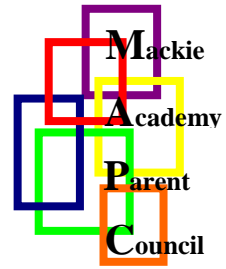


Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Wednesday 1 February 2017



PRESENT: Cllr Raymond Christie, Andy Forster, Evelyn Gillies, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Fiona Harris, Jacqui Hutchison (Chairperson), Sheila Lees, Vicky McGillivray, Louise Moir (Rector), Marc Nunn, Victoria Park, Evelyn Patterson, Karen Perks, Keith Petrie, Fiona Ritchie, Isobel Townsend

APOLOGIES: Morag Coull, Karen McClymont, Dawn Milroy, Kim Milton, Billy Morrison, Teresa Mugford, Rachel Shanks, Lesley Tullock

In Attendance : Jill Reid – Library service

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 6 December, were approved.

MATTERS ARISING

Swimming Pool

Jacqui advised that there was no update on refurbishment of the pool area or the possible closure of the pool.

Survey

Jacqui reported that the Governance Review survey had now closed. Details of responses provided are awaited but feedback seems to be that parents are largely still “in the dark” about educational changes.

All other matters arising were covered in the agenda.

LIBRARY SERVICE UPDATE

Jacqui introduced Jill Reid who provided an update on the provision of a library service at Mackie.

Jill reported that first of all she had arranged for the removal of more than 3000 books which were either out of date or in poor condition, the books having gone to a book charity. Next, they had come up with a stock management plan and had re-configured the layout of the library and adjusted the different sections. A large number of new books had been acquired and Young Adult, and Classic, Sections established. It is being ensured that the careers area is kept up to date and “Fun Fridays” with a selection of board games etc have been introduced. A Library Council has been set up and they had manned the book fair. Jill expressed her thanks for the new furniture and flexible seating which has proved very helpful.

Jill explained that Aberdeenshire libraries are unique in that school and public libraries are managed by the same staff, and each service uses the same system therefore students can have access to books throughout the library service and now that they have become aware of that fact, reservations have increased and Mackie has become the third top issuing library.

Jacqui expressed delight that pupils are wanted, and want to be, in the library. Jill advised that one lunchtime had seen 150 pupils in the library. Victoria Park mentioned that the busyness of the library makes it difficult to use it as a study resource.

Jill agreed that it is busy at lunch and break time and Louise Moir advised that students have been informed of the other spaces available for study at lunchtime, and it has been emphasised that the library is a resource available to the whole school. In fact, Louise said, the library being used, together with the creation of social areas and the canteen being more available has led to a better atmosphere in school at lunchtime, which is especially noticeable when the weather is bad.

Louise advised that it is also planned to have the library accessible later in the day too and the logistics of that are being worked out. Jill explained that the library is currently open from 8.15 am to 4 pm every day, and an app is available to allow self-issue of books but the possibility of using volunteers, for instance as part of an Award initiative, is also being given consideration.

Jill advised that Broad General Education English students regularly borrow books and seniors are making use of the study areas. The school has access to the School Library Service and its catalogue of extensive available resources. Louise indicated that it will be worthwhile to raise awareness amongst staff of all the accessible resources. Fiona Ritchie recommended that it is ensured that probationers are also informed.

Jill reported that she had attended a transition event and intended to hold referencing drop-in sessions for senior pupils. Further events are planned, more stock will be acquired, suggestions from Faculty Heads will be welcomed and a suggestions box will be set up. Louise said that senior pupils will be provided with all the relevant information about resources at their induction day.

Louise advised that it is also intended to organise a transition youth club, with Jill participating in a session at that as well as at the S1 parents evening.

Jacqui thanked Jill for all her efforts to transform the library service in Mackie. This was echoed by all attendees.

Isobel Townsend recommended that a letter of thanks be sent to Sharon Jamieson (Library Services Manager) and Jacqui undertook to do so.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT

As previously reported, a meeting had been arranged with the School Transport Unit to discuss public transport for the Johnshaven etc pupils. It had been advised that there was no capacity at present to effect any changes but there was a willingness to re-visit the subject when more information about the make-up of the school roll is available for the next academic year. Louise said that the relevant figures should be available in March.

Andy Forster pointed out that space is available on other buses but Jacqui explained that it seemed to be a question of logistics. She added that nothing would be changed this late in the academic year but once the composition of the roll is known in March it will be possible to encourage action then.

Isobel advised of one recent incident when the bus had been late meaning that some pupils had arrived in school only 5 minutes before sitting a prelim. She pointed out that the bus is often late and Andy stated that on one occasion it had not turned up at all. It was also highlighted that pupils are waiting at the side of a busy road raising safety fears, and pupils being delayed getting home resulted in a very long day.

Isobel suggested that it would be worthwhile to survey Johnshaven etc parents for their observations so that when discussions are reconvened the Parent Council is speaking for all affected parents. Louise confirmed that it would be possible to produce a targeted survey.

Cllr Christie recommended that it is requested that a representative from Stagecoach is included in future discussions.

Louise advised of two recent serious incidents when it had been impossible to make contact with Stagecoach staff, meaning that the school had to take action to resolve the situation. The School Transport Unit is organising a meeting with all relevant parties, to discuss various transport issues since the school has no direct control over the service.

Jacqui underlined that Aberdeenshire is not holding Stagecoach accountable for the poor service being provided. Louise stated that when the aforementioned meeting is arranged she will request that the Parent Council Chairperson is allowed to attend. Cllr Christie pointed out that there are problems with the bus service in general. Andy indicated that it is a fundamental requirement that emergency telephone numbers are provided and that someone is contactable at all times.

