

PORTLETHEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

Minutes of virtual meeting Thursday 4 February 2021

PRESENT

Fiona Squires (Chair), Erica Kemp (Treasurer), Tracey Robinson (Minute Secretary), Anne Wilkinson, Gillian Smith, Fiona Lindsay, Nadine Bown, Viv Persson, Nicola Cameron, Andrew Cameron, Yekaterina Dzhalilov, Hope Eke, Louisa Snelling, Denise Humphreys, Karen Jenkins, Shameem Miah, Konstantinos Rizopoulos

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

Parent Forum attendees: 11 - Ann Miller, Fiona Gibb, Tracey Innes, Nikola Lancaster, Sandy Beattie, Gale Beattie, Ngozi Madubogwu, Nichola Reilly, Minesh Chopra, Jan Griffiths, Lesley Robertson

APOLOGIES

Ken Watson

WELCOME

Fiona Squires welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Tracey Robinson for taking up the role of Secretary and Nadine Bown for her work as outgoing Secretary.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on 26 November 2020 were approved

FINANCIAL UPDATE

£	
4,048.30	previous balance @ 26/11/20
499.50	income from Aberdeenshire Council
1, 279.00	outgoings (cameras for Portlethen Academy as approved in the previous meeting and committee expenses)
£3,268.80	current balance

SCHOOL UPDATE

1. Learning and Teaching

Neil Morrison reported that the current approach of timetabling is for tutorial sessions of 30mins. This appears to work well for older pupils but younger pupils are more reticent to interact so teachers are using questions and issues that arise during the week to inform these sessions. The use of time slots reflects the timetable where possible and gives both structure and flexibility. It has been frustrating for teachers as they are not permitted to record lessons which absent pupils can access later. Local and national education staff continue to pursue this with John Swinney.

Kirsty Campbell-Robertson reported that staff continue to track engagement of pupils in all year groups. This is proactive to determine if there is anything the school can do to give additional support to pupils. In addition teachers reach out individually to pupils where appropriate.

Tom Liversedge reported that the Guidance Team is working to ensure pupil wellbeing and engagement. Chromebooks have been issued to those who need them, ably supported by technical staff. SHANARRI surveys with pupils and staff continue to monitor wellbeing.

A click and collect service has been set up for maths jotters, (as with art materials and musical instruments). McColls donated 500 carrier bags to enable the jotters to be packaged/collected in a Covid secure way.

2. SQA

Craig Cowie reported that the SQA recently moved the assessment deadline from 28 May to 18 June, which currently means that the latest to assess pupils is the end of May as there is a quality assurance process to be undertaken.

SQA have advised that the current focus is to be on teaching and learning. In relation to assessment, SQA have been releasing exam materials which schools can opt to use. However their guidelines are premised on young people being in schools to sit the assessments. This is difficult, as it is not known when young people will return to school, or if they will need to take further time off re Track and Trace or what guidance will be in place e.g. social distancing, as this will determine how many young people can physically be in a classroom/exam hall.

Meetings with Principle Teachers are ongoing to consider how to undertake quality assessments in the time available. SQA co-ordinators in Aberdeenshire are meeting frequently to ensure consistency across Aberdeenshire including training for teachers and devising a robust verification process.

A parent asked if the school could ensure that young people be made aware of the standards for the SQA assessments given that some year groups have not had the opportunity to sit formal exams or prepare for class assessments using prelim exams. School staff are discussing the best way to do this in individual departments. This is one of several considerations which Aberdeenshire schools have raised with the SQA including concerns that there are only 75-80 days of school left to cover course work, there is a need to complete courses and facilitate practical coursework, there is a lack of knowledge around timelines for return, guidance etc.

