

James Gillespie's High School

Parent Council Minutes

Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Present : Cath Downie ( Chair), Donald Macdonald ( Headteacher), Anne Sandfield, Sheila Hobbs, Fiona Borthwick, Andreas Grothey, Paul McLaughlin, Maria Orologa-Vouza, Kirsty Stobie, Sarah Davis, Graeme Davis, Ute Jaeger-Fleming, Sue Milligan, Ailsa MacIntosh, Anne Mealyou, Maggie Young, Tanya Potter, Clarissa Rowe, Ben Paechter, Anna Christal, Jacqueline McCluskey, Robert Cochran, Phil Acott, Lucy Norris ( Communications), Jane Cudby, Pam Billina, S. Saraswatibhatla, Julie-Ann Sime, Karen Finlayson, Elke Jeffery, Amelia Beattie, Catherine Lyons, Ian Porter, Penny Stuart, Connie Smith, Gillian Clarkson, Sam Paechter, Shelagh Shields, Alison Platts, Fiona Giles, Rukmini Sarawatibhatla, Alison Macleod, Mary Robertson

1. Welcome & Apologies
2. Minutes of last meeting (12<sup>th</sup> May)  
Wifi – Parent Council have written to CEC and are awaiting response.  
AOCB – Malala was invited to the new building opening however she is inundated with requests and has sadly had to decline.
3. English department feedback - Mr Crosbie was unable to attend due to family circumstances ( hopefully he will be able to attend a later meeting )
4. Dress Code Survey feedback – update from Eilidh Grant. DM introduced this topic and said that he receives a lot of communication about this. Last surveyed in 2003. Purpose of the survey was to inform the dress code decision, not to make the decision. Timeline to date has been that the working group was set up in summer 2014, made up of parents and staff. Parents, staff and pupils were surveyed May to Sept 2015. Survey closed last Friday. August 2016 decision implemented. Parents, staff and pupils surveyed and also P7 pupils and p5 to p7 parents in feeder primaries. Every pupil vote counted. Staff and parents both completed online surveys. 1867 responses to survey. 903 pupils, 877 parents, 87 staff. Results : 47% dress code status quo, 28% blazer option, 20% polo shirts option and 5% no preference. It was suggested having a discussion between secondary and primary parents, perhaps an on-line forum. Possibility of opening up the parent forum to primary parents. Comments have been made on-line about parent preferences re polo shirts and blazers should the uniform go ahead. Information and comments from the survey and working group will now be handed over to SMT and they plan to make a decision by October. Following the decision, the school will have from October to the start of the new session 2016 to implement any changes. Important to have unity of approach once this decision is made. Important that all voices have been listened to in this decision.
5. Events Group update – a plea was made to parents for a new co-ordinator of the Events group, as the previous co-ordinator is no longer a parent at the school. There are various categories of events e.g. parents' evenings – rota of parents helping to serve tea & coffee

and social events such as the wine tasting. There are detailed notes on the various events that the Events group run and the Parent Council would be pleased to hear from anyone who is interested in co-ordinating helpers for these events.

6. CEC consultation on primary catchment changes in South Edinburgh – it was thought that a Parent Council response is needed to CEC regarding the extra secondary school pupil capacity coming from the increasing proposed primary capacity in the area. DM pointed out that the general picture in Edinburgh is that maximum school capacity for secondary schools will be reached in 2020. Suggestion to retain Darroch in the future to meet the extra pupil capacity. Discussion followed as to why the council had not looked ahead to plan for this extra capacity in the rebuilding of both JGHS and Boroughmuir. DM pointed out that 'like for like' replacement was the rule for the rebuild and this was linked to funding. Numbers are also increasing in the Gaelic sector. Gaelic sector does add to the capacity requirements moving forward. This needs to be resolved by the council. An enquiry was made that If every primary school in catchment was at full capacity would the school be able to take all pupils? DM did not know but would like to think that this would be the case. **Action: Cath to draft bullet points for PC response to consultation and post on PC website for comment, then produce formal PC response.**

7. HT report

Pupil voice - Pupils from the Pupil Voice attended the meeting to represent pupil community. Pupil Voice are a fundamental part of the school and were welcomed at the meeting.

New DHT - Ian Porter was introduced and is replacing Hazel Kinnear. Ian is from Firrhill High School and has been a Pupil Support leader in the past.

Parent Council agendas - If there are areas parents would like DM to address, please e-mail in advance. The school is always looking to improve things, so please feedback on issues of concern. **Action: All**

Homework feedback has been gathered by SMT and the draft for this will be passed on to the Parent Council initially.

Results - Current S5 & S6 had the best results ever. DM pointed out that it has been found that schools which have undergone rebuilding regularly see an improvement in results and this was the case at JGHS. Thanks to everyone involved in this - staff, parents and pupils.

Later meeting will be used to give details of results using a government tool which compares JGHS results with a similar virtual school. Final conclusions will be made in February. The Parent Council would like to formally express their thanks to staff in achieving these results with the pupils, despite the difficulty of working across different sites.

