

# **James Gillespie's High School**

## **Parent Council Meeting**

**Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

### **Minutes**

#### **Present :**

Donald Macdonald – DM (HT), Ian Porter - IP (DHT), Jeff Warden (JW), Sally Westerman (SW), Ailsa Macintosh – AM (Chair) Graeme Davis - GD (Communications), Julie-Ann Sime - JAS (Treasurer), Karen Finlayson - KF (Events), Elke Versmessen - EV (Fundraising), Mary Kernohan, Robert Cochran, Suzanne Mackenzie, Tanya Potter, Penny Tarsia, Jenny James, Pam Billina, John Keating, Matt Ponting, Nikki Sinclair, Cynthia Berry, Angie Brierley, Caroline Sparks, Karen Burke, Magnus Hagdorn, Connie Smith, Cath Downie, Anna Christal – AC (Secretary),

#### **Apologies:**

Charles Warlow, Stuart Boutell, Alistair Philip, Ruth Tiplady, Gillian Clarkson

#### **1. Welcome & minutes of last meeting**

AM welcomed everyone and passed on apologies.

The minutes of the last meeting on 06 December 2016 were approved.

##### **1.1. Questions from the previous meeting minutes and actions completed.**

All completed. Letter about WiFi access has been drafted and will be sent shortly.

##### **1.2. Actions carried forward**

None.

#### **2. Homework Update (Sally Westerman)**

##### **2.1. Homework presentation including: survey feedback, expectations of pupils, staff and parents; possible use of electronic diaries.**

SW gave a presentation that started by highlighting:

- Questionable link between quantity of homework and achievement in terms of international comparisons.
- Effect of homework on pupil well-being and home-school balance
- Effect of homework on pupil enjoyment of learning

Two clips were shown:

- Everybody Loves Raymond - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnaHfhl8Dnl>
- DNews - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7luT8yquDMg>

As a result of some of these issues, SW noted that some schools have decided not to give any homework (with or without extending the school day).

SW then gave feedback on the homework consultation of parents, pupils and staff in 2015-16.

Over 300 replies were received from parent body with a wide diversity of views.

The school have also held two staff in-services to look at homework and the latest research.

This has resulted in a new draft homework policy which was presented at this meeting and will be more widely shared after further revisions.

The key ideas are that homework should be:

- Achievable
- Motivating
- Varied
- Differentiated (often by outcome)
- Spaced (with appropriate time to complete)

There is also an expectation that pupils in S1 to S3 should have no homework in the school holidays.

Study support is provided in school and also in Easter Revision classes.

## **2.2. Q & A**

A number of parents commented that their children did not seem to receive much homework and less than the quantity suggested in the draft school homework policy.

A parent noted that homework issues only seem to be highlighted in annual reports and that it would be useful to receive more timely feedback if homework is not being completed or if it is not of the required standard.

SW responded that there is a letter system that is used to inform parents if homework is not completed.

Several parents commented that it was hard for pupils to be motivated to look over class notes. A parent noted that written homework was easier to monitor and support.

A number of parents commented on the difficulty of supporting pupils if homework diaries are not completed and they do not know what homework is required.

A parent commented that homework diaries were useful for pupils to record their own homework.

Another parent commented that it was hard to keep up with the variety of mechanisms used to issue homework, e.g. Office 365, blogs and Edmodo. It was asked if a single system, preferably Edmodo, could be used for online homework. A single system would mean that pupils and parents do not have to waste time looking for homework.

A parent said that by joining Edmodo themselves, they received notifications of homework being set.

SW commented that these systems were for pupils rather than their parents and pupils should be familiar with these systems to store notes and class work.

Another parent praised the Maths Department section of the school website that gives clear signposting to the relevant pages on the SQA website as well as other online resources.

A parent asked if expectations for the return of marked homework could be included in the homework policy as feedback was not always timely.

SW commented that teachers will prioritise the marking of senior school homework to support pupils sitting examinations.

A parent commented that peer pressure can mean that pupils do not attend study support.

JW replied that systems can be put in place to support pupils to attend.

A parent asked if the suggested levels of homework suggested in the draft homework policy represented an increase or decrease in the current level of homework.

SW replied that the levels reflect general current practice. However the emphasis has shifted with greater awareness of family life and activities.

Another parent asked if the removal of SQA unit assessments will impact on homework.

DM replied that it is likely that other assessments will be developed.

In summary, DM commented that communication about homework appeared to be the key issue.

SW welcomed feedback on the draft homework policy.

### **3. Chair update (Ailsa Macintosh)**

#### **3.1. South East Locality meeting**

Please email at [jghscouncilcomms@gmail.com](mailto:jghscouncilcomms@gmail.com) if there are specific issues to address at this forthcoming meeting.

