



## Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

**Tuesday 5 March 2019**

**PRESENT:** Morag Coull, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Chris Ann Holt, Kim Milton, Elaine Mitchell, Dawn Milroy, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Marion Montgomery, Karen Macangus, Karen McClymont, Aileen McKellar, Karen Perks

**APOLOGIES:** Dawn Black, Sonia Cooper, Paula Durward, Lorna Findlay, Andrea Forster, Fiona Harris, Fiona Hogg, Carol Howie, Lisa Macaulay, Michelle McGill, Allison McIntyre, Marc Nunn, Fiona Ritchie, Margaret Sweetnam

### 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Aileen McKellar had volunteered to chair the meeting. Aileen welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies for absence were noted.

### 2. PLASTIC REDUCTION PLAN

Louise Moir introduced Rhona and Ella both S6 students. She explained that the girls had developed a plan for further reducing waste within the school and had begun by looking at what measures Mackie and Aberdeenshire Council currently employ to reduce waste. This had involved meeting with various relevant parties, including Council officers and catering staff.

Rhona explained that the plan had arisen out of one lunchtime when as a group, sitting in the canteen, they had become aware of the amount of single-use plastic being used. They had talked about what else the school could be doing to reduce the use of plastic, because they cared about the environment and wanted to play their part.

From discussions, they had learned that no other school in Aberdeenshire is plastic free so their target is Mackie becoming the first plastic free school, and that is what they want to work towards. Louise said that the students have driven the initiative and progress has been made. It was recognised however that there are various hurdles to overcome. For instance, the canteen holds 200 seated but a recent census showed that 712 meals were served. Also, plastic cartons are not environmentally friendly but compostable cartons are very expensive which would of course be passed on in the price of meals, and boxes are not recyclable because of contamination from the foodstuffs they had contained. The possibility of people bringing their own boxes had been debated but that would be against the canteen's hygiene regulations. However, the canteen staff have been very pro-active and plastic cutlery will no longer be available. More cutlery has been obtained as well as a quantity of plates plus plastic covers, so that food can be taken out of the canteen, and receptacles are being placed around the school where cutlery can be left. The plans seem to be working thus far.

Louise advised that the Council are still in the process of establishing ongoing mechanisms to process and recycle waste. Stuart Gray is participating in the Carbon Reduction Group and several schools, including Mackie, will be trialling recycling bins to see which is the most effective and easy to use, with different types of bins in each school.



Louise advised that the group has been given a dedicated notice board to post relevant information which will be helpful for educating everyone on the reasons for the action being taken. Cllr Dickinson said that someone had contacted her about Stonehaven aiming for a plastic-free town, which would obviously involve the local schools and a pledge would be required from Aberdeenshire Council. She added that of course it is worthwhile to remove single-use plastic where possible, but there are numerous factors to consider such as pill boxes in care homes, which as yet have no available alternatives.

Cllr Dickinson said that she was confident however that significant progress can be made, and that targets will be achieved but it will take time. She detailed relevant facts and figures re waste and disposal and undertook to forward them to Louise for inclusion on the notice board,

Louise said that there are always little pieces of the “jigsaw” that have to be resolved, for instance if the number of bins in each corridor is increased it raises the question of who has responsibility for emptying them – janitorial or cleaning staff. There will be an impact and this has to be discussed and agreed with their respective line managers before the bins are put in place. Dawn Milroy suggested that pupils could be involved in this and Louise said that some pupils participate in their tutor groups. Dawn suggested that Duke of Edinburgh volunteers might be keen to become involved and volunteer their services. It was agreed that this was worth exploring further and Louise pointed out that the group’s Health & Safety advisor would be available to advise on any necessary protective gear and precautions. Morag Coull said that the Eco Group would also be interested in being involved and it was agreed to link in with them.

Louise advised that Stuart Gray is obtaining details of the current annual costs to the school of waste disposal which will be very informative, and Cllr Dickinson provided details of the general costs of waste disposal.

