

James Gillespie's High School

Parent Council Meeting

Tuesday 21st March 2017

Minutes

Present :

Donald Macdonald – DM (HT), Ian Porter - IP (DHT), Jeff Warden JW (DHT), Ashleigh Kennedy- AK (CL – Social subjects), Ailsa Macintosh – AM (Chair) Graeme Davis - GD (Communications), Julie-Ann Sime - JAS (Treasurer), Karen Finlayson - KF (Events), Charles Warlow, Alistair Philip, Ruth Tiplady, Gillian Clarkson, Suzanne Mackenzie, Tanya Potter, Pam Billina, Stuart Robertson, Rachel Davison, Karen Burke, Magnus Hagdorn, Jenny James, Phil Acott, Susi McDonald, Robbie McVeigh, Anna Christal – AC (Secretary),

Apologies:

Elke Versmessen, Stuart Boutell, Cath Downie, Mary Kernohan, Cynthia Berry

1. Welcome & minutes of last meeting

AM welcomed everyone and passed on apologies.

The minutes of the last meeting on 24 January 2017 were approved.

1.1. Questions from the previous meeting minutes and actions completed

All completed. Updates on several issues will be given during meeting.

1.2. Actions carried forward

None.

2. Faculty Update (Ashleigh Kennedy, Social Subjects CL)

2.1 Social Subjects – History, Geography and Environmental Science

AK welcomed follow up questions after the meeting.

AK listed members of staff for social subjects:

History

- Asheligh Kennedy (CL)
- Nicola Carruthers
- Brian Carson
- Adam Maclaughland

Geography

- Rosie Harvey-Jamieson
- Kerry Anne Matheson
- Chris Stewart
- Adam Maclaughland

AK outlined that S1 and S2 have 1 period per week of History and 1 period per week of Geography and described the current course content.

S3 and S4 have 3 periods per week if History, Geography or Environmental Science is selected. Courses are offered at N3, N4 and N5.

S5 and S6 have 5 periods per week if History, Geography or Environmental Science is selected. History, Geography and Environmental Science courses are offered at Higher and History and Geography at Advanced Higher. In addition N4/N5 Travel and Tourism is also being offered. Travel and Tourism is all internally assessed at N4/N5.

Environmental Science courses have been offered for last 2 years and courses are increasing in popularity.

Course content is detailed at: <http://jamesgillespies.co.uk/history-courses/>

Plans to remove mandatory unit assessments at N5, Higher and Advanced Higher will mean some changes in the balance coursework and exams. Exams will be longer. The Faculty plan to continue SQA unit assessments with current S3.

The Faculty use formative and summative assessments across all year groups. They give individualised feedback either through Edmodo or learner conversations in class.

AK outlined homework expectations:

- For S1 and S2 homework focussed on projects with research focus.
- For S3 and S4 homework will include short written pieces and revision.
- For S5 and S6 homework will include essays, source questions and revision.

The Faculty offer weekly revision classes and are contributing to Easter Revision Programme. Details are at: <http://jamesgillespies.co.uk/easter-exam-revision-timetable/>

AK outlined the pedagogy or teaching methodologies used in the Faculty.

Teaching incorporates a wide range of activities and covers many literacy, numeracy and Health and Wellbeing outcomes with a significant focus on group work and sharing opinions.

Lessons can be teacher led or involve cooperative learning (group presentations, expert groups) or active learning and incorporate ICT.

AK noted that there is currently no textbook for Environmental Science but teaching staff have prepared booklets for pupils. There are textbooks in classroom for History and Geography.

There are links to Edmodo resources from school website and some staff are using OneDrive to share resources.

The Faculty run excursions including:

- For S3 – WW1 battlefields trip each May
- For S4/S5 - Sorrento trip in June. This is a combined Geography and History trip.
- There are also many local excursions for fieldwork especially in Geography courses.

