

PORTLETHEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minutes of Virtual Meeting held on 11th June 2020

Present:

Fiona Squires (Chair), Erica Kemp (Treasurer), Nadine Bown (Secretary), Graeme McColl, Fiona Lindsay, Alex Robertson, Viveca McNeil, Elaine Northcroft, Erica Cargill, Tracey Robertson, Anne Wilkins

Neil Morrison (Head Teacher), Depute Head Teachers: Craig Cowie (YH S1 & S4), Kirsty Campbell-Robertson (YH S3 & S6), Tom Liversedge (YH S2 & S5). Rhona Mackenzie (PT Support for Learners Faculty), Kevin Rinchey (Modern Studies Teacher/PT Humanities Faculty), Jacqueline Rinchey (PT Maths Faculty), Laura Allan (PT & Auchlee Guidance Teacher)

Apologies:

Ken Watson

Approval of Previous Minutes:

Minutes of meeting held on 30th April were approved by those present.

Financial Report:

Account balance is £4,048.30

Items of Business:

Head Teachers Report

Neil Morrison began by acknowledging that it has been an exceptionally challenging time for all involved in education and welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Parent Council.

To enrich the virtual learning environment, the possibility of offering live lessons to pupils was discussed. `Google Meet` could be utilised for live interactive lessons or lessons could be recorded for pupils to access at a time convenient for their home situation. Aberdeenshire protocol for this style of teaching states that there needs to be a teacher and a moderator for both live and recorded lessons. This would put additional pressure on time constraints of teachers. Broadband capacity could be an area of concern and there have been some issues with both uploading by the teacher and downloading by pupils due to file sizes being too large and unstable internet connections. Some pupils have found it difficult working between the different platforms (e.g. teams/google) and parents have found it hard to track which subject is using which platform when trying to offer support. As part of a PSE lesson, Laura Allan conducted a survey with parents and pupils from two of the four 'houses'. Whilst parents were largely in favour of live lessons, pupils, for varying reasons, were not so keen. Where live lessons have been available some pupils have failed to join.

Teachers are becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of engagement by some pupils. This has been particularly prevalent in the senior phase and is being followed up by staff. It is highly likely that blended learning will continue for some time, therefore, it is imperative that pupils continue to keep pace with their learning. Failure to do so could see them falling behind and struggling to catch up due to time constraints for the teacher and pupils being at different levels when back in the classroom. The possibility of sending a weekly report to parents outlining their child's level of engagement was discussed.

The next school session is due to begin a week early with the 10th and 11th of August being inset days. Pupils will begin a phased return with a mixture of home and school learning from the 12th of August. There will be a focus on S1 induction during the first few days back at school with a small number of current pupils to support the process.

Social distancing guidelines will have huge implications on the running of the school. Timetabling needs to be carefully planned to reduce movement round the school and room capacity will be drastically reduced in line with the two-metre rule. It is estimated that one-third of pupils in each subject can be taught in a room at any one time. Given that there will be between 300 – 350 people in the Academy building each day, thought needs to be given to exit and entry points, toilet facilities, hygiene protocols and arrangements regarding breaks and lunches. The Academy Support Services Coordinator is currently looking at ways in which this can be managed. It is thought that the catering service will be reduced but cold food would be available.

Regarding the issue of school transport (e.g. a Newtonhill school bus, which is typically a 53seater, will only be able to transport 13 children,) there are not enough buses in the North East of Scotland to facilitate all the school bus routes. Priority will be given to those that need to travel, meaning that those who pay for a privilege pass could be without transport. Neil will be producing a phased return to school letter detailing how the Academy plans to work around these obstacles and push forward with plans for pupils' return to school.

Craig Cowie and Jacqueline Rinchey have been working on a revised timetable to facilitate a phased return which allows for a two-metre distancing policy within school. A spreadsheet showing what it may look like was put on screen. The whole timetabling area is extraordinarily complex, and it was acknowledged that this was a substantial piece of work. The new timetable will not affect subject choices but will impact how subjects are delivered. Where possible pupils in the senior phase will be taught by their subject teachers, however, this may be more difficult to achieve for those in the Broad General Education phase (S1-S3). Using this model, pupils will attend school for one week out of a block of three, the remaining two weeks will be online, home-based learning. Movement around the school will be minimised by pupils spending longer times in each subject (e.g. where possible, senior pupils may spend one day in a subject) and enhanced hygiene requirements will be enacted. Pupils in school will work a four-day week, allowing teachers to support home-based learning on a Friday.

To facilitate home based learning, the Academy currently has fifty computers out on loan to pupils. Thirty-two new Chromebooks will be bought to ensure that there is not a shortage when pupils are being taught in school.

The impact that blended learning will have for the SQA exam diet next year was discussed. If blended learning delivery continues through the new academic year, awards may have to be

granted through continuous assessment. Teaching Unions are lobbying the government for clarity.

The discussion then moved to the Track and Trace initiative and the impact this could have on pupils and teachers. Whilst this could be extremely problematic for staffing levels it is thought that the tight social bubbles in place would help reduce the number of staff and pupils required to self-isolate. Neil plans to engage extra supply teachers from the start of the new term to enable them to find their way around the Academy and get to know pupils. This should ensure cover is available if needed and allow for continuity.

Work to claim refunds for cancelled school trips is ongoing. The Academy has all the paperwork ready to file for insurance claims, however, the insurance company will not pay-out until there is certainty that the travel companies will not be issuing refunds. Claiming a refund for the skiing trip has been particularly problematic due to the travel company not replying to any correspondence, Aberdeenshire lawyers have been instructed to intervene. Neil would like to thank everyone for their patience while this frustrating situation is being resolved.

AOCB:

A discussion ensued around managing breaks and lunchtimes, it was thought that pupils may abandon social distancing rules at these times. The question was raised about encouraging pupils to remain in their social bubbles and make use of out-door recreational areas attached to the Academy instead of going off campus to the shops at lunchtimes. After some discussion it was decided that whilst this was a good idea it would be difficult to enforce.

Questions were asked about provisions for pupils who need additional support. It is anticipated that pupils will still be able access the Support Centre. Staff are working on a process to allow Pupil Support Workers to safely work with pupils who, for any given reason, are not able to remain in class or need in-class support. Personal Protective Equipment will be available for those that need it.

An additional question was raised re possibility of full-time access to school for any pupils that require it. That is not in the current plan but may be reviewed and Hubs will continue to provide care for vulnerable pupils and children of Essential Worker households.

The school remains in close contact with providers of Youth Apprenticeship courses and other courses delivered by NESCOL. Some Foundation Apprenticeships are developing digital and simulation work experience online.

Thanks were given to all staff for the phenomenal amount of work being carried out by school staff to support our young people. Please be assured that it is very much appreciated by all.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 20 August 2020