Louise cautioned that it is a balancing act to ensure students are not discouraged from using the canteen. There is a high use of the canteen facilities, which the school wants to maintain. It is helpful to keep pupils on-site at lunchtime and canteen staff work hard to keep the queues moving as quickly as possible. It is recognised that there could be a drop in numbers but it is hoped that it will pick up again.

Kim Milton pointed out that recycling will be an ongoing habit if it begins in childhood and it bodes well for the future.

Marian Montgomery provided details of the Paws on Plastic initiative which encourages dog walkers to pick up a couple of pieces of plastic or litter while they are out walking the dog. She explained that it is becoming popular locally and the impact is beginning to be noticed. Louise requested written details so that they too could be included on the notice board.

The students left the meeting at this point.

### **3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 18 January, were approved.



#### 4. MATTERS ARISING

##### **Improvement Planning Glossary**

As suggested at the previous meeting, a glossary of terms had been compiled which had been circulated with the agenda. Louise said that this will be uploaded on to the website beside the Improvement Planning documents and parents will be advised that it is there.

##### **Anti-bullying Policy**

The most recent draft had been circulated with the agenda. Louise expressed thanks to parents for their feedback.

##### **The Cost of the School Day**

Louise explained that while costs of trips had been raised at the previous meeting, she had thought it would be helpful to look at the costs of trips in the context of a wider framework. She had recently participated in training with other agencies on the cost of the school day taking everything into account, and Mackie is certainly conscious of financial challenges to some parents, and is keen to ensure that it is addressed effectively – for instance keeping uniform requirements to a minimum and being as flexible as possible.

There are also subjects that involve a financial outlay; for example practical cookery charges almost £60 yet there should not be a cost for curriculum activities, in an ideal world. Louise indicated that if a student is aware that their family cannot afford £60 they will not choose that subject, therefore it is worth exploring possible ways of minimising associated costs. Again, if a cost is attached to a trip in relation to an S2 Elective Course, a pupil would decline to participate rather than explain they cannot afford the cost. Louise emphasised that, where a trip involves significant costs, it will take place outwith term time. She underlined also that there has been significant positive feedback from these trips and there would be a negative reaction if they were to cease.

Whilst the school is not in a position to subsidise the cost of trips, it can access some funds. There is the John Hunter Trust which is shared between Mackie and the 3 Stonehaven Primary Schools. The money is ring-fenced for transport costs and can be used for curriculum activities. There is also a hardship fund, which could be used, for example, to support young carers.

Louise reported also that there had been some preliminary discussions about the possibility of using some of the underspend from the Devolved Budget to re-introduce Activities Days. It is recognised that there were positive and negative factors around the Activities Days and they required significant organisation. It has been decided therefore that, if they go ahead, no Day will cost more than £50 and there will be a full range of activities but no overnight stays. Issues still to be resolved include the current capacity of the school making it difficult to accommodate the activities, and the office staff being unable to take on the extra admin duties associated with the Activities Days.

Kim queried if pupils had asked about the return of Activities Days and Marion enquired if parents had been consulted. Louise said that pupils had not mentioned them and parents have still to be consulted. She was aware that there was an opinion that previously Activities Days had not been a worthwhile use of time and they had often been elitist. Aileen agreed and pointed out that some of the activities had very little, or no, educational value.

Louise said that equity is an important factor in school time and in any event there are insufficient local bus companies to transfer all the students to activities outwith the school.



Louise advised that Mackie receives approximately £40,000 from the Pupil Equity Fund. She clarified that the criteria is a pupil being eligible for free school meals, and since Mackie only has approximately 35 pupils in that category, it is important that nothing is done that would target them. The purpose of the funding is to close the attainment gap, and sustain the closure and the money has been used to fund a number of different projects such as the Tree of Knowledge and the Homework Club.

Karen Perks queried the costs involved in participating in the Duke of Edinburgh award. Louise explained that there is a central kit so that those participating do not have to purchase any equipment, with the possible exception of suitable footwear.

