

Banchory Academy Parent Council Meeting

19 January 2023, 6:30 pm

Attendees: Gil Bruce, Sofi Izatts, Trish Amundrud, Rebecca Glansbeek, Lizzie Bird, Julia Fleming, Sarah Little, Marion Fyfe, Ruth Hutchinson, Scott Newey, Louise Considine, Fiona Melville

Online Attendees: Anne Corbin

Apologies: Alison Smart, Sophie Logue, Judith Wight, Lynne Street, Kelly Noble

Agenda

A. Standing Items

1. Welcome and Introductions, including apologies
2. Minutes of last meeting held on 10 November 2022 - approval and matters arising (attached)
3. Chair's report
4. Talk from Librarian
 - a. Potential for book donations? Support from Parent Council
5. Rector's report
6. Update on Working Groups
7. BAPC updates e.g. Constitution, Financial

B. Additional Agenda Items

8. Curricular Change – looking ahead G Bruce DHT curriculum
9. Information Evening
10. Safe driving sessions – any potential for the school to support?
11. Issues Arising from Parent Forum
 - a. Strike on 30th January and impact on exams
 - b. Questions re S4 subject choice (we note there is now a meeting set up for the 17th January by the school).
 - c. Question from parent forum re misogyny and recent news coverage
12. AOB
13. Date for next meeting

Meeting Minutes:

1. Welcome (see above)
2. Minutes of September and November meeting – approved.
3. Chair's report
 - a. Thank you to the school for Christmas concert.

4. Librarian Talk

- Library had reopened in new location just as Covid closure started and needed restart.
- Have had a huge increase in kids using the library (for break and lunchtime safe spaces and for reliable information).
- Goal is to have books for everyone.
- Tour provided to parent council; highlights included:
 - Fiction and non-fiction books 8900+ books in the library, 3000 have been taken out recently
 - Stationery supplies are available (for minimal cost i.e., pencils are 10).
 - Clubs including board games, chess, and coding
 - Senior area includes Study Guides and University Prospectus
 - Issues Magazine available including digital access
 - Audio books also available via Aberdeenshire council library
 - Digital World Encyclopedia
 - Digital bookshelf is available and the students know where to get help.
 - Q re accessing books, students can also access books and resources via Aberdeenshire library network or access Aberdeen university library.
- Books are regularly reviewed to ensure they are in date, books that are no longer needed are passed to charity.
- School very happy to have donations and can pass them on to the public library if they don't need them (limited to reasonable numbers at a time due to space limitations). Due to limitations of space and staff, a book drive would not be helpful.
- Q re books for dyslexia – yes, the library has suitable books and have access to order in other books. Focus on bringing in books that are age suitable for readers and appeal to their interests (i.e. Barrington-Stoke publishers).
- Libby- the library app – allows the students to download audio books and e-books. Students can ask Mrs Bird for a PIN to use the app.
- Press Reader provides digital access to many newspapers – it was noted this can be accessed via Aberdeenshire public library for parents as well.
- Parent attendees have noted that the library has been a sanctuary for their S1 students and for students in other years.
- Q re returning books that are overdue – please just return them.
- Parent Council would like to note how appreciated and excellent the library and Mrs. Bird is to the school council.

Study books exchange

- Used to be run via parent council, now school would love to have them donated to the school.
- **Action: PC to inform parents that the school would appreciate donations.**

Parent Council Funding and Library Donation

- We have £1852 in our account, some of this is surplus, and it has been suggested we support the school by donation. The money would be used to support initiatives like:

- Community reading project, train the S3 to go to care homes and nurseries to read to the community.
- Author visits where costs range from £75 to 250 (depending on additional funding that is applied for in other grants). For example: Tom Foster is coming to talk to students about visual storytelling (graphic comics), will be advertised through the library and target some classes.
- School has a small budget already towards this.
- Parents have expressed that money donated should benefit the whole school and note that a library donation would meet this.
- Stationery was previously provided for students in need, provided by parent council, and kept at reception. Mrs Bruce noted that teachers have supplies to 'lend' students pencils when needed now.

Action: Parent council agreed (unanimous, no concerns) to donate £500 to the school library.

