

James Gillespie's High School

Parent Council Meeting

Tuesday 21st January 2020

Draft minutes

Present:

Donald Macdonald – DM (HT), Cath Downie – CD (Acting Chair),
Laura Stewart – LS (Acting DHT), Elaine Oram – EO (Development
Officer), Ian Porter – IP (DHT), Anna Hamilton - AH (Communications),
Ros Ingle – RI (Treasurer), Graeme Davis, Laura Young, Sarah Scott,
Shelagh Shields, Suzanne Mackenzie, Nicola Currie, Tanya Potter,
Lisa Sutherland, Jason King, Jacqueline Kinghan, Alastair Philp,
Anna Christal – AC (Secretary)

Apologies:

Ailsa Macintosh, Charles Warlow, Karen Burke, Gail Edwards,
Christine Rednall, Ruth Tiplady

1. Welcome and minutes of last meeting (26th November 2019)

CD welcomed everyone.

The minutes of the last meeting on 26th November 2019 were approved.

1.1 (1.1) Production of JGHS Parent Council banners

Ongoing.

1.2 (1.3) Update on ParentPay funds collected on behalf of the Parent Council.

Completed. RI noted that these sums were included in funding allocated through the small sums fund.

1.3 (3) Arrangement to have the Small Sums Fund Allocation earlier in the school year

Completed.

1.4 (3) RI to meet with Ann Henderson (JGHS Trust) to look at ways to align funds and in future possibly be able to fund all Small Sums Allocation Requests.

Ongoing. Planned meeting had to be rescheduled.

2. Pupil Equity Initiative and Rising Rolls. (Laura Stewart - LS (Acting DHT) and Elaine Oram – EO (Development Officer))

2.1 Presentation

See attached presentation.

LS outlined the current staffing for the JGHS Pupil Equity Initiative.

EO then described the work of the JGHS Pupil Equity Initiative using Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) from the Scottish Government.

This funding is allocated to 35 students at JGHS.

EO has held individual meetings with students to identify specific needs.

LS described the current work on rising rolls.

2.2 Questions

A parent asked about costs of some school trips, noting that some may be prohibitively expensive for some families. DM noted that the school are committed to offering a variety of trips, with financial support available where required. For example, 3 fully funded places were provided on the South Africa this year.

EO noted that in the alternative timetable, PEF supported pupils had a free choice of options and all selections were funded.

A parent asked if there are likely to be some 'hidden' pupils in financial need? DM acknowledged this possibility, but noted that good relationships with Pupil Support Leader minimise this likelihood.

A parent asked about the effect of rising rolls on trips. LS noted that equitable decisions have to be made by Senior Leadership Team to look at which pupils are selected for trips if numbers are limited. There may also be options to offer several trips or restrict a trip to a specific year group.

DM noted that the S3 history trip was oversubscribed this year. Places were allocated on a first come, first served basis. In the future, a deadline will be set for applications, then places will be allocated to ensure equitable decision making about places.

LS noted that getting notes of interest in trips gives a useful early indication of numbers.

In relation to the pupils identified for PEF, a parent noted that the criteria for eligibility are primitive in relying on take-up of free school meals. EO noted that schools can use professional judgement and that this relies on close links with pupil support leaders and support for learning staff.

A parent noted that the initiative links with pupils, but asked if there was support for parents or communication with parents to increase awareness of this equity work.

LS noted that the group are trialling lots of pilot schemes this year. They plan to analyse these schemes and fund those with maximum impact in the future. There was potential for the new school app to improve communication with parents about PEF initiatives.

A parent asked if follow up interviews with pupils were planned to identify impact of interventions this year?

EO noted that the focus on a small number of pupils allows development of close relationships and she plans to get feedback from the pupils at the end of this school year.

A parent asked about whether the approach for assessing wellbeing and happiness across school could be shared across the school. LS noted that she plans to share experience with pupil support leaders involved in teaching PSE.

A parent asked if many ideas have been taken from other schools, ideas that have been shown to work in different settings?

LS and EO noted that PEF teams from schools across Edinburgh meet regularly to share experiences and ideas. LS is also planning a meeting with PEF staff at St Thomas of Aquin's as they receive a similar level of PEF funding, but are using it in a very different way.