AK is keen to utilise website and electronic communication to better connect with parents. Website currently has course information and links to other websites as well as details about excursions.

AK outlined the Faculty development plans for the next 6 months. These include:

- Surveys of S2 and S4 pupils for feedback
- Improved links to primary for progression and to avoid repetition of learning. This is associated with a broader review of the S1 and S2 course to mirror benchmarks (shared standards across schools)
- Development of new courses – Scottish Studies; Travel and Tourism
- Reviews of existing courses in line with proposed SQA changes
- Development of Faculty pages on the school website

2.2 Q + A

AK confirmed that there are no plans to offer Higher Geography Easter revision classes. After the meeting, a Higher Geography Easter Revision class was added to the programme.

A parent asked if pupils were offered taster lessons in S2 for Environmental Science. AK noted that these were not yet offered, but information was available for pupils and the Faculty was developing links with Biology.

A parent said that it would be useful to share information about requirements and timetable for assignments and homework via school website. AK noted that pupils should have information sheet detailing assignment requirements, but agreed that it would be useful to share this information with parents directly.

DM noted that generally more information needs to be shared about the timing of assignments and requirements and this will be shared with parents next session.

Action: DM to coordinate sharing of information about assignments with parents.

IP noted that the school was planning to share good communication strategies from Maths Faculty with other curricular leaders.

A parent asked what the Insight tool had shown about attainment in Social Subjects. AK noted that results in Higher History in particular were strong, but she felt there was room for improvements across all subjects. For example, evaluation of assessment results had shown that there was room for improvement in N5 assignment in History and this had led to AK sharing clearer instructions with pupils this year on requirements.

3. Chair update (Ailsa Macintosh)

AM noted thanks to all involved in helping to organise and run the parent council refreshments at the Scottish Schools Pipe Band championship especially Elke Vermessen who had coordinated efforts.

AM also noted thanks to Karen Finlayson for organising the Pub Quiz and to Carol Philip for getting the school signed up to collect Active Schools Vouchers again.

AM also asked DM to pass on thanks from the Parent Council to the teachers that had organised the S2 party.

Action: DM – to pass on thanks from the Parent Council to the teachers that had organised the S2 party

3.1. Summary of issues from South East Locality meeting, Consultative Committee with Parents (CCwP) meetings, including: equity, growth, governance, building safety, parent pay and WiFi

AM summarised issues raised at the SE locality cluster group including a presentation from the Council 1 in 5 team who are addressing equity issues in Edinburgh. AM reported that the team reckon that no school in Edinburgh has less than 1 in 10 pupils living in poverty. Group suggested that it was useful to have a Parent Council Equity Fund to support disadvantaged pupils to be used with schools' discretion.

AM reported on the PPP report on the safety of school buildings. CEC had reported that intrusive inspections are being carried out across all schools and CEC seems to be taking a very thorough approach.

It was also noted at these meetings that Edinburgh schools are generally outperforming average national attainment and in line with their virtual comparator in terms of attainment.

AM reported that there has been a delay in rolling out parent pay for online payments. This has been linked with IT issues concerned with refunds, plus debate about surcharges.

DM asked for parent view on surcharges. There was considerable debate about importance of transparency of charges. Some schools, e.g. Sciennes Primary School have absorbed cost as there is a saving for school in reduced administration time to deal with for cash and cheques.

DM reported that the school deals with between £500,000 and £600,000 in payments per year. There will be no cost to school for providing service. A benefit of system will be that it is easier to refund if costs for trips are overestimated.

In general the parents felt that a small surcharge was a reasonable cost for convenience on online payments, but costs should be clearly stated (i.e. this includes a **% charge).

AM reported that we had heard back from CEC following our enquiry into rising rolls and continued use of Darroch, however further discussion will hopefully be more forthcoming after council elections. CEC have assured us that there will be no action without consultation.

AM has linked with Chair of Boroughmuir Parent Council for collaboration and sharing of information.

