staff to volunteer to run activities and tried very hard to make it fair and available to all pupils; a number of activities were free. An effort was made to accommodate every pupil on an overnight trip at least once. The activities offered a huge opportunity and experience for pupils, for example, team building, and spending time with staff in places they might not otherwise go to. It was confirmed that, although some funding was available for more costly activities, this could not be confirmed until after a deposit had been paid.

JuW

15. **DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

30 January 2020
12 March 2020
04 June 2020

16. **CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS**

There were no confidential items to discuss.