Building – both buildings scheduled to be completed on 15th July 2016. Two additional closure days are needed to successfully move into the new buildings. A possible plan is to use the last day of summer term for packing up (Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> June) and a day at the start of the autumn term to unpack. Currently Mon & Tues at the start of the autumn term in August 2016 are planned as in-service days. One possibility would be to have the Monday as an unpacking day and Tuesday and Wednesday as in-service days so pupils would not start back

until Thursday of the first week. Every department is affected to varying degrees re packing and unpacking.

New S1 – settling in well. Waiting lists for S1 to S4. Any concerns should be passed on quickly to the school. DM concerned with current lack of outdoor space around school as building work continues. S1 stay in school grounds at lunchtime until Easter. At this time, exam leave is happening for S4 –S6 and the queues are less in local shops and there is a bit less congestion.

Staffing – very stable staffing position overall. Jeff Warden is acting DHT until Ian Porter is in post happened. Sally Westerman (DHT) is going part-time for the next year and DM will be interviewing for her job share in the next week. Active Sports – someone was appointed before the summer but this person was then offered and moved to another job. Someone is starting next week in this position and DM disappointed in the delay. School librarian, who was temporary, has taken up a permanent post at another High School. This post has been filled – again on a temporary basis – until Ms Brown returns from Maternity leave.

South Africa – the school has had a long association with South Africa (12 years). Visit by S6 pupils is usually in Feb holiday. South African choir visiting in August. A big thank you to families who hosted South African pupils for two weeks. Alex Wallace (previous head teacher) has set up a charity working with the South African links beyond school for pupils and parents. Please contact the school if you would like more information on this. DM highlighted that the aim is to keep raising the bar.

Previous criticism of Maths in JGHS was taken on board and the Maths dept are now assuming that 90% pupils will do Higher. Setting still occurs for Maths. Setting the bar very high. Falling short of this will still be doing better than previously. This must be balanced against pressure on pupils. Raising expectations does not necessarily contribute to this pressure. There was discussion re movement between classes. DM emphasised that there should now be more communication with parents re assessments and when they are taking place.

The issue of textbooks for National exams was raised. DM pointed out that due to further cuts the school do not have the money to issue textbooks to every pupil and with the new curriculum changes new textbooks are needed in various subjects. Parents will be sent out a list of books for the next term and those on free school meals will be given a free textbook. Parents discussed the move to parents buying books and it was felt there should be a noise made about this, particularly with the introduction of new courses, and this should be being funded. The Pupil Voice raised the point that online resources were more environmentally friendly. All schools in Edinburgh will be deciding what they are doing with resources i.e. staffing / books on a reduced budget. Parents asked for an overall picture of resourcing in other schools and DM said he would investigate this and feedback. **Action: DM**

The budget has been cut and cut again – effectively two members of staff have been taken out of the budget at JGHS. Next step – what are departments experiencing now particularly undertaking the new Higher and new Advanced Higher. This will be shared with the Parent Council and they can decide how to take this issue further. Councillors have previously been at the Parent Council. Parents asked for more concrete information about what is going on

so that pressure can be put on council. Connections should be made to other schools to see what they are doing about budget cuts. Discussion pointed to the fact that the cuts are not going away and we should try to involve other schools to get an overview of what is going on. The point was made that the council budget cuts have been going on for 5 years and there is only so much efficiency improvements can be made without cutting essential parts of education.

Parental data base – Elke Jeffery has been compiling a data base of additional skills in the school community where parents have indicated their particular skill base and offered to use this to support the school. The idea behind this is to involve parents more in the school and to tap into a wealth of skills and expertise. There will be information coming out on this soon.

DM concluded by adding that there is much to look forward to in the year ahead at JGHS.

8. Date of next meeting – AGM 27<sup>th</sup> October 7pm in the Library at the Lauderdale campus
9. AOCB
  - UCAS : A UCAS meeting for parents was requested to enable parents to support their children through the process of applying to university. DM said this will be organised as soon as possible. **Action: DM**
  - Future agenda items - S6 : There have been a number of enquiries about different aspects of S6. Parents decided that they would be interested in having S6 on the agenda for another meeting. **Action: CD**
  - Eco Schools : Pupil Voice would like to involve Parent Council in maintaining the status of Eco Schools. Lots of aspects to be discussed re recycling and ensuring that the school is Eco Friendly. Suggestion was made for Pupil Voice to meet with Melanie Maine (Green Party councillor). DM agreed that this was definitely an area of development for the school.
  - Departmental feedback : it was agreed that it would be good to have different Heads of Department on a rolling basis at meetings. **Action: CD/DM**
  - Working Groups : are these groups still ongoing? DM to send out an e mail to parents about these groups for this session. **Action: DM**
  - Parent Council fundraising : Karen Finlayson volunteered to take on co-ordinating fundraising events for the Parent Council, and Shelagh McLeish for teas/coffees at parents' nights.