

PORTLETHEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minutes of Virtual AGM and Parent Council Meeting – 26 November 2020

Present:

Neil Morrison (Head Teacher), Kirsty Campbell-Robertson (Acting Depute Head Teacher), Craig Cowie (Depute Head Teacher),

Fiona Squires (Chair), Erica Kemp (Treasurer), Nadine Bown (Secretary), Tracey Robinson, Elaine Northcroft, Ken Watson, Viveca McNeil, Graeme McColl, Fiona Lindsey, Andrew and Nicola Cameron, Yekaterina Dzhililova, Helen MacLean, Shameem Miah, Konstantinos Rizopoulos, Karen Jenkins, Paul Eke, Denise Humphreys

Apologies:

Erica Cargill, Gillian Smith, Nicola Cameron, Louisa Snelling

Minute of Previous AGM:

It was noted that the Minutes of AGM held on 30th October 2019 had been approved at the subsequent Parent Council Meeting on 30/10/19. This was accepted by those present.

Chair's Report:

The meeting was formally opened by Fiona Squires who welcomed and thanked everyone for attending. Fiona then delivered her report:

Research suggests that when school and parents work together the outcomes for children in terms of attainment and achievement are better. This is one of the main reasons why we meet together as Portlethen Academy Parent Council.

I personally believe that building healthy relationships within a Parent Council contributes to a greater understanding of children's education experiences and so I begin by thanking you all for your support of the school and for one another within this group.

Over the past year, the membership and attendance rates at Parent Council meetings have risen from 14 parents to today's list of 40 parents. (Some are unable to attend this evening. As the numbers have gradually risen, we have had excellent administrative backup from the school and Kirsty Campbell-Robertson in particular, who currently schedules and hosts our online meetings.

In addition to the healthy number of attendees recently, it is also very good to have the consistent support of a dynamic and committed Senior Management Team led by HT Neil Morrison, who is the only member of staff required to attend PC meetings. At informal meetings with other PC Chairs in Aberdeenshire we at Portlethen Academy are envied for the high level of staff interest and participation in our Parent Council. We do not take this for

granted and take the opportunity now to record our appreciation to Neil Morrison and all the staff who help to ensure that this is indeed a partnership of parents and staff working together.

With the Coronavirus pandemic necessitating so much change in our daily lives the transition to virtual meetings has been a huge learning curve for many of us and although we have been unable to meet in school since March, the PC has continued to meet regularly and participate fully in relevant matters.

Over the last 12 months we held 6 meetings. Since April these have been conducted on a virtual platform and many of you have sent positive feedback after these meetings which has been very encouraging and well received. Thank you.

The nature of attendance at any PC is that there is a constant turnover of new families welcomed into this group and yearly farewells made to families leaving the school. So, as we attract new members every year, it is worth highlighting and reminding all present that at PC meetings we cannot discuss our own individual children, other individual pupils, families, teachers or individual school issues. Such concerns are always to be referred to the school.

Crucially, the Parent Council deals with more general concerns which affect many or all children in the school.

It is worth underlining that our remit is to work collaboratively with the school, and I am happy to report that this collaborative style has worked very well and harmoniously during the ten years I have been attending.

I know from your correspondence with me that some of you are new to the Aberdeenshire area and so I take a few moments to highlight all Parent Councils' main areas of interest.

We ought to be and are concerned with the following 7 areas:

- *Supporting Learning and Teaching – this is of prime importance*
- *Contributing to the School Improvement Plan and school policies*
- *Supporting the school in making sure communication is parent friendly*
- *Representing the views of parents in the school*
- *Recruitment to the school's Senior Leadership Team and School Inspection*
- *Representing parents' views to the education authority on issues that are of concern to parents, pupils, and staff*
- *Fundraising to help the school add value to what it offers to children.*

Over the last year we at PAPC have welcomed visitors' presentations and participated in wide ranging discussions which are fully documented in relevant Minutes.

This has included the Senior Pupil Youth Achievement Group regarding their Morocco Trip. As a result of their presentation we committed to support them in their various Fundraising activities and made a substantial donation to their project.

It included a 'Cost of the School Day' presentation regarding financial implications for families with pupils attending school.

SLT and Faculty or Department 'Heads' gave us regular updates regarding their own specific areas of responsibility.

We received regular updates including staffing changes, subject choices per year group and alternative pathways and awards, effects of Covid-19 closure of school, challenges of digital learning and teaching, crucial work of the Support for Learning Dept, support for pupils whose mental health is affected or exacerbated by Covid-19 pandemic and school closures, SQA courses, SQA processes and results...and more.

As Chair, I attended the Excelerate Conference in Aberdeen, Young Philanthropists presentations, several PC Chairs meetings with Director of Education, and informal PC Chair meetings organised by Aberdeenshire's Parental Engagement officer. Recently NM and I attended a meeting regarding the impact of Covid-19 on Children and Families specific to Kincardine and Mearns.

