

JAMES GILLESPIE'S HIGH SCHOOL PARENT COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

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1. Parent Council Members and Post Holders 2020/21

Post holders:

Chair: Sarah Scott

Secretary: Kirstin Leighton

Treasurer: Ros Ingle

Communications: Hilary Snaith/Laura Bird

Events/hospitality: Shelagh Shields

Parent Council members:

Nicolas Boyes

Karen Burke

Anna Christal

Graeme Davis

Cath Downie

Fiona Killen Quinan

Ailsa Macintosh

Lynne Mackintosh

Kathryn Mason Pak

Colleen McCrone

Aileen Nimmo

Cressida Peake

Vikki Plant

Katy Ruggeri

Lisa Sutherland

Penny Tarsia

Marion Thompson

Charles Warlow

Laura Young

2. Chair's Introduction

This is my first annual report having been appointed as Parent Council (PC) Chair at the AGM in October 2020. As Chair I would like to express my gratitude to all the PC members for their support during what has once again been an especially challenging year. In particular, I would like to thank to the other post holders for their hard work and enthusiasm throughout the year. Unfortunately, Laura Young, who was appointed as PC Secretary at the AGM, had to step down from her post earlier in 2021. However, I am delighted that Kirstin Leighton, one of the PC members, agreed to step into that role. At the AGM we were not able to appoint a new Communications Officer but I am happy to report that Hilary Snaith and Laura Bird have now agreed to take this on as a joint post.

After 8 years as Events/Hospitality convener Shelagh Shields is stepping down from the PC. Shelagh has worked with unfailing energy and efficiency in this role, organising refreshments for school events such as parent-teacher evenings and school concerts. This helped both to enhance them as social activities and to provide valuable source of PC funds used to support the school. We are very grateful to Shelagh for all this work over the years.

In addition to post holders, this year there have been a further 19 members who have contributed to the running of the PC in a variety of ways including adapting to circumstances as they changed throughout the year. I would like to give particular thanks to PC member, Lisa Sutherland, for her work on Active Schools, and to Graeme Davis, Ailsa Macintosh and Cath Downie for their work in ensuring that online meetings were set up and managed during the year. In particular, Graeme's IT knowledge and generosity with his Teams account have been invaluable in enabling the PC to engage more widely with parents and carers.

Thank you also to the many parents who have supported the PC in different ways, including lobbying Councillors and Council Officers, particularly on the important issues of Active Schools and on school capacity. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to hold social events this year at which parent helpers have always been very generous with their time and support, but we hope that it will be possible to resume these at some point during the year.

As parent representatives, the PC would also like to express our thanks to all the staff at James Gillespie's High School – the teachers and support staff, the admin team, and the senior leadership team and Head Teacher, Donald Macdonald, for their hard work and dedication during these unsettled and changing times.

3. Parent Council Meetings

PC meetings have been held entirely online during 2020/21 as necessitated by covid regulations. This has meant that meetings have had to take on a new format which is in some ways less interactive. However, this has also meant that attendance has expanded enormously with some meetings attracting in excess of 200 people, far exceeding the numbers present at in-person meetings. We hope also that the meetings have supported what we think has been one of the core functions of the PC during such a disturbed year, of

helping keep parents and carers informed on what is happening at the school, and providing a forum for questions to be posed and answered by school staff.

The issues raised by parents have been very varied, and where answers have not been available on the night, these have been gathered up and responded to by the school, and the Q&A posted online, along with the recording of the meeting, to allow an opportunity for those not able to attend to catch up with events.

