

PORTLETHEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minutes of Virtual Meeting: Thursday 1 October 2020

PRESENT

Fiona Squires (Chair), Eric Kemp (Treasurer), Ann Miller, Ava Mathieson, Susan McKechnie, Akmal Dzhililov, Erica Cargill, Denise Humphreys, Fiona Gibb, Graeme McColl, Hazel Willox, Jamie Snelling, Georgie Matthew, Paula Hardie, Elaine Northcroft, Fiona Lindsay, Tracey Robinson, Marcel Dike, Andrew Cameron, Louisa Snelling, Alex Robertson, Amanda Johnston, Gillian Smith, Anne Wilkinson,

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

APOLOGIES

Nadine Bown (Secretary), Ken Watson

WELCOME

Fiona welcomed all to the meeting and invited new attendees to send their email details to her (via the school) if wish emailed copy of Minutes.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

Minutes of meeting held on 27 August 2020 were approved.

CURRENT BANK BALANCE remains unchanged from previous meeting – £4048.30

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

Chair Update

Fiona reported her attendance at two Parent Council Chairs meetings including an update with Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Children's Services. See letter dated 21 Sept on school website.

Many groups within the Education sector have been protesting about John Swinney's continued delay in announcing plans for SQA exam/assessment diet and course work to be taught to pupils this year. Secondary School Parent Council Chairs in Aberdeenshire also discussed writing to John Swinney but as an announcement is expected within a few days it was decided to wait.

Correspondence received from the group of S6 pupils following the cancellation of their trip to Morocco re Youth Achievement Award Scheme. They are donating £2,000 of their raised funds to the Avon Academy in Morocco. They will also set aside funds for a Pupil Benefit Fund for future years' development of the course at Portlethen Academy and have offered to assist the PC at future fundraising events.

Parent Council has been invited to participate in discussions related to a draft document regarding Flexi Schooling where a young person is enrolled with a local authority school and receives some education 'out of school' as arranged and agreed with their parent/guardian.

School Update

Lauren Miller (SLT) will return from Maternity Leave in November. Part of Kirsty Campbell-Robertson's remit has been to cover Lauren's post and she will remain full time with the team thereby creating some extra capacity.

Neil Morrison reported that there is a good atmosphere around the school and noted positive attitudes of pupils as they engage in their daily learning and social interactions. Staff appreciate some aspects of school life have meant new ways of operating around the school and have been impressed with the way pupils have adapted to the strict procedures e.g. hygiene protocols, accessing and moving around the building, school travel.

Neil thanked all parents for the support they are giving and highlighted the commitment of all staff who are doing their best for those in the school community. Particularly pleased to hear positive reports from school transport staff re compliance with procedures on the buses. Feedback from members of the public has been positive re distancing and mask wearing in local shops. Neil encouraged all parents to support compliance so that no one becomes complacent about the important protocols and procedures. Wearing of masks is important and thicker masks are better than thin. Pupils know that snoods are not suitable replacements for masks.

Parents Comments

Parents were invited to provide feedback regarding 3 questions being asked of all pupils and staff.

What has gone well?

- *Good communication from teachers re any issues they were identifying e.g. missing homework deadlines or poorer standard of work than expected.*
- *Positive feedback to families and recognition for good work from teachers.*
- *Lot more information coming back from the school and communication excellent especially realising that teachers are under increased pressure re workloads.*
- *Reports that their child and friends are happy.*
- *Child's health seems better than usual after a return to school term when often picked up colds – Neil reported that a short spell of a cold circulated and affected some pupil groups.*
- *Seems normal – more so than expected as know that staff must be tired, but pupils are not tired by the new routines and return to school is good and more normal than expected.*

What has not gone well? and What could go better?

- *Anxiety levels are raised about assessments/class tests/exams.* Neil confirmed that staff are aware of and responding to this and are very frustrated that John Swinney's announcement about SQA plans have been so delayed. The announcement is due next week, and staff will speak with senior pupils about the subsequent ramifications before school finishes for the October break.
- *Concern re implications of long-term staff absence and SQA course delivery.* Neil informed us that all schools in the shire have been finding it difficult to employ specialist subject teachers to provide cover and he is hopeful that this will be addressed by start of term 2. It is important to appreciate that there is no significant surplus of teaching staff in the NE and, in fact, there are shortages in many subject areas. Where subject specialists cannot be recruited, staff endeavour to support senior classes and are grateful that there are a number of supply staff who are very loyal to our school. All schools are competing for supply cover and we are grateful that we remain their preferred option.
- *Lack of visibility how first year pupils are doing - concerned about 1st year pupils loss of teaching time since March and wondering what the learning implications of that have been for individual pupils and year group as a whole.* Neil and Tom reported that a 'Settling in' report is due for that year group at start of second term and staff will be discussing this point.
- *Observation that staff would have had difficulty providing tracking assessment information for Senior pupils after only 5 weeks of teaching.* Usually, tracking reports at this stage would have included a month of coursework delivery prior to summer holiday. Some courses did manage to do this virtually but more difficult to achieve with aspects of practical based subjects. Teachers also had the dilemma of removing teaching time to carry out formal assessments.