We are currently in talks about developing the content of the PC page on the website and hope that this can be continued by forthcoming PC personnel.

I am genuinely sorry to say that this is my last AGM as my youngest child is now in the last year of school. This is the case for another 4 or 5 parents. I am very pleased that we have a nomination for handover to a new Secretary this evening and I ask you all to consider taking a part over the next few years in supporting the PC by sharing the responsibilities of Chair, Treasurer and Secretary.

I extend a heartfelt thank you to Erica Kemp, the current Treasurer, for her efficient and calm manner in dealing with all things financial. Erica also provides wise and prompt feedback to any questions posed to the office bearers. It is imperative that we identify a new Treasurer soon to ensure a smooth handover of bank accounting information and documentation before the end of the academic year. So, if any new members have experience or wish to learn about this role please contact me.

We are also indebted to Nadine Bown who has produced excellent minutes of our meetings and will handover that responsibility at the end of tonight's meeting. Thank you, Nadine, for the time you have given to the detail and accuracy evident in your Minute writing. You have a flair for turning our discussions into such beautifully concise reporting which is greatly appreciated by all of us.

The role of Chair in this group has been made enjoyable and very rewarding because of the tremendous support we receive from Neil Morrison and I make special mention of how much I, and we, appreciate his commitment, wisdom, energy and respect for all in the Portlethen Academy Community.

In conclusion I finish by extending more gratitude than my words can express to you, the parents and staff who support and contribute so much to this group of Parent Council. We all know that this is a time of extra pressure for many people which is why your support is so valued and appreciated. Thank you.

Parent Council members thanked Fiona for her continued enthusiasm and commitment. The Chairperson's report was accepted by those present.

Treasurer's Report:

Opening Balance at 30/10/19	£4,568.80
Current Bank Balance (last statement dated 30/01/2020)	£4,048.30

2020 Breakdown:

Income (since 30/10/2019)	
Aberdeenshire Council Annual Payment – 7/11/19	£499.50

Expenditure:

Morocco Trip:

Occasional Alcohol Licence (13/11/19)	£10.00
(28/01/19)	£10.00
Donation to trip fund (15/11/29)	£1,000.00

Total Expenditure (from 30/10/2019) **£1020.00**

Over the years, from 2014 (where the account records begin) to present day, over £8,000 has been spent within the school to supplement and enhance pupil experiences during their time at Portlethen Academy.

Funding has been given for:

Netball Strips	Christmas Fayres
Pantomimes & Stage Equipment	Geography Equipment
Language Department	Textile & Design Mannequins
Photography Enrichment Lessons	Rugby Shirts
Lego Models	Drama Club
Ukuleles	School Ties
Youth Achievement activities	

Head Teachers Report:

Neil began by thanking all for their continued and highly valued support. He reflected on this difficult year where he felt it had been a privilege to work so closely with pupils, staff and parents. He commended all for their resilience and community spirit in such times of uncertainty.

Neil then went on to discuss the work that has taken place in partnership with the Wood Foundation and Excelerate Learning. The aim of which is to develop project-based learning/skills and develop collaboration between schools and industry. This enables high quality teaching and innovative ways of delivering skills-based education through experience in the workplace. As a result of the pandemic and the ever-changing landscape in the jobs market, this partnership is now more relevant than ever. The number of curricular courses available at the Academy has widened in response to the labour market and aims to encompass key growth sectors. Pupils can gain practical experience at SQA accredited levels 5 and 6 together with National exams.

The work being carried out by the Academy has been recognised as good practice by Education Scotland. Craig Cowie (Depute Head Teacher) represented Aberdeenshire at a recent curriculum Development Course regarding Foundation Apprenticeships. Neil Morrison and Craig Cowie were interviewed and invited to provide thoughts and evidence surrounding curriculum development as part of a discussion at National Level.

Portlethen Academy is currently working in partnership with Mackie and Mearns Academies as part of Validated Self Evaluation. Portlethen Academy was the first school to be evaluated, all staff found the experience beneficial. Although feedback was extremely positive, there is now a clear agenda for few areas of improvements. Staff look forward to resuming evaluations when the pandemic situation allows.

Neil then moved on to discuss staffing, he was pleased to report that Portlethen Academy has a positive reputation as a place to work. Two new teachers have recently been appointed, a Principle Guidance Teacher and a Chemistry teacher. There is a current vacancy for a Part-Time Maths Teacher.

Neil then reflected on the challenges and implications of the lockdown in March. He commended all staff for their unwavering support and endurance in the move to blended learning. It was not easy for many reasons; home circumstances, differing levels of access, and ensuring pupils had the correct equipment to engage with home learning. The ICT department did some amazing work in ensuring everything came together, for which Neil is ever grateful. Pupil engagement varied and was tracked by support staff to ensure the health and wellbeing of pupils. Mostly there seemed to be a preference towards being in the building and working together.