#### **3.2. CEC recruitment and selection training**

It was noted that members of parent councils help recruit staff and senior staff. If you would like to do this you must complete the City of Edinburgh Council training courses. Training is held between 6-9pm on Tuesday evenings and the next training events include 28 February 2017, 25 April 2017 or 6 June 2017 at Liberton High School, 328 Gilmerton Road, Edinburgh EH17 7PT. Please email [jghscouncilcomms@gmail.com](mailto:jghscouncilcomms@gmail.com) if you are interested.

#### **3.3. Active Kids Vouchers**

The Parent Council will be collecting Sainsburys Active Kids Vouchers again this year. This will be promoted when the scheme starts.

#### **3.4. Engage career events**

The Engage career event entitled 'Alternative Routes - Different Ways into the World of Work' scheduled for 24 January 2017 was cancelled through lack of interest.

A parent suggested this might be because it coincided with Prelims.

Another event is scheduled for 07 March 2017. Details will be published on the JGHS Parent Council website (<http://jghscouncil.btck.co.uk/>).

#### **3.5 Public consultation on the proposed closure of Panmure/St Ann's Special School**

AM noted that the City of Edinburgh have opened a public consultation on the Public Consultation on the proposed closure of Panmure St Ann's Special School. Details are at: <https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/cf/public-consultation-on-the-proposed-closure-of-pan/> A public meeting will be held on Monday 6 February and the closing date for the survey and comments is 27 February 2017.

### **4. Communications update (Graeme Davis)**

#### **4.1. Communications subgroup to assess marketing, coms, social media**

GD noted that a meeting will be arranged shortly and thanked those who have already volunteered. Please email if you are also keen to be involved. Details of plans for this subgroup were noted in the minutes from the meeting on 06 December 2016 and are available at: <http://jghscouncil.btck.co.uk/Minutesandfiles>.

## **4.2. Pop-up banners for use at school events**

These will be available shortly.

## **5. Events update (Karen Finlayson)**

### **5.1. Pub quiz – Wednesday 22nd February 2017**

The annual pub quiz will be held at the Bruntsfield Links Hotel on Wednesday 22 February 2017 at 19:30. Tickets are £10 each. Tables will compete against each other for a £100 prize. Teachers and parents competed last year. It was decided not to use Eventbrite. The event will be publicised by email shortly.

## **6. Fundraising update (Graeme Davis and Elke Versmessen)**

### **6.1. Christmas Concert fundraiser update + discussion**

EV thanked GD for taking over organisation of event following a family bereavement. Thanks were also passed on to all those involved in preparations before the event and collections on the night.

The approach of asking for donations increased funds raised from ~£700 in 2015 to ~£1500 this year.

It was thought that this approach was successful, though some aspects of organisation need to be improved, specifically improving the visual presence for collection at the interval.

### **6.2. Mini-poll of parents to preferred methods of fund-raising**

GD conducted a mini poll of about 30 parents at the S4 parent's night to assess preference for different fund raising mechanisms such as donations, raffles, events and sponsored events. The option of not interested was included, but not chosen by any parents. Results showed no clear preference, indicating that a variety of approaches is important.

### **6.3. Fund-raising opportunity at Scottish Schools Pipe Band Championship**

The Scottish Schools Pipe Band Championship will be held for the first time at JGHS on Sunday 12 March 2017. The event will run from 08:00-16:30 and it is likely that over 1000 people will attend. The Parent Council have been invited to run a 'tuck shop'. Ideas for providing catering – e.g. soup, home-baking are welcome. Volunteers to help in the day are also needed.

Action: All –Please email the Parent Council at [jghscouncilcomms@gmail.com](mailto:jghscouncilcomms@gmail.com) if you can help with this event.

DM also noted that there may be other fund-raising opportunities at this event.

SW suggested approaching pupils, via Pupil Voice for support with the fundraiser/hospitality at the Pipe Band event.

#### **6.4. Other fund-raising opportunities**

EV suggested that the Parent Council could organise an annual fair in September. She suggested a science fair as a similar event at Sciennes Primary School had been very successful. There would be opportunities for ticketing, catering and raffle. Other schools could be invited.

DM noted that this would link well with the school STEM club (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic club)

SW noted that a Saturday events tends to be better attended by families and pupils.

SW noted that historically the school has successfully fund-raisers including a Car boot sales, fairs and Burns Supper.

GD noted that pupil involvement is important.

#### **6.5. Book fundraising initiative using Amazon Wish Lists update + discussion**

AM noted that 52 books needed by the school are now on the Amazon Wish List. As such the initiative is ready to go and could be launched. However in liaising with the school library, Stuart Boutell discovered that if these are purchased through the school library, it is possible to get a 40% discount. The Parent Council have therefore held off launching this initiative and AM asked for comments.

Many parents were concerned about the additional cost that this represents if using Amazon Wish Lists instead of purchasing through the school.

A parent asked if a local bookshop could be used through Amazon marketplace?

