

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Dawn Black had volunteered to chair the meeting. Dawn welcomed everyone to the meeting, and apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 27 November 2018, were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Anti-Bullying Policy

Louise reported that useful and helpful comments from a variety of sources had been received, and a revised document would be circulated in due course.

Aberdeenshire Council Parental Engagement Strategy

Louise advised that the Council's work on this initiative is ongoing and further information will be provided as and when it becomes available. Meetings had been arranged in various locations and the one in Stonehaven was scheduled for the following week. It was noted that Aileen McKellar had volunteered to attend. Louise stated that these meetings are worthwhile, and they also provide an opportunity to meet senior members of Aberdeenshire Council's Education team. It was agreed to include Aileen's report of the meeting in the agenda for the next Parent Council meeting.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

Standards & Quality Report/Improvement Planning

Louise provided a detailed presentation on the Standards & Quality Report and how it feeds into improvement planning. She explained that it is also linked to HGIOS 4 and relates to what HM Inspectorate will be looking for, when carrying out a school inspection. Louise advised that reports from school inspections are freely available and recent ones have been studied to ascertain what Inspectors are currently seeking. Louise suggested that it would also be worthwhile to look at reports from the context of Parental Involvement to gain a sense of Inspectors' expectations on that.

She explained that the Improvement Plan works on a three year cycle, the current one being 2017-2020. The full version of the Standards & Quality Report and Improvement Plan, as well as a short summary document are available on the school's website.

In response to a query, Louise clarified that because not all schools offer the same number of qualifications this has to be taken into account when looking at how Mackie is compared to its virtual comparator; there is a mechanism to do this within Insight. Louise explained that in S4 the plan is to utilise two periods that are currently designated as "study periods" so that all pupils gained a seventh Level 4 or 5 qualification. For example, Scottish Studies utilises units of work from other subjects such as English, History and Geography which can be transferred over alongside stand-alone work. It may also be possible to offer a Mental Health & Wellbeing National Award, and with these additional options, the school would be placed in a stronger position against its virtual comparator. However, Louise stressed, the important factor is to ensure that the additional qualifications will have value for the students and their learning pathways.

Cllr Dickinson suggested that attaching a glossary of terminology and abbreviations to the document would be helpful, and Louise undertook to arrange this.

Lorna Findlay suggested that it would be worthwhile to provide regular notifications of significant events. Louise advised that these are included in the annual report, and good news stories and congratulations are included in the in-school bulletin. Lorna stated that a "pat on the back" is always good for morale and suggested informing a wider audience of all the success stories. Louise undertook to do so on a regular basis.

Property Update

Louise reported on the most recent leak from water that had pooled on the flat roof. She advised that urgent remedial action had been carried out and the contractors would be carrying out the repairs shortly. It had been emphasised to them that whilst there was some flexibility at present during the exam period, there would be no flexibility as from 28 January.

Louise was delighted to report that the new water fountains are installed, including two in the canteen, and all of which are suitable for filling water bottles. New recycling bins have been acquired which have each receptacle clearly marked. In due course the water bottle machine will be removed, and the intention is to source re-usable water bottles to present to students at the sponsored walk, rather than medals.

Cllr Dickinson highlighted that pupils heading to school via Mineralwell Park are causing damage to a wall by climbing over it. Louise said that the school is aware of the situation and an ideal solution would be to erect a stile or put in an access point, as the wall is also a barrier to using the astro-turf pitch because of disabled access as well as the time factor. Cllr Dickinson undertook to ascertain who owns the land and who in Aberdeenshire Council would be the best person to consult about any possible solution.

Louise advised that the upgrade of the PE staff base has been approved, as has renewal of the flooring in the science classrooms.

Staffing

Louise provided a comprehensive report on the staffing situation in each faculty.

She reported that the appointment of a Faculty Head of Health was imminent and would mean that the Faculty Heads team will then be at full strength. It was explained that because of the staffing difficulties in the Modern Languages dept it had been decided that German would no longer be offered from the next school year. There is also the ongoing challenge in recruiting to the Geography dept but in the meantime it has been possible to source a Geography supply teacher.

Louise advised that applications for the Depute Head post closed the following week, and Kim Milton has agreed to represent the Parent Council on the interview panel.

