

**James Gillespie's High School**  
**Parent Council Meeting**  
**Tuesday 29th May 2018**  
**Draft minutes**

**Present:**

Donald Macdonald – DM (HT), Deirdre O'Brien – DB (DHT),  
Allan Crosbie – ACr (EiS representative and Curricular Leader for English),  
Ailsa Macintosh – AM (Chair), Graeme Davis - GD (Communications),  
Julie-Ann Sime - JAS (Treasurer), Elke Versmessen – EV (Fund-raising),  
Shelagh Shields - SS (Events), Fiona Denvir, Ros Ingle, Penny Tarsia,  
Congrong Dai, Robbie McVeigh, Jennifer Rodger, Karen Finlayson,  
Amelia Beattie, Melanie Main, Alison Platts, Tanya Potter,  
Anna Christal – AC (Secretary)

**Apologies:**

Cath Downie, Charles Warlow - CW, Cynthia Berry

**1. Welcome, apologies and minutes of last meeting (20<sup>th</sup> March 2018)**

AM welcomed everyone.

The minutes of the last meeting on 20th March 2018 were approved

**1.1. AM to write and thank Lorna Sweeney, Schools and Lifelong Learning Service Manager, City of Edinburgh Council for presentation about WiFi at last meeting**

Completed

**1.2. AM, GD and CW to consider option to visit Tynecastle HS**

Option to visit Tynecastle HS has been considered.

### **1.3 GD and CW to continue to meet with CEC representatives to pursue feasibility study of allowing access to school WiFi for senior pupils**

See item 4 and 5.1

### **1.4 JGHS Parent Council to look at options for organising an event to express concern about rising rolls at JGHS and impact on pupils and curriculum.**

A meeting has been organised for Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> June at JGHS. See item 4.

## **2. Allan Crosbie re: EIS and teachers' pay & conditions**

ACr is the Education Institute of Scotland (EIS) union representative in school and curricular leader for English. The EIS is Scotland's largest and most teaching union. It represents 55,000 teachers in Scotland.

ACr had approached the parent council to ask for time at this meeting to let parents know about the EIS pay campaign and current negotiations with COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) and Scottish Government through the SNCT (Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers). The EIS are campaigning for a 10% increase in teacher's pay.

ACr stated that he was appealing on behalf of teachers and the EIS for support from parents. He said that teachers' pay been falling in real terms, representing a cut of 20% in the last decade and that the campaign was focussed on trying to restore teaching pay to previous levels. Current pay is less than the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average and a 10% pay increase would still only bring Scottish teacher's pay up to the average for OECD member countries.

ACr stated parents and carers should be concerned because pay is a critical factor in the recruitment and retention of teachers. He noted that an independent survey had suggested that up to 40% of teachers are considering leaving. He said that many older teachers were leaving and that

current teacher's salaries meant that it was not an attractive option for graduates, especially after 5 years. Many schools are already struggling with recruitment and retention.

ACr encouraged parents to go onto the EIS website to register support. This register of parental support can be used to support the pay campaign.

He also suggested options such as lobbying MSPs, letters to papers and sharing news of the campaign by word of mouth.

ACr noted that if current negotiations are unsuccessful there is the possibility of a ballot for industrial action, but emphasised a preference for a negotiated settlement. He noted that Scottish teachers have only had 1 day of industrial action in the last 30 years. The latest pay offer will be discussed in June and next steps in the campaign will be organised after the summer. ACr noted that other teaching unions are also involved and represented pro rata at the SNCT.

DM noted that he was supportive of campaign and stated that issues are affecting recruitment. In particular he noted that there were significantly reduced applicants for positions.

### **3. Deirdre O'Brien – Parent/Carer Survey feedback**

DB gave feedback on the recent parent/carers survey. A copy of this presentation is available on the school website at:

<http://jamesgillespies.co.uk/letters/>

She noted that there had also been surveys of learners and a further survey is planned for staff. There had been 273 respondents representing approximately 23% of parent/carers cohort. Through a series of pie charts, DB noted that most parents/carers felt that their child was more confident; progressing in their learning; feel safe and feel fairly treated. Most parents also agreed that the school had the resources to support high quality education.

