Banchory Academy
Parent Council Office Bearer & Rector Meeting
Thursday 4th June 2020
Microsoft Teams

Present): Scott Newey (Chair), Jeanne Ritchie (Treasurer), Alison Smart (Secretary), Linda Stromberg (Vice Chair) and Judith Wight (Rector).

1. **WELCOME**

   It was agreed that, rather than hold a formal meeting of the Parent Council, the Office Bearers would meet with the Rector to discuss the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schooling. The aim was primarily to offer support to the school and also to provide some anecdotal feedback from parents on pupil experiences of home schooling to date.

2. **UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR**

   SN had been invited to a meeting of PC Chairs with Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Children's' Services. He would feedback to **JuW**, the PC and wider parent forum as appropriate.

   SN

3. **RECTOR'S REPORT**

   - There were a small number of staffing changes (Technical and PE).
   - Prize-giving would go ahead in a simplified format with book tokens for subject awards for senior school pupils only (S4-S6). Letters would be issued and a list of prize-winners would be published. School Dux would also be awarded.
   - Groups of children had been seen congregating on school grounds with no social distancing. It was not clear what, if anything the school/PC could do about this but it was frustrating given the lengths that staff were going to in order to prepare for a return to campus with all required social distancing in place.
   - Office staff were currently working on issuing activities week refunds where applicable.

4. **ISSUES ARISING FROM PARENT FORUM**

   Anecdotal feedback had been gathered informally and circulated prior to the meeting (refer Appendix A). Discussions in the meeting are summarised in blue text in that document for ease of reference. It was stressed that the PC was keen to support the school, pupils, PF, and staff in any way it could.

5. **SQA AWARDS AND RESULTS**

   There were some concerns around SQA awards and results e.g. how will results day be managed? It was confirmed that results would be issued as usual on 4th August. A member of staff would be in school on that day to help answer any queries. SQA would make the final decisions about the grades awarded. In terms of 'appeals', it would be up to the school to decide whether or not an appeal was submitted. This would have to be based on evidence and it was unlikely that any additional evidence would be available, given that all available evidence had already been used by the school when submitting predicted grades to SQA in the first place. This was in addition to the professional judgement of staff of the award the pupil would have likely gained from that time to the exams had they sat the examination. There would be potential for a grade to go down if the evidence submitted was not considered sufficient.

6. **RE-OPENING SCHOOL**

At this stage, it was not possible to confirm how much time pupils would spend in school when they returned in August, this was something the school was still trying to plan. In addition to transport issues (refer item 4), work was underway to review classroom occupancy levels etc. Many different scenarios were being considered at regular transition meetings. The school was under pressure to confirm these arrangements prior to the summer break; it was a huge amount of work.

7. **P7 TRANSITION**

Anecdotal feedback had been gathered and circulated prior to the meeting. Key concerns that current P7 pupils had included: finding their way around school; school transport; understanding how the school day would be organised.

These were all issues that the school was well aware of. A substantial amount of work had been undertaken to start inducting the new first year. All pupils were now on MS Teams and each department had been posting information, with teacher introductions etc. A film of the school as well as an interactive map had been provided. A presentation for new parents had also been produced. It had been agreed, following advice from educational psychology, that there was no benefit in bringing new S1 pupils into an empty school, this would be unproductive and possibly daunting. However, some of the most vulnerable may be brought in to help alleviate anxieties where this was considered appropriate.

Link week would go ahead w/c 15 June with online tasks being set by departments. Pupils were also being encouraged to visit the school to walk around the grounds with maps, to find entrances etc.

8. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

TBC

BAPC: Anecdotal Feedback from Parent Forum (summary of discussions in blue)

Thanks to the school

- Parents are very appreciative of all the work being undertaken by the school, particularly as staff have had enormous challenges to deal with, including estimating grades whilst learning to teach online.
- Guidance teachers have been seen to check up on pupils by individual email. Parents would be made aware of this (if appropriate) and pupils reminded to engage with their guidance groups.
- Many parents are impressed with how the teachers have adapted to teaching online and the effort they put into it. Some have been cited as 'going the extra mile'.

Contact and Communication

- Can the objectives and expectations of home learning be clearly communicated to parents and pupils? Some teachers have responded quicker than others in terms of missed deadlines. Others simply encouraged pupils to do what they could.
- More online contact and interaction, both with teachers and classmates, was cited as desirable by many parents. For example, daily registration, online classes to bring everyone together, increase motivation, reduce feelings of isolation and to 'meet' new teachers.
- Many children are reluctant to engage with their teachers on Teams, mainly due to feeling self-conscious about their peers seeing their comments. In some cases pupils chose not to do work rather than have to post to the chat stream to ask a question or seek clarification.
- Can all pupils email all their teachers directly? Many do provide email addresses but some parents felt email contact was discouraged. All teachers have glow email accounts which pupils can use to contact them; parents and pupils would be reminded of this.
- Communications from Mrs Wight to pupils, keeping them up-to-date with what's happening have been appreciated. A weekly assembly on Teams was suggested.
- Parents are not sure how to raise a question with the school or contact teachers. Parents can contact the school via the school email address: banchory.aca@aberdeenshire.gov.uk. Parents are not encouraged to post within classes on MS Teams.
- Some families felt there was a bit of a vacuum between the school closing and the start of the work for the new school year.
- Pupils would love to have their timetables for the new school year as soon as possible. Timetables are not required at the moment as lessons are being delivered in a different format. On return to school, the school day would be delivered in a very different way as it was very unlikely all pupils would be on campus at once and pupils will be issued with their COVID timetable at that point.