Louise said that when a bus had gone off the road recently, the school had to telephone the police and work with them to resolve the situation. Jacqui pointed out that it is a drain on the school's resources and it should not be the school's responsibility to resolve such incidents. Louise agreed and added that she was fearful that there could be an occasion when no-one in the school is available.

Jacqui said that in the first instance she would contact Stagecoach about an emergency contact telephone number and seek assurance that it would be answered. Fiona Harris queried whether Stagecoach had a response procedure and if they ever tested it. Evelyn Gillies thought that it might be worthwhile to ask parents to complain direct to Stagecoach. Louise advised that following the recent incident it had been recommended to parents that they voice their concerns to the School Transport Unit and it was known that several had done so. Andy pointed out that on the occasion when the bus did not turn up at all the school had faced a barrage of angry calls from parents.

PARENT COUNCIL VISIBILITY

Jacqui reported that she and Vicky McGillivray had attended the latest Parents Evening to raise awareness of the Parent Council and be more visible to parents.

Jacqui highlighted that the next Parents Evening is on 28 February from 4 pm to 6.30 pm and requested that any volunteers let her know of their availability.

The questionnaire for parents was discussed in detail and various suggestions for questions were mentioned. Vicky cautioned that it should be kept focused, short and sweet. Jacqui advised that Rachel had offered to produce the questionnaire once its format and content has been decided.

Jacqui underlined that she would like suggestions for questions within one week so that progress can be made. Fiona pointed out that it was important to gauge the current visibility of the Parent Council so that a baseline can be determined. She recommended also asking participants how many children they had at the school and what year group they were in. Further suggested questions included the following: What is your favoured method of approach/ response from the Parent Council?; What would you like the Parent Council to achieve?; Are you aware of the twitter account?; Have you seen us at Parents Evenings? Transport questions could also be included, and a list of all the issues that the Parent Council has played a part in resolving.

Sheila Lees pointed out that the school's website does not contain much information about the Parent Council. Jacqui advised that the minutes of each meeting are uploaded once they have been approved but she agreed that our information could be updated and expanded.

TWITTER ACCOUNT

Vicky explained that she was seeking a volunteer to take over running the Twitter account. She advised that it is very easy to use, and can be very informative. Jacqui confirmed that it is a worthwhile tool for advertising the Parent Council and the school. Fiona agreed that it is very informative. It was requested that anyone willing to take on responsibility for the Twitter account email Vicky for details.

HMIE INSPECTION COURSE FEEDBACK

Louise reported on a recent course she had attended on proposed changes to the Inspection system. She advised that Education Scotland are trialling different models for primary and secondary school inspections and have run a pilot exercise in Moray Council. Louise said the event had been very informative and helpful. As previously discussed, education is in transition and one of the Chief Inspectors had been honest about the status of that initiative.

Louise highlighted some of the salient points but emphasised that in future the role of the parent body will be subject to significant analysis. She underlined that the parental questionnaire conducted as part of the pilot had met with a poor response despite that school's best efforts to encourage participation. Louise stressed that increased parental involvement in the process should be anticipated, both from the Parent Council and the wider parent body, and using a variety of methods to do so.

Louise did say that she had the impression that the process is supportive, although of course any areas of concern would be picked up on. Louise added that she did not anticipate any areas of concern within Mackie.

In the ensuing discussion, Fiona queried developments in the changes to National 5s. Louise explained that the Scottish Executive had decided to **take out** unit assessments which determined a pupil's eligibility to sit an exam. While a level of **bureaucracy** had been removed, a number of subjects do not have a written exam, using a portfolio of work and assessment instead. Mackie has been encouraging positive achievement and where some

pupils struggle with written exams they had the opportunity to obtain a National 4 via unit assessments. However with the removal of these assessments, the possibility for a qualification via that route disappears.

Louise emphasised that Mackie has worked hard on accurate entry levels with a view to ensuring that students gain an A to C grade. Much time has been spent on progression work especially in English and Maths; ie National 4 in S4, National 5 in S5 and a Higher in S6, so that teaching staff can be confident of accuracy in projected levels and ensure that parents have a greater awareness of any potential risks in subject choices.

Louise said that all details of revised courses and structures for each subject would be available on the school's website, as soon as they are available.

PROPERTY DEVELOPMENTS

Louise reported that the contract for the Curtain Walling project has been awarded and plans are on schedule for the work to begin two weeks before the summer holidays. The contractor also anticipates that if all goes to plan there could be a shorter timescale for completion of the work.

Also, the Learning Estates team have earmarked money in the capital plan to refurbish key areas in the school, including the removal of the end part of R Block. It is likely that the project will be phased over a period of time, but it will mean enhanced areas of learning, and the best possible use of space. It is likely that staff will no longer have their own classroom although classrooms will be allocated to a faculty. It has also been decided to re-configure the faculties with a view to consolidating the teams. Louise pointed out that it would be helpful if the refurbishment did not take place at the same time as the curtain walling project. While it will be a stressful time for staff, it is recognised that it will be worthwhile in the long-term and it is intended to ensure that the changes are purposeful.

STAFFING

Louise reported that the chemistry post had been filled, and the vacancy is covered until the successful applicant is able to take up post after the Easter break. The advertisement for the vacancy in music had closed. One application had been received and the interview was scheduled for the following week.

The post of Faculty Head for Performing Arts had just gone live. Otherwise the school is fully staffed with the new Depute Head also taking up post after the Easter holidays. In the meantime, the Acting Depute is covering the post very well.

Louise advised that Nicola Hamilton is seeking parental input in relation to the literacy programme initiative, and details will be provided to the parent representatives of the Parent Council.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As already notified, the next scheduled meeting will be held on Tuesday 25 April.