The main areas of concern for parents/carers were to do with:

- how well informed parents/carers are about progress.
- how well staff know their child as an individual.
- how many pupils participate in the wider achievement of the school
- how parents/carers are supported to contribute to and understand their child's learning

Comments in the survey showed that parents/carers:

- like the maths model for communication
- would appreciate departmental newsletters
- would like more opportunities to meet with teachers
- would like more information about homework
- would like more opportunities for online learning

DB outlined the next steps following the survey information which will involve reflection and incorporation of key points into the school improvement plan with a focus on increased collaboration with parents; using the maths model of communication with other departments; more newsletters and celebrations of success; further development of the key adult role and discussions about changing the balance between written reports and opportunities to meet with teachers.

A parent asked why the maths model of communication hadn't been adopted by the English Department. DB noted that this has been part of English Departmental Improvement Plan, but issues with staffing have delayed implementation.

Another parent asked if there was evidence that better engagement with parents leads to better results?

DM responded that better engagement with parents by the maths department has improved results and numerous international studies have shown that this is a significant factor in improving learning.

Another parent asked whether staff had enough time for communication?

DM noted that dedicated administration time would be useful, but specific skills were required. The school has received requests from parents to update the Faculty sections of the school website..

A parent noted appreciation for email updates about upcoming assessments.

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

AM raised WiFi again at the recent South East Locality Meeting.

S5 pupil, Adam Paton had also spoken again about the need for pupil access to WiFi at the last Education, Children and Families Meeting.

AM noted that the main issue now seems to be security and ensuring that CEC systems and storage are not at risk from non-council owned devices accessing WiFi.

AM noted that 'a picnic by the path' has been organised to celebrate the centenary of Muriel Spark on Bruntsfield Links from 12:00 onward on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June.

AM noted that the last Education, Children and Families Meeting had also proposed a working group to address the issues of rising rolls at JGHS.

AM reminded parents that the JGHS Parent Council are hosting a panel event at the JGHS Forum on Wednesday 6th June from 7-9pm to engage with Edinburgh Council and the JGHS school community on the issue of capacity and rising rolls. The panel will include: Donald Macdonald, HT; Crawford McGhie, Acting Head of Operational Support, Communities & Families, Edinburgh Council; Councillor Ian Perry of Southside/Newington

and Convener of the Council's Education, Children and Families Committee and Councillor Alison Dickie of Southside/Newington and Vice Convener of the Council's Education, Children and Families Committee.

In relation to this event, AM asked for a volunteer to make notes for this meeting.

**Action: Any parent/carer interested in taking notes at the rising rolls event to contact AM**

AM distributed fliers for the forthcoming ENGAGE careers event on Tuesday 12 June. Further details are available on the JGHS Parent Council website at: <http://jghscouncil.btck.co.uk/News>.

AM thanked Karen Finlayson and Fiona Denvir who had organised a surprise treat of coffee, pizza and cakes for teachers at the recent Inservice. KF noted that the event had been organised to show parental appreciation for staff and to promote teacher well-being. DM noted that it had been very much appreciated by staff.

AM extended further thanks to KF at her last Parent Council meeting in recognition for all her hard work to organise and support events and develop the school community.

## **5. Communications and WiFi update (Graeme Davis)**

### **5.1 WiFi update**

GD reported that there was no news about pupil access to WiFi, apart from the concern with security issues as noted in item 4. Communication is largely being directed through DM. GD noted that it would be beneficial if other schools were involved. Other schools appear to be interested in pupil access to WiFi, but are not campaigning.

GD noted that the previous head of IT at CEC had stated on record that there were no IT issues, preventing this pilot for pupil access to WiFi

## **5.2 Communications**

In relation to the new GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations), GD noted that the current mailing list has been maintained, but moved from Gmail to MailChimp. This gives a clear unsubscribe option. For parents/carers that have opted to join the JGHS Parent Council mailing list, only name and email address only stored.

GD has also designed a business card with QR code for subscribing to the JGHS mailing list for distribution at events.

## **6. Fundraising update and discussion on future strategy (Elke Versmessen)**

EV noted that current fund-raising had focussed on an appeal at the Christmas concert and teas and coffees at events. The fund-raising at JGHS raised only a small percentage of that at feeder primaries. She noted that many parents work and are engaged, but time limited. Efforts to organise a science fair, support work experience, run a sponsored event in health week and engage with alumni had foundered on not having enough time or commitment from parents or the school. EV noted that the infrastructure for running events and fund-raising was lacking both in the school and the volunteer community. She noted that the JGHS Trust alumni organisation has received a legacy of £62,000 to be used to support the school. EV suggested that one option was to use some of that legacy to employ a fund-raiser to organise events and develop the infrastructure to link alumni, current pupils, staff and parents.