The return to school in August with just two weeks' notice of the ever-changing safety requirements once again presented a challenge. Everyone pulled together and did a great job in facilitating the process. Once back at school daily pupil briefings have enabled consistent

messages around compliance and commitment to procedures. Neil paid testimony to parents for their role in encouraging compliance.

Neil expressed concern for senior pupils undertaking college courses or certificated exams. There is a lot of uncertainty about how things will be sustained should pandemic levels rise. He is also concerned about the effect of the pandemic on pupils' home situations. Consequently, guidance staff are working hard to support pupils and direct families to various services that could be of help.

All staff remain committed to providing school experiences based on establishing hope for the future for all our young people.

Election of Office Bearers:

The following Office Bearers were elected/re-elected and Tracey Robinson was welcomed as the new Secretary.

Chair: Fiona Squires (Proposer N Bown / Seconder G McColl)
Treasurer: Erica Kemp (Proposer F Squires / Seconder T Robinson)
Secretary: Tracey Robinson (Proposer F Squires / Seconder E Kemp)

This concluded the AGM section of tonight's meeting.

Approval of Previous Minutes:

Minutes of meeting held on 1st October 2020 were approved by those present.

Matters Arising from Previous Minutes:

There were no matters arising.

Items of Business:

Feedback from chairs meeting and impact of COVID-19 on Families

Members of Secondary School Senior Leadership Teams and Parent Council Chairs attended a briefing to raise awareness of the impact of the pandemic in the Kincardine and Mearns area of Aberdeenshire. The economic landscape is becoming very uncertain for many families. The use of food banks has risen significantly, and teachers are seeing the impact on pupils. It was also noted that where senior pupils have reached the age to take a part-time job to fund hobbies and interests, there are now very few opportunities to do so.

Guidance staff are conscious of the impact on pupils and families and are ready to respond sensitively in providing direction and support. Schools are in a receipt of a Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) that could be used towards helping to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

Christine McLennan (Education Officer, Parental Engagement) continues to suggest that Parent Councils should be sensitive when initiating school fund raising activities/fun days and try to keep costs to families as low as possible.

Neil expressed his appreciation for the relationship that the Academy has with Public Health Scotland. Weekly updates have provided timely and invaluable advice.

SQA Planning and Procedures 2020/21

The next update on key dates for National 5 estimates and assessments to be submitted will be released on the 10th of December. It was also noted that the situation for Higher and Advance Higher could change depending on the pandemic situation.

The senior leadership team have permission from the Local Authority to run an assessment period/exam diet from the 11- 22 January 2021. This will be conducted in the same way as previous years prelims and will mostly take place in the Games Hall. Catch-up days will be available should pupils be absent due to ill health or self-isolation. It will be necessary, where possible for pupils to wear a face covering (type 2R fluid resistant) and be 1.25 meters apart. Neil asked for our thoughts on the wearing of face coverings and any impact this could have on pupils' attainment. It was unanimously agreed that although not ideal it was a wise precaution at this time. Alternative arrangements will be put in place for those with additional support needs where, depending on numbers, social distancing may not be possible within the Support for Learning Hub. It was noted that the age bracket of current invigilators puts them in the 'at risk category', working in a hall with large numbers of pupils could be deemed too risky. Therefore, it may be necessary for staff to support the Chief Invigilator during the prelims.

Funding Requests

Simon King requested funding for cameras to be used by the Photography Enrichment Class and the Academy Photography Club. The Enrichment class currently comprises of around 22 pupils working towards a National Progression Award (NPA) at level 5. The Photography Club is extremely popular and has around 140 members. Current school cameras are over 20 years old and do not have full manual control. The request was for 5 - 10 good quality used cameras at a price of £100 each. This request was supported by those present and £1,000 was approved for 10 cameras.

Jess Copner submitted a funding request for a whole school 360 degree camera. This type of camera is useful for providing a whole school interactive tour, would be a means of sharing good practice, allows pupils to showcase their learning, familiarises pupils with workplaces and allows those who cannot currently access the school a way to see the work being carried out by pupils. The price for this is £259.00. This request was supported by those present and the full amount of £259.00 was approved.

Leaver Profile

Leaver profiles highlight the skills and qualifications pupils will need to succeed in the current jobs market. There was not sufficient time to discuss this item in any depth, therefore, this will be an item on the Agenda of the next Parent Council Meeting.

AOCB

A question was asked about when to expect tracking and settling-in reports for S1 – S3 pupils. It was discussed that there would be two tracking reports and a self-reflection and evaluation report. Some year groups have recently received a tracking report. Neil reported that pupils have been resilient and picked up their learning at a good pace. He was also pleased to inform us that pupils are settling-in very well and not displaying the disruptive behaviour that has been reported by some other schools.

Date of Next Meeting:

Thursday 28 January 2021