Another parent noted their personal preference to avoid Amazon.

A parent asked if the books could be purchased through the library now using funds raised this year.

Some parents noted that both systems could be used and that the Amazon Wish Lists may allow donations that might not be made through other fund-raising activities.

The Parent Council agreed that it was worth trialling the system whilst making supporters aware of alternative routes for donations to purchase books.

**Action: JGHS Parent Council - to launch and publicise Amazon Wish Lists.possibly in conjunction with World Book Day. GD to draft first communications.**

## **7. Head teacher's report (Donald Macdonald)**

DM publicly congratulated Jeff Warden on his appointment as DHT with responsibility for S4 and S5. He noted that JW has worked at JGHS for 10 years and his useful experience in the school and knowledge of families will be very beneficial in his new role.

DM reported that the Prelims had worked well to date, with few glitches. This is the first time examinations have been held on the new school campus. Prelims are being held in the school gym hall with overspill to classrooms. The school is working to ensure that S1-S3 pupils are aware of appropriate behaviour in areas of the school used for examinations.

It was noted that an S2 Social will be held on Thursday 2 February 2017. Tickets are selling steadily.

An initiative to promote cycling to school will start soon, targeting S2.

DM and IP will be accompanying S6 pupils on the JGHS South Africa Project from Thursday 9 February till Tuesday 20 February.

DM noted that the school is currently fully staffed. Karl Roderick started yesterday in Computing. In Physics, Robert Brice left 2 weeks ago and his replacement Alan Russell will start next week.

The City of Edinburgh Council published a report from 9 December 2016 about options regarding future pupil projections. It has been predicted that by 2022 all Edinburgh high schools will be at capacity and two new high schools will be needed. JGHS and Boroughmuir High School are under particular pressure in the short term. Report lists the continued use of Darroch as an option, with possible shared use. There will be a consultation later this year. DM predicted that JGHS will be above capacity in August 2019.

AM noted that a parent had emailed with questions regarding capacity and sought parents support to contact City of Edinburgh Council for more information about future pupil projections and options. This action was agreed.

**Action: AM - to contact City of Edinburgh Council for more information about future pupil projections and options.**

It was noted that it would also be useful to invite a representative from City of Edinburgh to a future Parent Council Meeting to address these issues.

In response to a question, DM noted that the projected S1 intake for August 2017 is 220 pupils, but this will not be confirmed until pupil registrations are completed at the end of January 2017.

A parent asked about the future of Gaelic Medium Education at JGHS as numbers are increasing in the Gaelic primary school, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce. It was noted that there are now more than 60 pupils in P4.

DM noted that Gaelic Medium Education had been based at JGHS for 30 years. There is no plan for any immediate change.

DM is keen to involve parents in School Improvement Planning. He is looking for 2-3 parents with experience of strategic planning in the public or private sector to work together with 2-3 teaching staff and 2-3 pupils. It is envisaged that this will involve 4-5 meetings with an end point in May 2017. Timing for meetings can include twilight sessions.

**Action: All – please contact DM directly if you would like to be involved with School Improvement Planning.**

DM is also keen to get parental feedback on the school calendar, especially regarding the timing of reports and parents' evening.

**Action: All – please contact DM directly with feedback.**

It was noted that the school will run Easter revision classes during the first or second week of the holidays for senior pupils.

DM also addressed the issue of cost and equity for school trips. The option to increase the cost of trips to allow subsidy for pupils on free school meals was discussed. The excursion fund from the City of Edinburgh Council is ~£1000 and insufficient. He stated that it would be a good aim to be able to provide 10% of places fully funded

A parent suggested that it is not just pupils on free school meals that may not be able to afford school trips. Increasing the cost of trips might make them too expensive for parents that were just managing financially. The option of using general fundraising was discussed.

Some funding may also be available through the James Gillespie's Trust.

A parent stated that additional funding had been found for Looked After Children through the City of Edinburgh Council at St Thomas of Aquin's High School.

DM suggested that the issue of cost and equity for school trips would merit further discussion at another Parent Council Meeting.

**Action: AM – to identify opportunity to further discuss cost and equity for school trips**

DM noted that the school were planning to run a film showing of 'I Daniel Blake'. This was being organised by Cait Pearce and the School Equity Group. A parent (Paul Lafferty) was the script writer for this film.

The possibility of using the school hall for fund-raising through film showings was discussed. The hall has a 250 capacity. Licences and age certificates will need to be respected.



## **8. AOCB**

IP noted that PC Alan Jenkins, the school police liaison officer had sent details of a free app called 'Selfie Cop' that can be used by parent to monitor selfies that are taken. It also reminds the young person that uploaded photos can be shared with anyone.

Details are at: <https://www.selfiecop.com/>

IP noted that pupils are taught about sexting and cyber-bullying in PSE.

## **9. Date of next PC meeting (21st March 2017 @ 7pm)**