

PORTLETHEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minutes of Virtual Meeting: Thursday 27 August 2020

Welcome:

Fiona Squires (Chair) welcomed all new and former parents/carers plus members of the Senior Leadership Team to the meeting. It was great to see so many people participating in the virtual meeting. Those who wished to be on the email circulation list for Minutes were invited to send their contact details to the Chair via the school email address or via Kirsty Campbell Robertson.

Present:

Fiona Squires (Chair), Erica Kemp (Treasurer), Alex Robertson, Andrew Cameron, Bryan Snelling, Denise Humphreys, Fiona Lindsay, G McColl, Jane Harrold, Ken Watson, Louisa Snelling, Nicola Cameron, Rachel Forbes, Tracey Robinson, Viv McNeil

16 other households attended

Neil Morrison (HT), Kirsty Campbell-Robertson (Acting DHT), Craig Cowie (DHT), Tom Liversedge (DHT)

Apologies:

Anne Wilkins, Erica Cargill, Elaine Northcroft, Nadine Bown (Secretary)

Approval of Previous Minutes:

Minutes of meeting held on 11 June 2020 were approved.

Financial Report:

Account Balance remains at £4048.30

Items of Business:

HEADTEACHER UPDATE

Neil Morrison reported that there was a positive atmosphere around the school and hoped that the guidelines issued pre return had enabled families and pupils to prepare for the procedures and protocols that were put in place rapidly and shortly before the start of the new academic year.

The August newsletter was issued today commending the ways all year groups – especially S1s - have settled into the new term. Staff are impressed with pupils' engagement, respectful attitudes, and pupils seem to be enjoying socialising within their year groups.

New Scottish Government Advice requiring use of masks has been communicated to pupils and families with the requirement for face coverings to be worn in communal areas, corridors and on school transport from 31 August.

There has been little national advice issued to departments delivering practical subjects *e.g.* HE and Technical subjects. Whilst other schools are focussing on theory only, the Portlethen Academy staff have worked together to create and deliver practical activities as well as theory.

The Active Schools Co-ordinator is in regular contact with the school and ready to relaunch a programme of After School Activities as national guidelines and local council advice allows. It is hoped that local community organisations

which book school premises re Aberdeenshire Council letting system (including Duke of Edinburgh Programme) will gradually restart activities this Autumn.

If Portlethen Academy is affected by a Covid-19 outbreak, then Public Health experts will manage the situation. If the situation shows extensive community transmission the most likely scenario would be a limited time closure of school, as seen elsewhere in Scotland. The school would then revert to online learning (not the Blended Learning model outlined in June). A question was raised regarding the implications of school closures/part closures at differing rates across Scotland and what effect this could have on an exam diet for May 2021. The delay in national guidance on this has been noted across Scotland and Unions are pursuing the matter. It will be several weeks before the outcomes are known so, at the moment, staff are working on the premise that assessments should be gathered to show progression.

S1 UPDATE AND YEAR GROUP Q AND A

Kirsty Campbell-Robertson reported that the new S1 pupils seemed settled, calm and respectful. Physical distancing measures in their designated theatre space was working well for breaks and lunchtimes. Informal feedback from pupils included enjoyment of greater independence, enjoying the variety of exciting subjects in different classrooms e.g. science and HE, and enjoying the excellent school canteen food options.

Parent feedback was positive. Parents reported that their children were enjoying the different format and types of lessons. In particular, the 'fantastic' Prefect Buddying System was greatly appreciated by parents and pupils. It was very successful in supporting the children as they learnt to navigate the new building and new routines each day. The prefects have also helped to lower anxieties some had about attending the Academy for the first time. One parent reported their child, understandably, had some pre-anxiety symptoms and that it was a relief to get back in to schooling, reacquaint with 'old' friendship groups and to start to build friendships with new groups.

In response to a question about submission of homework to be paper or online, different faculties would be using different systems and online platforms. More information will be sent to new parents about this.

SQA RESULTS, APPEALS PROCESS & COURSE CHOICE UPDATE

Craig Cowie outlined the SQA awards process that resulted in pupils being issued with SQA certificates.

Due to Covid-19 lockdown and national school closures the SQA exam diet did not take place in 2020 and teachers were instructed to produce evidence-based estimates for their pupils.

On the 4 August Portlethen Academy pupils received a total of 1435 awards for which teachers had submitted estimates in May. The SQA had upgraded 70 awards; 1012 were accepted; 353 were downgraded from teachers' original estimates.

However on 11 August, the Scottish Government decided to reinstate all downgraded awards to the original teachers' estimates. This affected 196 Portlethen Academy pupils who will be reissued with new awards/certificates on 8 September. There will be a limited appeals process which will allow for any administrative errors to be rectified but individual pupil awards will not be re-assessed by the SQA.

The 2020 attainment for Portlethen Academy is difficult to compare to previous years' results because national exams did not take place. The following gives a breakdown of results per year group using national criteria.

- S4 – number of pupils achieving 5 or more qualifications at level 5 (National 5) was 71/157 (45.2%)
- S5 – number of pupils achieving 3 or more qualifications at level 6 (Higher) was 62/139 (44.6%)
- *S6 – number of pupils achieving 5 or more qualifications at level 6 63/173 (36.4%)

*Because of the number of resits included in the S6 results the statistics may fall slightly

The Scottish Government will release the official data in September with the accurate data which will also pick up on some non SQA awards.

At Portlethen Academy, alongside SQA subject studies and exams, there is a wide range of awards and vocational courses undertaken by pupils which has had a high success rate of pupil achievements and includes the following...

- 17 x Awards (Pass) with school link courses at NESCoL (North East Scotland College)
- 2 x S6 pupils achieved Open Uni modules (YASS)
- 36 x S5/S6 Pupils achieved Foundation Apprenticeships Awards (the highest number of pupils in Aberdeenshire). Subjects included Accountancy, IT Software, Children and Young People, Health and Social Care Studies
- A further 9 pupils registered for a Creative and Digital Foundation Apprenticeship course supported by SHMU (Station House Media Unit) in February and in the short time available to them, 2 pupils achieved full awards (course and SVQ), 4 others achieved a course award while the remainder were successful with various modules

Portlethen Academy continues to roll out an increased list of Foundation Apprenticeship courses and numbers are high again for the forthcoming year with additions of Scientific Technologies, Engineering and Business at SCQF Level 6 and possible additions of Construction, Automotive and Hospitality courses at SCQF Level 4 and 5.

2 staff members of AFC Community Trust will also work with Portlethen Academy pupils 2 days per week and provide additional pathways for pupils to achieve awards related to Sport, Health and Wellbeing, Community and Enterprise.

S5 and S6 pupils continue with a variety of certificated awards and community work experience options which lead to qualifications.

Neil Morrison reflected that this demonstrates to new families the breadth of the secondary curriculum. There is a wide range of courses on offer to meet the needs of all pupils. The practical and vocational courses are very important as academic learning is not appropriate for everyone. Other schools are looking to Portlethen Academy as notable exponents of this breadth of curriculum. Craig Cowie has been involved in an educational group set up by Education Scotland looking at learner pathways for pupils in Scotland. In addition the Scottish Government is reviewing the whole exam system and Portlethen Academy and 5 other Scottish schools have been selected to be involved in this exercise.

GENERAL Q & A

Response from a new S1 parent saying it is heartening to see the breadth of opportunities in senior years. It was noted that the Career Ready Mentorship programme has been in use at the school since its inception along with similar options available to support and motivate pupils.

AOCB:

Fiona thanked the school staff for scheduling and intimating the meeting and thanked everyone for their contributions and participation in the meeting.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 1 October