Work issued to Pupils

- A variety of feedback about volume of work – some parents perceived a lack of work in certain subjects and felt their children should be more fully occupied. Others felt workload seemed appropriate and a number believed too much work is being set in some subjects/year groups. It is not possible to state exactly how much work each pupil will have on any given day. Teachers are working under a variety of home-working conditions and it is not always possible to ensure that work is issued in a consistent way (for example, on the same day each week). However, the staff body was reviewing the management of this and enhancements were being made all the time as everyone became more familiar with the Microsoft Teams platform. Equity across faculties was desirable.
- Consistency across subjects in the way assignments and additional guidance is published is desirable e.g. some teachers post under 'Assignments', some under 'Files'.
- The use of separate channels for pupils to post under is helpful to avoid clutter under the main 'Posts' area.
- There is some evidence that improvements have been seen since pupils transitioned to the new school year, for example, there is evidence of increased contact and more consistency in posting on Teams.
- Videos with teachers in them have been greatly appreciated. Are there restrictions around live video teaching?
- Some comments on types of work, for example why are they drawing pictures/posters which is time consuming and more structured learning would be more efficient.
- Is there provision for young people with additional support needs while learning at home? For example, suitability of screen-based communication and learning for those with ASN and/or reading impairments. Dyslexia sufferers often find it difficult to assimilate information from screens and MS Teams and 'chat' style communications can be particularly difficult. It was recognised that MS Teams

was very difficult for those with dyslexia etc. The school was looking at ways to support pupils with different needs in the new online environment. ASL staff were working on a 1-1 basis with many pupils.

Feedback on Assignments

- More feedback (quantity and quality) on the assignments submitted has been requested by several parents.
- Some parents indicated that the work that is being handed in is coming back with feedback really quickly.
- One parent indicated there seemed to be no come back for work being done/not done and next to no feedback when the work was handed in. The school is actively engaging with families with pupils who are not engaging in schoolwork (where appropriate)
- Maths post more assignments than many other subjects, often with very short deadlines (e.g. same or next day) and if not met pupils have to mark their own work. Most classes give longer to complete work; it is not always possible to operate a normal timetable from home.

Technology

- Is there any support for families who do not have access to internet and/or devices for accessing online learning? The school is aware of families with pupils who do not have access to devices at home and IT equipment had been provided in some cases. It was a priority in the local authority to ensure that everyone had some form of IT i.e. laptop/iPad. Further down the line, a 'bring your own device' to school was not seen as desirable given the issues of inequality that this would raise, as well as issues relating to wi-fi and network access. There was an awareness that not all pupils would return in August and the school would have to continue to support them working at home.
- This term there seems to be a move towards using MS OneNote and some parents and pupils would like to know more and/or have some training as it was not entirely intuitive to use. The science faculty was moving more towards using One Note. This would be looked into.
- Where do all the files and student work get stored? Will they and all the links (to YouTube etc) be available in the future? This would be looked into.
- There are some issues around having multiple OneDrive accounts on the same computer.

Senior School

- There are concerns about the ability of pupils moving into exam years and their ability to cope/keep up under the new arrangements (the details of which have yet to be confirmed).
- Concerns that blended learning will not work for higher pupils given the faster pace of the higher courses. Those who are motivated might be okay, but the majority might not cope.
- Many parents with children in senior school were aware other schools had started next year's work early i.e. on the first day after the Easter holidays. BA had started the new school year earlier than normal. There was still a great deal of uncertainty about what the next year's SQA courses would consist of. Until this was clarified by the SQA it was very difficult for teachers to plan their teaching. The method of assessment in the following year was also unknown. It was therefore stressed that it was very important for all senior school pupils to complete all work issued at this stage in case it had to count as evidence of achievement in the future. There was a strong desire for teaching to be of value and the school was satisfied that pupils had not been disadvantaged in any way.

Transport

- How will bus transport work in practice with blended learning? Appreciate school may not know this yet. This was a big issue for the school given that the contract bus companies had confirmed that a 53-seater bus would only be able to seat 13 pupils. The school would therefore be reviewing, as a matter of urgency, how many pupils required school transport from August. It was possible that some parents might prefer or be able/willing to drive pupils to school.