We have also held an increased number of meetings this year, in light of the rapidly changing environment and the need to keep parents updated. Altogether, excluding the AGM, the PC held seven meetings over 2020/21, including a special meeting with Council Officers on school capacity. Topics/areas for action in 2020 - 2021 have included:

- Capacity and Rising Rolls
- Online Teaching and Blended Learning
- Active Schools and extra-curricular activities
- SQA Assessments
- Pupil Support and Wellbeing
- IT & Equity

Teacher/Council officer presentations and speakers at PC meetings:

November 2020 – Laura Stewart (DHT) on digital learning and Ben Lewis (DHT) on the school's anti-bullying policy

December 2020 – Bob Shankland (DHT) on arrangements for SQA assessments

2 February 2021 (special meeting on capacity) – Laura Stewart (DHT) and Council Officers, Lorna French (Schools and Lifelong Learning Service Manager) and Crawford McGhie (Senior Manager - Estates and Operational Support for Communities and Families) on plans to manage capacity problems caused by delays in the Darroch refurbishment project

23 February 2021 – Bob Shankland (DHT) with an update on SQA assessment arrangements and Deirdre O'Brien (DHT) on online learning

March 2021 – Deirdre O'Brien (DHT) and Ashling Dolan (Curriculum Leader, Maths) reporting on the parent survey on online learning, and Bob Shankland (DHT) with a further update on SQA assessment arrangements

May 2021 – Laura Stewart (DHT) with an update on progress in dealing with capacity issues in 2021/22 and Ben Lewis (DHT) on new arrangements for school communities

June 2021 – Bob Shankland (DHT) reporting on SQA assessments, Jeff Warden (DHT) on the new timetable and Eliot Ambrose (Active Schools Co-ordinator) on organising the Active Schools programme for 2021/22

In addition to these specific presentations, Donald Macdonald also attended at all these meetings to give the Head Teacher's report and to answer parents' questions on a variety of topics.

We would like to express our thanks to all those who have given their time over the year to speak to parents and answer their questions, and to Donald Macdonald and his senior team for their ongoing engagement with parents.

4. Parent Council Engagement

The PC has represented parents' views at South East Locality meetings, at the city-wide Consultative Committee with Parents meetings, and also at meetings specifically convened by the Council with PC Chairs on SQA assessment arrangements.

JGHS PC has worked with other PCs across Edinburgh and with the National Parent Forum of Scotland to lobby Councillors and MSPs in engaging with Edinburgh Council officers on a number of issues including, but not limited to:

- school capacity and arrangements for AH teaching
- support for teachers, parents and pupils with online learning
- health and wellbeing
- the operation of covid rules
- IT support and the distribution of 1-2-1 devices
- the return of music tuition
- a return of active schools and extra-curricular activities
- SQA assessment arrangements

The Parent Council also raised a Deputation to the Council's Education, Children and Families Committee on 2 March 2021 following our special meeting on capacity issues at the school.

5. Financial Summary

The financial annual statement is available as a separate document.

We would like to express our thanks to Ros Ingle for her work as Treasurer and for organising and managing the small sums fund and for the auditing carried out by Dougie Stirling.

6. Fundraising/Events

As noted above, we have not been able to hold fundraising or social events during 2020/21. Fundraising has been carried out exclusively via Parent Pay and Easyfundraising and a full report is provided in the financial statement.

We hope that events will be restarted at some point during the coming year and look forward to again working with volunteer parents, whose time and effort is always much appreciated.

7. Communications

We have managed to establish a new PC website this year, prompted by the discontinuing of the platform on which the old website was hosted, and with the aim of making the site informative and easy to use. The site is regularly updated and includes recordings of PC meetings, presentations made at meetings, and completed Q&As.

Information on PC activities and meetings has also been shared via emails direct to parents through the school, and via the Head Teacher's Friday email update. We are extremely grateful to the school's admin team for all their support with this. Although the PC also has its own mailing list, this has not been used during the pandemic with communication instead sent out via the school to ensure reaching all parents and carers. However, it is intended to look to using the mailing list for some PC work during the coming year.

The PC also carried out a survey of parents and carers in June 2021 to get an insight into the issues and priorities of parents which will inform planning for PC meetings and other activities in the future. We were delighted that the survey had a very good take up with a total of 185 responses across year groups and a wide variety of comments on different aspect of the PC's work. The report on the survey is published on the PC website.

8. Contact Information

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<https://jghspc.wordpress.com/>