AM also reported that we have heard back from CEC following our enquiry into free access to WiFi. See item 4.2.

4. Communications update (Graeme Davis)

4.1. Communications subgroup: marketing, communications and social media

GD apologised for lack of action in organising subgroup, but he will be in touch with interested parents shortly.

GD noted that there are 600 parents on email list, but challenge is keeping it up to date. Parents are currently only added to distribution list through request. He suggested that names could be added through the annual data capture form with a note to allow email address to be passed onto parent council?

A parent suggested that contact information could be passed on from feeder primary parent councils.

However another parent noted that forthcoming data protection regulations in 2018 are tightening up on how personal data is used and this may limit options.

An alternative is to send out an annual request via school email to sign up? A web form would be useful.

4.2 WiFi and school information screens

GD noted that there is clearly a need for WiFi, but CEC are currently not keen and concerned about liability and potential litigation from inappropriate use. However these legal issues would also seem to apply to all school owned computers.

There are clear resource saving benefits to school if pupils can use their own devices, but issues with security of devices needs to be addressed.

There may also be issues with band width and access points.

A parent noted that the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications had published report on 'Growing up with the internet' today and this report emphasised the importance of children learning how to manage risks and responsibilities.

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldcomuni/130/13002.htm>

A parent noted that passwords can be shared and asked how the school could ensure only legitimate users accessed the school WiFi.

DM noted that Portobello High School had issued approx. 1200 pupils with iPads and that systems were in place to manage access. Pupils at JGHS already have passwords to access fixed devices and a set of WiFi enabled devices in science.

DM noted that schools that have gone down the route of providing iPads for pupils have achieved this by making savings elsewhere in already tight budgets.

A parent noted that many pupils will go onto College or University and be expected to use IT and WiFi and allowing access in school would better prepare pupils. It was also noted that if systems can work for large numbers of students in Colleges or Universities, why not in schools?

Another parent noted that WiFi use in shared teaching spaces was discussed in the initial school plans.

It was also noted that there was an equity issue if some pupils have no access at home or at school.

It was agreed to invite Sheila Paton, CEC Senior Education Manager (Schools, Quality and Curriculum) and the CEC ICT Relationship Manager to the next parent Council meeting to further discuss.

Action: AM to write to invite CEC representative to next Parent Council meeting.

GD asked for an update on the information display boards in the school

DM reported that these were still not working despite installation nearly two years ago. There were practical issues following transfer of IT contract from BT to CGI. There now seems to be agreement in how they can link up on practical level, but continued delays in setting them up.

Action: DM to check position regarding school information display boards and Parent Council to write to CEC for update and to ask for resolution of issue.

5. Events update (Karen Finlayson)

5.1. Pub quiz (Feb 2017)

Attendance was disappointing with only 15 parents and 1 teacher. It was noted that event was held immediately after half term break and the S4 parents night was the next night. Those that had attended enjoyed the night, but KF questioned whether there was much appetite for social events. It was noted that the event in 2016 had sold out, so perhaps there was not enough publicity and timing was wrong.

A parent suggested that social events could be targeted at particular year groups.

DM noted that the 2017-18 calendar will be finalised by the end of June to allow better planning.

IP thanked KF for efforts and suggested liaison with staff social committee to plan events.

5.2. Spring Fling (22 March 2017)

The Parent Council will be attending to serve wine before and in the 10 minute interval. No glasses are allowed in theatre.

5.3 James Gillespie's Trust Event – (proposal re Saturday 22nd April 2017)

The parent council have been invited to cater (tea, coffee, juice and biscuits) for this alumni event between 13:30-16:00 on 22 April 2017. Approximately 100 are expected to attend. Alison Platts has volunteered to help. Gillian Clarkson, Tanya Potter and Cathie Sudlow to also help.