Fiona Ritchie sought further clarification on the Geography position. Louise explained that the vacant position is a fixed-term one which usually prove difficult to fill. Paula Durward asked what determines a fixed-term post and Louise explained that a fixed term is for 23 months or less and usually covers maternity leave, or where someone is acting up or has been seconded to another position. Karen McClymont said that it has been helpful that the supply teachers have all been subject-specific and not just general supply teachers but Dawn pointed out that pupils do struggle with changes of teaching staff.

Lisa Macaulay asked about Modern Languages. Louise explained the staffing difficulties there and advised that it was hoped that it might be possible to offer bespoke German perhaps via Wider Achievement as a 7th option, but it would not be included in the timetable. Louise said that affected pupils and parents will be informed and the school will try its best to resolve the issue, but they would not like students to begin a course which they were not able to complete. Unfortunately, Mearns and Portlethen Academies do not offer German, ruling out any possibility of collaboration with them.

Cllr Dickinson asked about other clusters. Louise said that she was aware that the e-school does not offer German, and in fact it seems to be the case that schools generally are moving away from German as a subject option.

Louise indicated the positive factor that current staffing dynamics appear to have struck a nice balance between "new blood" and experienced staff.

5. AOB

Privacy Notice

Louise sought views in respect of an updated Privacy Notice which has to be issued to all pupils in relation to photos, videos etc; and it can no longer be assumed that a non-return is consent.

The legal age of consent is now 13 therefore pupils who are 13 and over can sign the form themselves. For under 13s, the intention is to ask parents and students to sign the form so that the consent will also cover future years. The over 13s will sign the form during a PSE lesson to ensure that they know why and what they are signing.

Louise asked parents if they thought a covering letter to parents was necessary and, if so, what it should contain. Lisa suggested that an email would be sufficient; outlining what is happening, and requesting a response in the event of any concerns or queries. Parents all agreed this would be satisfactory.

Lockers

Fiona R asked about the locker position for 5th and 6th year pupils. Louise advised that lockers are available, on request at the front office. She explained that lockers are allocated to S1 pupils first, and the remaining lockers become available to the other year groups thereafter.

Litter

Dawn said that she was aware that litter was an ongoing issue. She noted that last term there had been an improvement but suddenly it seems to have deteriorated again. Louise underlined that it is a constant battle and in fact S1 had lost their dedicated space because of litter. It is something that will be worked on in the different year groups but one contributory factor is that pupils are now allowed to take food and drink away from the canteen area when previously this would not have been allowed. The current number of students would make this ruling difficult space-wise but it may have to be considered, although it could mean that the pupils would leave the school thus taking the problem elsewhere.

Karen Perks pointed out that litter is not a problem at primary school. Fiona R agreed and indicated that parents have to take some responsibility for addressing the issue too. Karen Mc advised that addressing the problem will be worked on in the tutor groups and at the eco group.

Toilets

Dawn pointed out that the lack of toilet facilities can be an issue for children who have to get to a toilet quickly. Louise advised that pupils with health issues can use the disabled toilets, which can be arranged via Pupil Support.

Lorna pointed out that the condition of the girls toilet is disgusting. Louise agreed and reported that a business plan had been prepared, and it has been recognised that it will cost in the region of £100,000 to refurbish the toilets at the front of the school. Approval from committee will be required but it would be helpful if it could be approved and work carried out during the summer holidays. Dawn pointed out that the school is showing its age. Louise agreed and added that it is also well-used by the community but this is not recognised as far as the cleaning arrangements are concerned.

PE Changing Rooms

The refurbishment and re-configuration of the PE changing rooms has been approved and that work should be undertaken during the summer holidays.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As previously agreed, the next meeting is scheduled for 5 March. It was reported that Aileen McKellar had offered to chair that meeting which everyone was delighted to accept.

Louise asked if there was anything else which parents thought would be useful to include in future agendas e.g. some aspects of the Improvement Plan. It was agreed that Different Pathways would be an interesting topic; perhaps Lucy Angel would be willing to attend and provide details of her role.

Karen P thought that education on relationships would be helpful including mental health, sex, healthy relationships, and consent.

Paula requested further information in relation to school trips; ie how the destinations of school trips are decided upon, as well as who each trip is open to, and how and where all school trips are advertised.

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