SQA

Craig Cowie had hoped that 'Insight' analysis of 2020 SQA results would have been available to report, but the data has not been published yet. This reports attainment data from all schools in Scotland. As this has been a year like no other it will be difficult to make comparisons with other years' data.

On Tuesday 6 October, John Swinney is due to announce SQA plans regarding requirements for Senior pupil courses. There is considerable concern - nationally - that a diet of exams will test courses that are already running across Scotland but that course requirements are liable to change. There is also concern that course completion may be interrupted in individual schools if there are intermittent and varied school closures. Neil has been one of the Head Teachers contributing to the Priestley Report, commissioned by Scottish government, and represented Portlethen Academy and pupils' issues within that group.

Daily Contact Time

Kirsty Campbell-Robertson provided an update about plans to reintroduce DCT and links to Excelerate goals.

Portlethen Academy is one of four Aberdeenshire schools involved in Excelerate. This is a pilot project, developed in partnership with the Wood Foundation, which focusses on project-based learning relevant to the local work sector. It has direct links to Curriculum for Excellence, Developing the Young Workforce Agenda and GIRFEC.

<https://www.thewoodfoundation.org.uk/developing-young-people-in-scotland/excelerate/>

Daily Contact Time has been on hold since return to school but there are plans to reintroduce this to the daily timetable in November. Elements of the current whole school briefing will continue as this has been an effective communication tool and DCT time will provide increased opportunities to build on Excelerate goals and vision, including development of pupils' skill sets, building relationships within the school environment and local community and encouraging a greater 'pupil voice'. The Principal Teacher of Pupil Development will have substantial input to DCT development.

Linked to the conversations around meaningful work experiences for pupils, Craig Cowie reported that the three new Foundation Apprenticeship courses awaiting confirmation have had the go ahead: Construction, Automotive, Hospitality – all at level 4/5. Hospitality students were inspired by a recent visiting teacher and Construction Course students are displaying a high level of engagement. A school space has been identified for running the Automotive Course. It is apparent that the FA courses are providing a high quality level of teaching and learning related to practical preparation for transition to positive post school workplaces. It is most encouraging to hear about the growth in course provision and engagement of pupils.

Other

Tom Liversedge reported that staff continue to be actively engaged in matters related to Health and Wellbeing. SHANARRI surveys provide feedback regarding how pupils feel about eight indicators: safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible, and included. Compared with the last two surveys (during school closure and at start of term) most results are stable. However, 'feeling included' has lowered and this may be related to lack of provision of extracurricular activities which engage pupils at lunchtimes and in 'after school' activities. At the moment, the main area of concern for Senior pupils seems related to SQA plans for coursework and exam uncertainties and staff are supporting pupils with this. Portlethen Academy has good resources available to support pupils. Many staff have been trained to use LIAM (Let's Introduce Anxiety Management) aimed at early intervention and all Aberdeenshire school clusters are being allocated a Schools Counsellor to work with pupils who can be referred by Guidance teachers.

'Contingency Plan' discussions are ongoing. If significant numbers of staff and/or pupils are required to self-isolate at a future date, there may be a partial closure of the school – possibly for pupils in S1-3. All faculties are preparing for alternative methods of teaching delivery should there be full or partial closures. In the meantime, the main goal is to keep the possibility of virus transmission as low as possible and to keep the school open. This requires rigorous compliance with the measures put in place by the school and appreciation is extended to all who are supporting the pupils to achieve this.

A discussion followed regarding the benefits of a positive model of a 'blend of learning' between school and home – not the blended learning model of '1 week in 3 in school' but of a genuine blending so that there is not a polarisation of learning in 2 separate environments. Neil Morrison reported that some interesting work is ongoing in Falkirk and Stirling where every pupil has access to Wi-Fi and a Chromebook so that the whole education focus can be on blended learning in its broadest sense. Also, there are great opportunities e.g. in the Foundation Apprenticeship models where there is already shared learning. It is generally recognised that the skills young people need during this challenging time includes learning about the effective use of technology to support their learning.

AOB

Nadine has served as Secretary for two years and is not able to stand for re-election at the AGM due to other commitments. Fiona extended an invitation to the Parent Council members to consider volunteering or nominating another for the role of Secretary. Please contact Fiona before the next meeting.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

AGM and Meeting: Thursday 26 November 2020, 7 30 pm.