6. Fundraising update (Graeme Davis/Ailsa Macintosh)

6.1. Scottish Schools Pipe Band Championship

The Parent Council successfully ran a successful Tuck Shop and Cafe at the Scottish School Pipe Bands Championship which was hosted for the first time on JGHS on Sunday 12 March. GD noted that the event was very well organised by EV. £2219.42 profit was raised and approximately £500 was spent to set up.

The parent council would also like to thank the following:

- Tesco Causewayside for donating all the Danish Pastries, baguettes, morning rolls, hot dog rolls, ham and cheese.
- Papa John's for donating 300 portions of pizza.
- Sainsbury Marchmont for donating a £50 gift card.

EV asked for special mention in the minutes for the following parents:

- Pam Billina, for help with shopping
- Jennie Morris (and family) for signage, general advice and help
- Fiona Denvir, for excellent soups and help on the day
- Jackie Wright for great homebaking
- Julie-Ann Sime, for being in charge of change and monies and being on site the full day
- Caroline Brockbank and daughter, for triple shiftwork
- Sarah and Graeme Davis for overseeing the final slot and handover of site.
- And all the other volunteers who spent between 2 to 4 hours that Sunday (including Ailsa MacIntosh) and all the homebakers (including Nikki Crawford, Gillian Clarkson, and many others) who generously baked and donated.

DM had received very positive feedback from visiting staff and parents.

Neighbours were not notified, but there had been no complaints.

6.2. Amazon Wish Lists

The Amazon Wish Lists were launched on World Book Day and our first books have now been received. We are currently organising covers.

The Wish List can be accessed here: <http://bit.ly/JGHS-wishes>

It was noted that Blackwells books can be sold back in June and purchased second hand from August and books can also be purchased from local shops. Cash donations for books can also allow cheaper purchase with bulk discount via school.

A parent noted that it would be useful to share used books with school.

GD noted thanks to Stuart Boutell and Jenny James for organising.

7. Head teacher's report (Donald Macdonald)

DM noted that there had been recent issues with fighting between boys in S1-S3. The school has taken a hard line, zero tolerance approach with exclusions for those involved and also for agitators. Assemblies have been held with these year groups. An S1 parent noted approval for approach. Another S1 parent questioned that the assembly had addressed only boys. DM agreed and noted that in retrospect assemblies could have addressed the whole year group.

DM noted that staffing was generally stable with 85 FTE teaching staff. Vacancies in Computing and Physics have been successfully filled. A long term absence in languages has required some reorganising of classes. There were also issues in English where a number of staff have been seconded and promoted. However no significant changes were foreseen.

DM reported that the S6 South Africa trip had been very successful. This trip will continue in 2018 and for foreseeable future.

Achievements are now covered in weekly newsletter, and DM asked parents/carers to let school know of any achievements to share, however small.

DM thanked those that had responded to the recent parent/carer survey. These responses will be summarised and the results will be shared. They will also help inform the School Improvement Plan. There was approximately a 30-35% sample size.

A parent noted the difficulty in responding to questions with more than one child at school. The online questionnaire does not allow you to complete a response for each child from same computer.

Four parents have volunteered to join the group supporting school improvement planning. This group will address general national issues including raising attainment and closing the gap as well as local issues, especially communication.

The recent presentation from world bike girl, Ishbel Taromsari, to S2 pupils had been inspiring.

There are approximately 20-30 tickets left for screening of I Daniel Blake this Thursday.

8. AOCB

A parent asked about school overcrowding as it has been a big issue in primary. He was concerned about the CEC delays in responding to issues.

DM noted that there were 237 pupils for S1 August 2017, and confirmed that projections are being monitored. Council officers are well aware of issues and this will be addressed after Council elections.

The parent noted that it was important to question candidates campaigning for election to ensure councillors sympathetic to concerns are elected. It was noted that campaigning

about issues in primary schools has been effective, but continuous pressure has been needed.

9. Date of next PC meeting (Tues 30th May 2017 @ 7pm)