Parents and teachers are aware that young people are finding the uncertainty stressful and have a lack of experience in sitting formal exams under timed conditions. Also concern expressed about how potential employers are viewing predicted grades. Noted that younger children are also suffering from anxiety and stress. Guidance and Pupil Support staff are attending specific COVID

19 Mental Health Well-being Courses to enhance the resources available to support pupils in all year groups.

3. Return of pupils to school

The First Minister has announced that 5-8% of senior pupils will be able to return to school for work on practical subjects / subjects with a practical element. This is over and above pupils currently attending the 'hub' for key worker children and other identified pupils.

On 16 February it will be confirmed if young people can return on 22 February. Schools will receive the guidance and advice on 10 February including the social distancing required, although this coincides with holidays/INSET so, in reality, only 3 days to contact young people. There may be about 60 pupils back week beginning 22 February.

The uncertainty over the number of pupils coming back, dates for return and the social distancing required make it difficult to plan. The rep for Aberdeenshire schools has raised these issues with Scottish Government. Parent Council Chairs are due to meet with the Director of Education and these concerns will be raised. Parent Council recognised the huge amount of planning effort required for such a swift paced and changing environment.

There has been no announcement in relation to the final day of school for S6 pupils and other school leavers.

4. School developments

Kirsty Campbell-Robertson began with an update regarding the 'Leaver Profile'. Over the last few years the school has worked in partnership with the Wood Foundation (Excelerate Project) to develop and build on the School Improvement Plan. In particular, to widen the curricular offer and enhance pupils' experience.

Parents from each year group, in particular S1 – S3, will be invited to participate in an engagement exercise - 'Visioning Session' - in March, to identify and gather data from a wide range of industry/ business links/ employers/ pupils/ parents/ other educational establishments regarding questions about the skills, attributes and experiences required by a pupil by the time they leave school.

This will inform forward planning re the School Leaver Profile and will feed into the reintroduction of an extended Daily Contact Time to be known as Clans which is due for roll out later in the Summer term. Each 30 minute session will focus on individualised and group skills development, health and well-being, and will encourage learning and ownership. (The House system will remain.)

In discussions, many parents were very supportive of this move to a Clans model. In response to a question about change of timetable, (currently there is a mix of 55 and 50 minute periods in the school day,) and specifically reducing the 55 minute periods to a standardised 50 minutes, staff responded that this had been examined and evidence from other schools using this model witnessed an increase in pupil wellbeing accompanied by a rise in attainment. Portlethen Academy is committed to developing further the rise of attainment that Portlethen has seen over the last 8 years and across educational establishments the health and wellbeing of pupils is becoming of increasing importance alongside the importance of learning and attainment. There is strong evidence from other schools in the UK, that this model achieves outstanding results and

schools have had exceptional reviews from educational inspections. Whole school communication about these developments has been overtaken by issues related to the lockdown practicalities and staff intend to communicate further on the School Leaver Profile and the development of Clans. There was a positive response from parents at the meeting who volunteered to be part of the Visioning Session.

Reporting and Parents Evenings

There has been a successful virtual Parents Evening event regarding curricular and subject choice for S2 parents and pupils. Further Curricular Choice sessions are scheduled for the next few weeks and Guidance staff in particular continue to support pupils with their subject choices. Information about reporting will be included in the next whole school letter.

Staffing

Neil Morrison and Tom Liversedge will be retiring at the end of the academic year but gave assurances that they are committed to the end! The Parent Council will be involved in the recruitment of the new Head Teacher. The recruitment process will see an increase in the number of Depute Head Teachers (one more than currently) as the school role is increasing.

The increase in school role, predicted to be above 860, will also mean recruitment of an additional Guidance Teacher and an additional 'house' will be created, Elswick House, in time for the timetable change. Some pupils will be reallocated to the new house, which will be done in Clan groups rather than individuals. There will be a consultation on the Elswick logo and colour.

Regarding staffing, the school is/will be advertising posts in Maths, Science and Modern Languages. Increased roll will allow for additional recruitment.

Date of next meeting to be confirmed

Fiona drew the meeting to a close thanking staff for their time, administrative help and updates. She also voiced appreciation of the Parent Council to staff for their hard work and to parents at the meeting for their support to pupils and to the school.