LS also noted that Leith Academy staff have colour coded lanyards to identify staff that can offer mental health support. 20 staff at JGHS recently trained in supporting pupil mental health and a similar approach could be adopted.

A parent noted that there were also opportunities for Parent Councils to share information through meetings such as the South East Locality group.

A parent asked how much extra funding is needed to address equity issues? LS noted that it will be clearer to see if there is a shortfall in funding when priorities are identified. DM noted that additional funding may be required to help with pupil mental health issues.

LS noted that the Army has approached JGHS and is keen offer pupils from S3 onwards access to the Army Youth Challenge Course. This is a 2-day residential course focussed on leadership skills, team-building and resilience with activities including first-aid and medical forensics. The course is fully funded, including transport.

LS was keen to get feedback from parents about this opportunity.

A parent noted that school needs to be aware that this represents a potential recruitment opportunity for the army.

A parent queried whether it involves any longer-term commitment or follow up and whether there was any retention of personal data.

Issues of gender equality and whether the course would cater for all needs were also discussed.

DM noted that there would be no school endorsement if details of this trip were shared with pupils and families.

It was generally accepted that if information was shared, it would be an individual pupil and parental decision about uptake.

3. Chair update (Cath Downie)

CD noted that there are currently links to two surveys on the JGHS Parent Council website that may be of interest to parents. These are related to the:

- Edinburgh Children's Partnership
- Edinburgh Poverty Commission
(https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Edinburgh_Poverty_Barometer_2020)

CD reported feedback from Gail Edwards and the fundraising group. The group have approached the school and requested a fundraising target. School staff have fed back a target of £40,000 focussed on mental health initiatives and improving outdoor spaces. The fundraising group are looking to promote this target with a two-year plan. The group plan to work with JGHS Trust to maximise Gift Aid. Two upcoming events were noted:

A quiz will be held on Friday 28 February 2020 in the JGHS Forum hosted by Grant Stott, Fred Macaulay and Richard Melvin. Tickets will be available soon! It will be BYOB.

Action: DM to negotiate later than 21:30 end time

A Sportathon is also planned for this term. A planning meeting will be held on Wednesday 4 February. The group have set up a dedicated email address: jghsfundraisingcommittee@gmail.com.

4. Finance update (Ros Ingle)

RI noted that small sums funding has been allocated. Details are given on the JGHS Parent Council website at:

<http://jghscouncil.btck.co.uk/Minutesandfiles>

The balance of the Parent Council bank account is £1463 with an additional ~£250 from refreshments to be banked.

RI is involved in discussions about linking with the JGHS Trust to allow all small sums applications to be funded. There are lots of discussions about how things will work in the future.

Action: Future allocations of Parent Council funds to be discussed at a Parent Council meeting, following discussions with JGHS Trust Chair.

5. Head teacher's report incl. exam results, league tables and rising rolls (Donald Macdonald)

DM noted that the South Africa Trip leaves on 3 February 2020. This links with 3 schools: 1 primary and 2 high schools. Donations of books and filled pencil cases are welcomed. There is a collection point at reception. IP noted that money raised for the trip is used to fund return visits from South African pupils and staff and there are plans to purchase musical instruments for the partner schools in Durban.

IP reported that the South Africa trip fundraising quiz night at Craigmillar Golf Club was very successful and Ashleigh Kennedy gave a 'History of South Africa' talk tonight for parents and pupils.

DM also noted that Jane Davidson, a parent, has volunteered to help develop a parental network to share community knowledge and experience and extend this to other schools.

DM is also looking to set up a parent focus group to help identify short, medium and long term priorities for JGHS. Other parental views will be included via a questionnaire.

DM encouraged parents to download the new school app. This is simplifying communications. It allows year group specific messaging. Parents should tick only one year group to get only one notification.

A parent noted that there is a need to ensure all parents can access this app if this becomes the main route of communication. Another parent asked if there was a PC version of the app. It was suggested that the Parent Council agenda could be added to the school app. DM confirmed that attachments can be added to app. However a parent noted that there may be issues with printing from the app if signed forms need to be downloaded and returned. It was suggested that there need to be termly reminders to parents about downloading the app, to ensure that all parents, including new parents, are aware of home-school communication methods.

