

BANCHORY ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minute of the Meeting held on 28 January 2021: Virtual Meeting via MS Teams

Present (members): Trish Amundrud, Jacqueline Conroy, Ruth Duddy, Vikki Duncan, Kate Ellison, Rebecca Glansbeek, Megan Hare, Scott Newey (Chair), Jeanne Ritchie (Treasurer), Alison Smart (Secretary) and Linda Stromberg (Vice-Chair).

In attendance: Catriona Beverley, Claire Hesketh, Moira Langmuir, Sharon McCann, Emma Ritchie (School Captain), Cllr Anne Ross and Judith Wight (Rector).

Apologies: Cllr Rosemary Bruce, Cllr Eileen Durno, Andrea Hale and Colin MacLeod.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair (**SN**) welcomed everyone to the third formal meeting of 2020/21.

2. MINUTE OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020 were approved.

3. CHAIR'S REPORT

SN reported lots of positive feedback from parents expressing their appreciation for everything the school was doing, recognising that these were extraordinary times, and online learning was not a situation that anyone wanted to be in.

4. RECTOR'S REPORT

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

- **Staffing:**

- o Drama: Grahame Whyte had been appointed to a permanent full-time post replacing Fern Lindsay. Thanks had been extended to Don Crabb who had supported the Drama department in the interim period.
- o Chemistry: Bruce Duncan retired at Christmas and was being replaced by Katie Rudge who would join next week.

- **Pupil achievements:**

- o Congratulations to Neil Simpson who was nominated for Young Sports Personality of the Year. Although he was not the eventual winner the school was incredibly proud of this achievement.
- o Two S6 pupils, Ellie Littlejohn and Rafal Wilowski, entered an essay competition as part of the Techfest STEM in the Pipeline project. They researched a topic of their choice which related to sustainability in the energy industry, interviewed an industry professional and produced an essay, learning Harvard academic referencing along the way. Rafal was awarded second place in the competition.
- o The school newspaper had just been published and was yet again fantastic. Well done to Rhone Bowie the school's editor and everyone involved.

- **Pupil survey:** The school recently carried out a survey to check how all pupils were coping with lockdown and online learning. The results would be analysed and appropriate enhancements made if required.

- **Digital learning:** The school continued to support digital learning and had provided families who needed it with IT equipment to allow this to happen. Thanks went to No 1 café for supporting the school to provide our young people with the resources they might require at the moment.

5. **WORKING GROUPS**

The working groups had not managed to meet yet.

6. **FINANCE REPORT**

JR reported that the annual funds from the Council had been received (£499.65) leaving a closing balance of £1767.52. Thanks were received from **ER** in respect of the monies for the trophies that had been procured for *Movember*.

7. **ONLINE LEARNING DURING LOCKDOWN**

The online school day had once again been implemented. It was noted that some other Parent Councils had shown an interest in the approach taken by Banchory this time round, which was to follow the timetable, with pupils required to 'register' at the beginning of each period. It was however believed that there was some misunderstanding about the actual running of the timetable. It was important to realise that pupils were not always sitting at screens all day and teachers were not teaching face-to-face for entire periods.

Some issues had been raised by parents about a long school day in front of a screen; having to catch up with work outwith school hours, and connectivity issues. All had an impact on pupil wellbeing.

JuW reminded members that the first time around, the school had had 48 hours to get online. This had been a huge learning curve for staff with many pupils and staff facing connectivity and IT resource issues. This time around, staff had just gone on holiday when the decision was taken by the Government to return to online learning from January. It had been a brave decision to try to run the timetable but one that had the support of staff.

The desire was to avoid pupils sitting at screens all day by providing pieces of work that would last 20-30 minutes with no requirement to work beyond the end of the school day at 1525. However, the school was still learning as it went, and many staff were balancing home schooling their own children and often working very late as a result.

The use of a consolidation period/lesson was being considered, where staff would decide how to manage this time. It could be used by pupils to check-in and catch up with work they had not managed to complete. It might be used by staff to undertake marking and feedback, in recognition of feedback from parents.

It was important that each family did what was right for them. If pupils needed time out they should have it, but should alert teachers first. Overall, pupil attendance was very high, way above the last lockdown period.

8. **ASSESSMENT FOR SQA EXAMS, INCLUDING PRELIMS**

A message had gone out to parents earlier that day explaining the proposed plans for the delivery of the SQA national assessments. SQA would be issuing end of year assessments and schools would have some flexibility in terms of how they used these. Concerns were raised about the confidentiality of these papers if they were delivered at different times by different schools across Scotland.