## 5. SCHOOL BUSINESS

### Staffing

Louise provided a detailed update on staffing movements. She said that she was delighted to advise that a Modern Languages teacher had been appointed with an early start date, and advised that it is intended to request a probationer for this subject too.

Applications for the post of Faculty Head of Social Subjects had closed and interviews will be arranged shortly. Fiona Stark was appointed to the Depute Head Teacher post, creating a vacancy in the Guidance Team and the PE dept continues to fluctuate, with a significant turnover of staff.

### Budget Developments

Louise reported that it is intended to utilise the underspend of the devolved budget on key projects around the school, such as upgrading toilets and the PE changing rooms, and timescales are awaited from the Property Dept. Louise explained that the size of contract will determine whether or not FES will sub-contract the work to other firms.

### 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Louise said that the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mackie Academy being sited in its current location occurs in August 2019, and there has been some interest in marking the occasion. An Open Day is being organised and other ideas for marking the occasion will be welcomed. Suggestions already received include requesting memorable items from former pupils to be catalogued and displayed and the possibility of a whole school photograph. Any other ideas will be welcomed. It is also hoped to have a keynote speaker at the prize-giving and again any suggestions will be welcomed. Morag suggested that Stonehaven Heritage Society could be a source of photographs and memorabilia and Louise undertook to contact them.

## 6. PARENT COUNCIL BUSINESS

### Email Account

Dawn explained the difficulties in manning the Parent Council email account. Not only is she unsure who to forward mail to, but because of GDPR restrictions she does not have access to the Parent Council mailing list. Having said that, Dawn reported that only five emails had been received but it is not being used as effectively as it could be. Louise advised that it provides a point of contact for the Parent Council to Aberdeenshire but also to the parent body. She pointed out that the address had not been flagged up recently so perhaps current awareness of the address is limited. Details are on the website and it is important that contact details for the Parent Council are readily available.



Dawn offered to keep responsibility for the email address in the meantime and monitor its usage. Aileen pointed out that it is an important source of information from Aberdeenshire such as details of the various training opportunities available to Parent Council members. It was agreed that any emails of a confidential nature should be forwarded to Louise. Rhona will forward general emails to Parent Council members, as appropriate, checking with Louise prior to doing so, if need be.

The ongoing challenge of communication with the parent body was noted, and will be discussed again at a future meeting.

#### **Headed Notepaper**

Louise tabled several options for headed notepaper, incorporating the new logo. Parents identified their preferred choice, which will be used in future communications.

Louise advised that S6 pupil Lewis King had designed the options, and had also re-designed the House logos. These were tabled for information purposes and all agreed on. All were impressed by the quality of the art-work.

#### **7. AOB**

Cllr Dickinson advised that she had received a complaint from a local resident in relation to the seagull issue, which is aggravated in the vicinity of the school by litter and food waste. Louise asked if there were plans to reduce the number of gulls by removing eggs, and employing the use of a hawk to scare them away. Cllr Dickinson advised that eggs will be removed in the town centre but there are no plans to utilise the hawk. Louise said that removing eggs from the school's roof had made a significance difference.

Cllr Dickinson pointed out that there is now a sizeable hole in the wall between the school and Mineralwell, which pupils use as a short-cut, and asked if there had been any progress. Louise reported that there has been correspondence back and forth on the subject. Although, the budget which could fund the work has still to be identified, Louise has requested that associated costs be obtained. It is intended to explore whether funding could be sourced since disabled pupils are being disadvantaged because they are being precluded from using the all-weather pitch due to the time factor involved in getting to and from the pitch.

Louise advised that Teresa Mugford had resigned from the Parent Council because the family is re-locating. Louise undertook to write a letter of thanks to Teresa on behalf of the Parent Council.

#### **8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Karen P provisionally agreed to chair the next meeting, scheduled for 17 April, subject to her availability which she will confirm or otherwise nearer the time.

Aileen thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to discussions, and closed the meeting.