5. Rector's report

a. Staffing

- Mrs Fiona Shanks Acting DHT has started with us this week in the role of Acting DHT, she will be with us at Banchory Academy for the next 23 months
- Mrs Debbie Bradey has joined the HE Department
- Mrs Nicola Murray (Physics) has started her Maternity Leave. We are currently advertising her post.

b. HE - The HE Department has been upgraded and is now fully functioning. The pupils are now back using it for their practical subjects.

c. Christmas Concert - This took place the last week of term and was well attended. The feedback from it has been really positive. It was great to be back at the East Church showcasing the many talents and achievements of our pupils.

d. Christmas Services - All year groups attended our Christmas Services in the Learning Plaza over two days. The services involved musical pieces, readings and the Christmas Address from our school chaplains.

e. S4 exams - Due to the potential of industrial action on the 30th January, the decision has been made to move the exams on this day to another date, this has been issued to both pupils and their parents. As with previous industrial action days, the school will require to close to all pupils resulting in us not being able to run exams on that day. This decision is made by the local authority and not the school itself. To allow pupils to plan for their studying, this decision will stand should the industrial action be called off.

- Parents have noted thanks that this decision to reschedule the exams in advance is appreciated

- Parents fed back that it is not clear if the students in S4-6 who are not in exams on the 6th of February should be in school; i.e., If they have an exam on the 7th, should they return on the 6th? **Action: School will send a clarification letter to parents.**
- f. Health and Safety – The School noted they are starting again to have issues with parents coming into the school car park to pick up their child at the end of the school day. Buses are unable to enter the school grounds safely and traffic also is backing up on Raemoir Road. Parents are therefore asked to not use this car park for pick ups. **Action: Parent Council will also post this on facebook as a reminder and ask parents to make arrangements to pick up students from a nearby street.**
 - g. Banchory Academy Young Musician - This is being held at Woodend Barn on Thursday 2nd March at 7.30pm
6. Update on Working Groups
 - a. Parent Council nominated three parent volunteers and would request an update. Was noted that this is a challenge for parents due to many parents working (volunteers work part time).
 - b. School working groups will be meeting soon, Mrs Bruce noted that it may be that notice is just coming.
 - c. Sarah Little has volunteered to join working groups as well. Action: Parent Council to obtain email and pass to school.
 - d. Action: School follows up and ensure that the link between the working groups and the parent volunteers is made.
 7. Updates on Constitution and Finances
 - a. Constitution updates to be worked on and minor points may be amended at the next AGM. Not felt to be urgent.
 - b. Financial - £1852.55. (Note donation of £500 to school library to come).
 8. Curriculum Change (Presentation by Gill Bruce): **Action: School to review these notes and ensure they represent the material presented.**
 - a. Since 2018 have had a working group looking at curricular structure. Up to 2014 Banchory Academy previously had offered up to 8 courses in S4 but were encouraged to align with neighbouring schools and offer 6 courses. In 2018, due to concerns this made it difficult for some young people to choose courses through S4/S5/S6, the school set up a working group to look at options.
 - b. Proposal is to change the school structure to allow for more choice in S4. This will require a revision to the school timetable to allow for a more efficient school day.
 - c. This is also happening against the background of the SQA revamp (for 2025/2026). School expects that Highers will remain the gold standard but Teachers are not fully aware what will come out of this. One expected consequence is a planned increase in non-contact time to allow staff to prepare and mark. School noted there is a risk that the Scottish Government's revision to the education qualification system may introduce a change the school need to respond to.

- d. Banchory would like to maintain the strengths, What is currently done well:
- S1-3 is felt to be a good, strong, broad general education.
 - Weekly contact with guidance (PSE)
 - 2 hours PE per week to age 16
 - RMPS 1 hour per week.
 - Good attainment in senior phase
 - Schedule now includes double periods and blocking of time for foundation apprenticeships.
 - Positive destination is high compared to peers across authority. School has responsibility to track and assist students for two years after leaving the Academy.
- e. Banchory would like to improve:
- Interdisciplinary learning
 - Increased DYW skills (Development of the Young Workforce)
 - Efficiency in the timetable to ensure time is best used.
 - Increased time in S4 for Maths and English. Currently students have 5 periods in S3 and 3 periods in S4, but this is felt to be detrimental for some students as they develop at different times and need more time than provided in S4 with the material. Currently the school addresses this by starting the National 5 or National 4 curriculum in February for S3 students.
 - Number of courses available to students in S4
 - Pathways for 16+
- f. Motivations: Cannot do what they want on the current 30 period week (of 55 minutes), need:
- increased time for English and Maths in S4,
 - 7 courses in S4.
 - Skills/IDL/LfS in S1-3
 - More time for options in S3 (currently students only get two periods a week for their optional choices).
- g. This necessitates the change in the length of the school day. After extensive consultation with other schools who have various school days, the school has identified an asymmetric school day pattern. School staff will be impacted by any changes but have voted and are in favour of the change.
- Proposal is an asymmetric week, 32 - 50 minute periods.
 - School will be a longer day M/W (7 periods)
 - School will be a slightly shorter day T/Th/Fr (6 periods).
 - Maintains face to face teaching time and allows the increase in number of courses. Inverurie and Alford have this already.
 - Maintain consistent lunch and break times (to support clubs and activities).
 - Note that this will require staff to adjust their teaching plans and as such the year is required for planning (ie S3 classes will go to three classes a week).
- h. Timescale of implementation: To start 2024/2025.
- Bus contracts will need to be negotiated. May be issues to resolve as some companies do primary and secondary contract.