It was noted that Fiona Denvir and Robbie McVeigh are the two JGHS Parent Council representatives on the JGHS Trust. DM and Melanie Main are also members. Colin Finlayson had originally set up the JGHS Trust to address equality issues in school. Fund-raising for South Africa has been large focus of work by the JGHS Trust in recent years. The JGHS Trust has charitable status and can claim Gift Aid.

Many parents recognised that benefit of the JGHS Parent Council and the JGHS Trust working together to build the school community and raise funds.

A parent commented that many parent councils have sub-groups which allows some parents to focus on policy and politics and others on fund-raising.

DM noted that the school does benefit from all funds raised as the state provided funding is not sufficient. In particular it allows many equity issues to be addressed.

Melanie Main suggested that the JGHS Trust and the JGHS Parent Council collaborate to organise one fund-raising event next year. She suggested an event linked to the Muriel Spark centenary. Another parent suggested a film night.

A parent noted that the S1 social event for parents is an important opportunity to bring new parents together and build the school community. Another parent said that the end of S6 ceilidh had been a good experience, but would like to see similar events for other year groups.

AM noted that a sub group would be useful, but needs a volunteer to organise.

Fiona Denvir agreed to work with EV to organise a fund-raising sub-group.

**Action: DM to liaise with Fiona Denvir and EV to add a request for volunteers to join this sub group to the Friday newsletter.**

Fiona Denvir noted that she was attending the P7 parents event to share information about the JGHS Parent Council and school community.



## **7. Finance update (Julie-Anne Sime)**

JAS noted that the JGHS Parent Council had raised approximately £3500 raised this year. This was less than usual and the result of refreshments, appeals at the Christmas concert and Easy Fundraising.

JAS asked for permission to seek applications for small funds requests from teachers and clubs. Last year there had been requests to the sum of £6000 and the JGHS Parent Council had funded £4,400.

JAS proposed that £4,400 again be allocated, with bids requested in June and funds allocated by September. Accounts should be audited by that date.

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

DM noted that several teachers were leaving at the end of session largely through retirement or for promoted posts.

In particular, he noted that Sally Westerman, DHT, is retiring. This is one of the two DHT at JGHS posts currently advertised. The other is in response to rising rolls. Interviews for both posts are scheduled for the 14 and 18 June and DM will be looking for the Parent Council to be involved in recruitment.

DM stated that the aim was to be fully staffed for August and noted the benefit of posts being advertised earlier than previous years.

DM noted that although the school website was refreshed two years ago, it was now very out of date. He said there is a group working on it in collaboration with a professional website development company. The relaunch is planned for August 2018. Amelia Beattie has been involved with feedback about the website and it happy to share her comments with others.

DM noted that the new timetable starts on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June. S4 will restart on the Monday and S5/6 on the Tuesday.

In relation to rising rolls, the new S1 has a cap of 240, but there are 276 S1 pupils on the list. 244 of these pupils are from in catchment, with some as a

result of late registration. DM reported that there were 13 appeals to be heard, but the school cannot accommodate additional pupils. Additional pupils will cause issues with staffing, timetabling and accommodation.

In response to questions, DM reported that pre-2015, 30-40% of pupils were from out of catchment, but over the last 2 years, all pupils are from within catchment and there are no out of catchment places.

DM reported that the School Improvement Plan (3 year plan, written in 2017) is being reviewed. As part of that review he will be discussing with staff the option of holding two parents nights for S1-S3 and reducing the number of written reports. A parent noted that it can be difficult to see teachers as the number of teacher slots can be an issue in some subjects. DM noted that the school are looking at the possibility of limiting number of appointments per pupil. Another parent noted that the S3 parents' night was very late in the calendar and 18 months had passed since previous meetings.

DM thanked Karen Finlayson and Fiona Denvir for the teacher appreciation event at the recent Inservice. He said that it had been much appreciated by staff and boosted morale. KF noted the importance of staff wellbeing in relation to supporting pupil wellbeing.

## **9. AOB**

In response to a parental question, DM confirmed that Edmodo can no longer be used in school as it had been blacklisted by CEC as a result of GDPR.

## **10. Date of next PC meeting – Tuesday 11th September 2018**