DM noted that the JGHS website has been slimmed down and is now largely up to date. He recognised that there will continue to be work to do, and this will be ongoing.

A parent asked if the annual pupil update forms can be sent out electronically? There are issues in ensuring pupils pass on forms and return them. DM suggested that the school app could be used to notify parents that these forms have been sent out. Current regulations required that these forms have to be printed and paper copies sent home.

DM reported that following parental feedback that it is useful for parents to be able to look at homework and resources, the school will be introducing the 'Show My Homework' app. DM would like to invite a representative from the company to attend a future Parent Council meeting prior to launching this app. The plan is that all teachers will be trained and using this app from 1 June onwards. DM explained that the app includes many resources from other schools and there will be the option to include teaching materials currently shared with pupils through SharePoint. It was also noted that there is the potential to share pupil marks and feedback via the app.

Action: DM to invite representative from 'Show My Homework' to future Parent Council meeting

DM noted that the school is currently fully staffed. School management are planning to advertise for new positions that are roll related for June 2020.

DM acknowledged that condensing the Prelim timetable to two weeks, compared with the actual exam timetable that is scheduled over five weeks, can create problems with some pupils having several exams on the same or consecutive days. There has been some rescheduling required for individual pupils, but this has been minimised to maintain the integrity of the prelims.

A parent noted that common course combinations, e.g. many pupils take several sciences, should be spread out. It had been stressful to have AH Prelims on consecutive days.

A parent queried the need for study leave for Prelims and noted that many schools have pupils in school during Prelims, providing structure and opportunities for help with revision. DM noted that the use of rooms for exams meant that it was impossible to have all pupils in school

during the Prelims, with for example, a large number of rooms used for N5 English.

It was also suggested that it would be easier for pupils and families if Prelims were held before Christmas as it affects the Christmas holiday. DM noted that this would impact on the Christmas concert and would likely require a second prelim to cover more course content. However DM acknowledged these points and said that he would look to get feedback on the current Prelim arrangements.

Action: DM to get feedback on current Prelim arrangements.

DM noted that there was a public meeting at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pairce Primary School on Wednesday 22 January to discuss options for the new Gaelic Secondary School from 2024.

DM commented on press coverage of exam results. He noted that attainment has risen, but the metric has changed leading to reports of falling attainment. DM reassured parents that attainment has risen. Whereas previous tables reported on % of S5 achieving 5 Highers, results are now quoted for % of S4 to S6 achieving 5 Highers on leaving school. Advanced Higher and A Level Art are not included in statistics. DM noted that % of S5 achieving 5 Highers in 2012 was approximately 30%, this had increased to 49% in 2018 and 52% in 2019. DM recognised that good attainment important, but also emphasised the importance of wider achievement.

6. AOCB – environmental education at JGHS; school trip places with rising rolls

In response to a question about climate change, DM noted that the school were discussing carbon offsetting for long haul trips. There are 120 solar panels on roof and the energy sustainability rating of the school is relatively good. He noted that CEC are looking at options to reduce environmental impacts across all facilities.

In response to a question about ethics of long haul trips, DM noted that the experiences of different cultures is very valuable for young people. Young people are encouraged to question and critically evaluate trips, both beforehand and afterwards.

IP noted that the school had worked with the University of Edinburgh and to address concerns about ethics of the South Africa trip, in particular concerns about 'poverty tourism'. Over the years the project has evolved, developed new partnerships and now focuses on educational and cultural exchange, to benefit both JGHS and the partner schools.

A parent asked if there was a support group for parents of dyslexic pupils. DM noted that Robin Andrews from Learning Support leads on parent engagement and this query has been forwarded to Robin.

A parent asked about when pupils should receive Prelim results. DM noted that they should receive these results before the February break, to help course choice decision making.

A parent asked about the date for the S4 Parents Evening. This will be held on Monday 2 March.

A parent noted that it was useful to receive notification about Parents' Evening booking several days beforehand, instead of on the day itself. It was preferable for appointment booking to start from 6pm to enable fair access to working parents.

7. Date of next Parent Council meeting - Tuesday 17th March 2020

PDF of Laura Stewart and Elaine Oram's PPT– [click to open](#)