- Communication to wider parent body likely to be February to allow the current S2 year group to keep this in consideration for choosing their S3 courses. School feels it is important to give the bus companies notice of their proposed changes immediately before this (learnings from Alford Academy).
- i. Impact on various year groups:
- Impact on S5/6s – to look at how some of the enrichment activities could be certificated or other value activities, S5/6 highers to remain at five periods a week.
 - Impact is for the current S2s who when they reach S4 in autumn 2024 will take 7 subjects rather than 6.
- j. Feedback and Questions:
- Q how does this compare with other schools across Scotland? Majority of Aberdeenshire offer 6, private schools tend to offer 7 or 8.
 - Parent feedback is that this is mostly welcomed change. Was noted that there will be some students who are not keen to have this wider choice but acknowledge that there will always be change that is more suited to some pupils than others.
 - Q re increased workload to S4s, taking an additional course. Yes, will be an increase. Parent Council highlighted that for students that might be struggling, they will need reassurance that there will be a solution suitable for them (not all academic courses, will be skills for work courses). School emphasised that not all students would be taking seven Nat 5s and this will also allow students to have more diverse types of courses.
 - Q do employers and universities want this? Yes, they want a diverse skill set and education.
 - Q how will wider parent form be consulted. And how can the parent council both support the school and the parents. Likely letter from the rector will be sent out, bus companies will be given notice as well.
 - Q re will ending early three days a week offer more time for extra curricular clubs? Staff may want to offer this but this is not a staff requirement.
 - Q will there be additional staff requirements? No, as this schedule is more efficient for staff timing.

Action: for parent council to provide any further feedback to the school.

9. Information Evening

- 16 March Drug and Alcohol evening for parents. Talks from Police Community Officer, School Guidance Representative.
- Committee is talking to other potential speakers but are looking for further options to be approached. Suggestion to ask Jean Henretty again for names.
- Parents are aware that students know of local incident where a 16 year old died and asked if school was aware, yes, School has addressed this.

10. Safe driving sessions – Parent Council asking if there is potential for the school to support:

- Car safety viewed as very important by parent council.

- Question for school on what can be done. School use to be invited to safe drive stay alive and had local police and fire and ambulance in to speak to the S4s. **Action for school to follow up with Guidance team and see what might be on offer.**
- **Action for parent council (Sofi) to follow up with Police Community Officer.**

11. Issues Arising from Parent Forum

- Strike on 30th January and impact on exams (see Rector's Report, resulting action).
- Questions re S4 subject choice for this year (we note there was a meeting set up for the 17th February by the school after these questions came to us). School noted that when these events were run pre Covid they had much lower numbers. Recognise that there is more appetite for these events now and will provide them.
- Question from parent forum re misogyny and recent news coverage. Has the school addressed this? School confirmed this was addressed with all staff in August, including training on how to redirect the conversation. Guidance also addressed with S3-S5 classes.
- Police community officer has offered a social media evening as well.

12. AOB

- Uniform Exchange – will review when exchanges have been most successful. Primaries are running separate exchanges.

13. Date for next meeting 16 March information meeting.

14. Next Parent Council Meeting 18 May.

- Was noted by parents that we may need another meeting earlier to discuss the changes to the school day and response from parents earlier than May. To be called if required.
- Was noted that any information provided by the school in response to parent questions (FAQs) could be disseminated by parent council if questions come to us.