

PORTLETHEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minutes of Virtual Meeting held on 30th April 2020

Present:

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

Apologies:

Anne Wilkins and Gillian Smith.

Approval of Previous Minutes:

Minutes of meeting held on 4 March 2020 were approved by those present.

Financial Report:

Account balance is £4,048.30

Items of Business:

Head Teachers Report

Neil began by discussing the school's response to the ever-changing circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to rapidly changing situations this was a challenging time for all. Measures were put in place to ensure all staff and pupils had technology to access online learning and to maintain social interaction (see email of 19th March). School computers have been available and delivered to those who did not have the correct level of IT support available to them at home. Virtual teaching has been a huge learning curve for all involved, gauging the volume and level of work to be provided has been difficult without face to face interaction. Teaching a class collectively has not been possible due to differing home circumstances (see letter of 20th April). Portals used are Teams, Glow, My Maths and Google Classroom, all of which staff and pupils are familiar with. Zoom has not been through Aberdeenshire GDPR or procurement and therefore, cannot be used by the school.

Neil concluded that plans are in place to create the new academic year timetable as per previous years. However, these are uncertain times, therefore, there will be virtual meetings with the various national bodies to discuss what the new term may look like. It is becoming apparent that schools may need a robust virtual learning environment in a blended learning format in preparation for changing situations.

Craig Cowie is currently working on finalising the 2020/21 school timetable and subject column structure. He has sent out links to various courses for S4 and S5 pupils (see letter emailed 27th April). Pupils have been encouraged to explore what is available related to next year's choices (eg Bitesize/Scholar), extend their subject knowledge, clarify subject choice is right for them and ultimately buy themselves more time for when the new academic year begins. Virtual courses for practical based subjects have been difficult to come by. It was brought to our attention that Halliday Fraser Munroe, an award-winning design practice, offers free online work experience courses to school aged pupils. The Senior Leadership Team will look at gaining access to this provision.

Kirsty Campbell-Robertson discussed the accredited online Employability and Personal Finance courses for Senior pupils (see letter emailed 27th April). To scaffold learning, commentary will be added to the current PowerPoint presentations. For those in the Broad General Education phase (S1 – S3), the aim is for work to be given for 3 subjects per day and be provided on set days to help pupils to manage their time. Staff are tracking engagement of all year groups regarding work that is being set.

Rhona MacKenzie, Principal Teacher of Additional Support for Learners Faculty, highlighted that some pupils need and are used to having support to access the curriculum. Support for Learning staff are available at all times to assist pupils with organisation, differentiate tasks and encourage engagement. Guidance staff are working closely with this department and staff are constantly developing new ways of delivering support and engaging with pupils and families.

Kevin Rinchey, Modern Studies Teacher and Principal Teacher of Humanities, reported on the perspective of class teachers and commented that staff had responded swiftly to the digital and technological challenges that the school closure brought. He explained that every pupil in every year has access to online learning with timeframes for completion and for feedback. If tasks are found to be less engaging than others, then teachers review and modify material. They are constantly looking for, and sharing, creative strategies to encourage and facilitate increased engagement.

Tom Liversedge discussed measures put in place to ensure wellbeing. All pupils were able to access a Shanarri feedback form, the indicators represent eight areas, they include: safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included. Eighty-two percent of pupils completed the survey. Wellbeing and engagement of vulnerable children is checked regularly and parents/carers contacted should there be concerns. Insight software enables Teachers and Guidance teams to identify where pupils have not been engaging and measures are put in place to encourage and support.

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A member of the Parent Council asked if there was any way to inject the element of inspiration which is obviously lacking when engaging with online learning and not actually discussing subjects with a teacher and peers. There has been a similar train of thought between staff, discussions are ongoing around measures that could be taken, perhaps in the form of a video or group call.

It was suggested that consideration should be given to a virtual discussion group for parents/carers and the School Leadership Team. This would enable achievements to be shared and hopefully answer specific questions and concerns.

Concerns were raised by a parent council member regarding School Trips. It was brought to Neil's attention that money is still being taken from some families' bank accounts to pay for trips that cannot take place. If payment is stopped or the School cancels, we are in breach of contract and lose money (see letter of 28th April from Laurence Findlay). Neil will continue to work with Aberdeenshire Councils Insurance Department to work on hopefully resolving this complex situation as soon as possible.

We would like to sincerely thank all members of staff for the outstanding thought and care that has been put into ensuring the support of our children during these exceptional circumstances. We appreciate what a difficult time this must be for all and applaud the measures that have so quickly been put into place to keep us informed of relevant information, ensure wellbeing and provide continuity of learning.

Date of Next Meeting: To be confirmed