The deadline for schools to submit predicted grades would now be 18th June 2021. This was a huge help, giving the school an extended period in which to get through all the required teaching content leading to a strong position overall in terms of these assessments. However, this would result in an impact on the change over to the timetable for the next school year and the school would await guidance from the local authority in that respect.

There was further discussion around the plans, if any, for prelim assessments in relation to social distancing restrictions, and the plans for running assessments for senior stage pupils, with a desire to avoid any sense of continuous assessment. Further advice from the Scottish Government was required before proper planning could take place. The school was very fortunate in that there had been no cases of Covid-19 therefore there had not been many cases of young people being required to self-isolate.

9. **SUBJECT CHOICES / PARENTS EVENINGS / REPORTS**

There were many reasons why Parents Evenings had not gone ahead for all years, including the fact that these could not be conducted by staff from home. If it was possible to look at this on return to the school, priority would be given to S4 (S5 and S6 parents evening had gone ahead). Many other schools had not delivered any parents evenings.

In terms of subject choices, a Careers Adviser was available to talk to pupils who needed advice. It would be possible to make changes to subject choices if they made the wrong choice. Information on choices would be made available to all parents and there would be conversations with pupils in PSE.

For those applying to University, it would be up to them to contact institutions to ask what they were looking for. **CB** provided some useful links in this respect:

www.discoveruni.gov.uk
www.prospects.ac.uk

10. **FEEDBACK FROM RECENT CONNECT, ABERDEENSHIRE PARENT SESSIONS**

AS provided feedback from an online Connect Session on *Parental Engagement* held on 8 December 2020. A presentation by Dr Janet Goodall, Associate Professor at Swansea University, highlighted the following research outcomes:

- The way that learning was treated in the home by parents was much more important than parents' income, education or occupation. Simply nurturing the desire to learn was key.
- Effective parental engagement with children was likely to be much more subtle by secondary school, but still had a significant influence – despite what teenagers might say to the contrary.
- The things that were of most benefit to secondary school children included:

- Showing an interest: 1-1 time spent talking about learning was much more important at this stage than in primary school.
- Concentrating on learning for its own sake i.e. not just the exam result.
- Supporting children's self-confidence and their belief in their ability to learn.
- Asking them how their day went – when asked, many teenagers admitted they would often give a limited answer (if anything!) but still wanted to be asked. A useful question was 'tell me something you learned today'.
- It was suggested that moving the focus from 'schooling' to 'learning' was helpful.
- It was important for parents, particularly during the pandemic, to realise that they did not need to have the answers to everything. Rather, they needed to care that the answers were found. It was not helpful to try to recreate the classroom at home. It was also important for children to feel that they would be able to make up what they had missed. Wellbeing was more important than anything else.
- When parents and schools worked together, children did better.
- Parent Councils could lead the way in terms of: putting across the above messages to parents; encouraging more parents to engage with school; holding meetings in places where families felt comfortable (e.g. leisure centres).

11. **PARENT COUNCIL CONSTITUTION REVIEW INCLUDING PTA MERGER**

The review of the Constitution was still in progress with particular consideration being given to the potential merger of the PTA with PC, and all the implications that brought, including transfer of PTA funds, OSCR status, insurance etc. It was proving very time consuming for those involved and extensive advice had been sought from various external parties, including OSCR, Connect and the Council. A progress update would come back to the next meeting.

**Holding
File**

12. **PC COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

There was a desire to establish better communication links within Parent Council as well as across the wider Parent Forum. Various platforms were suggested, including WhatsApp, Facebook and Slack. The latter had been used by the PTA, and was free and easy to use. It had the benefit of being able to use different channels for different subjects. It might be possible to use different channels for different audiences, for example, members only, members plus other attendees, wider parent forum etc.

Any suggestions in respect of the above would be welcome for discussion at the next meeting.

ALL

13. **LIAISON WITH FEEDER PRIMARIES**

TA and **MH** had made a start on making contact with the feeder primaries. **CH** offered to take on this liaison and a handover would be arranged.

TA to CH

14. **ISSUES ARISING FROM THE PARENT FORUM NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE**

No issues had been raised in advance of the meeting.

15. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

- 3 June 2021

A number of items remained on hold for fuller discussion at a future meeting:

- Focus topics/sessions – CFE Machine presentation will be the next topic, any other suggestions can be submitted to chair.bapc@gmail.com
- Information evenings – suggestions for an event in 2021 would be gratefully received at chair.bapc@gmail.com
- Cost of the School Day

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