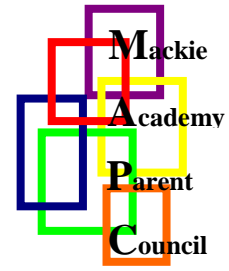


Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council



Wednesday 5 October 2016

PRESENT: Evelyn Gillies, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison (Chairperson), Sheila Lees, Karen McClymont, Vicky McGillivray, Louise Moir (Rector), Marc Nunn, Victoria Park, Evelyn Patterson, Karen Perks, Keith Petrie, Fiona Ritchie

APOLOGIES: Cllr Raymond Christie, Andy Forster, Fiona Harris, Elaine Kininmonth, Dawn Milroy, Kim Milton, Billy Morrison, Rachel Shanks, Isobel Townsend, Lesley Tullock

Jacqui Hutchison welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the new members. Introductions were made and apologies for absence were noted. Jacqui highlighted that Vicky McGillivray had decided to stand down as Vice Chairperson at the AGM, and thanked her for her efforts on behalf of the Parent Council in that role, and her continued endeavours particularly in raising the profile of the Council.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 20 June, were approved.

MATTERS ARISING

Jacqui advised that she had heard nothing further from Hazel Hall in relation to refurbishment of the swimming pool area and changing rooms, and said that she would contact her again informally.

Louise Moir reported that a letter of complaint about the changing rooms had been published in The Leader, following which she had been contacted by William Munro (Area Manager) enquiring if the complaint was valid. Louise had confirmed that the complaints were realistic and that the issues had previously been raised with Hazel Hall. The list of issues, and accompanying pictures, previously supplied, had subsequently been forwarded to Mr Munro. Louise pointed out also that the area is not DDA compliant despite being heavily used by the general public.

On the subject of the parental careers database, Louise reported that each of the 17 academies in Aberdeenshire has been given funding for the purpose of delivering the Developing the Young Workforce programme which is designed to help young people enter the job market and is a key document driving education. Funding has been provided to appoint a Principal Teacher on a 2-year contract to lead the initiative, and Mackie has appointed Amanda Bartlett to the post. It is anticipated that Alan Tullock will continue to cover the oversight of the database etc and Amanda's remit will include curriculum work and traditional careers advice. Louise offered an assurance that, in Amanda's absence, the English Dept will continue to be fully covered staff-wise.

Louise confirmed that the issue with the S6 lockers had been resolved.

All other matters arising were covered in the agenda.

JOHNSHAVEN SCHOOL TRANSPORT

Jacqui reported that she and Isobel Townsend had met with Transport Services to discuss possible solutions to the fact that what should be a relatively short journey to/from school has become quite long. The officers had been positive about seeking an answer to the situation and it had been requested that it be ensured that any solution did not disadvantage Inverbervie pupils. It had been pointed out that even 10 minutes later in the morning and 10 minutes earlier in the evening would be helpful.

SCHOOL EVENT

Jacqui reported that she and Louise had met with Jacqui Chen from the PTA to discuss the possibility of organising a social event. Louise advised that pupils had been consulted via the Pupil Councils and the S1 response had been positive but the other year groups' response had, as expected, been negative. It had therefore been thought that it would be worthwhile to organise something for the S1 pupils post-Christmas, as a transition event. Louise emphasised that space in the school is at a premium and there is only one caretaker on duty in the evenings making it difficult for the space used to be returned to normal format, ready for use by the school the next morning. Also, between January and March space is needed to prepare for exams but attempts will be made to try and accommodate some type of event. Jacqui explained that Jacqui Chen has good knowledge of what works, who would be interested in attending and how best to organise it, and Louise thought that Burns Night might be a possibility. Jacqui underlined that everyone would be required to assist in organising and running it and further discussions about possible dates and formats will be ongoing.

Victoria wondered if there might be more interest if the event was used as a fundraiser. Louise agreed and said for instance rock challenge participants are organising a ceilidh which will be well attended.

NATIONAL PARENT COUNCIL FORUM UPDATE

Jacqui advised that currently a wealth of information is forthcoming in respect of changes in education, and parental involvement/feedback is being sought but the National Forum is finding it difficult to obtain parental viewpoints via an online survey. It is also intended to set up area forums given that Aberdeenshire covers a wide geographical area. The forum would consist of Parent Council chairs with one chair from each cluster attending thus ensuring that everyone can be kept up to date with developments and ongoing issues, as well as a possible involvement in the decision making process.

It is anticipated that Donna Wilson will attend our meeting on 6 December to provide information on parental involvement initiatives and there is also an event being convened at the Exhibition Centre on 24 November with officers from Education Scotland and the Scottish Government in attendance. As well as providing a broad overview, they are actively seeking feedback to use when they mould policy. Jacqui encouraged everyone to attend if possible but offered an assurance that, as information on any topic is received, it will be forwarded on to everyone as soon as possible.

Louise said that there are 2 important documents that parents do need to engage with as they will shape education for the next generation. One is "Closing the Gap" as if there is positive parental engagement everything else would flow out of that, and parental involvement is also being sought in relation to the National Improvement Framework, which is about achieving excellence. Jacqui emphasised that the Scottish Government really does want to hear the views of parents.

Louise said that a post could be placed on the school's website with a link to the relevant documents, and backed up with a text message.

Louise advised that one area of change is that schools will have more autonomy in relation to their budget, however this will entail more responsibility and financial accountability, which is not usually an

area of expertise for Head Teachers. Whilst opportunities will open up there can be pitfalls too, and currently schools enjoy significant support from the LEA which might not continue to be available.

SUBJECT EVENINGS

Jacqui provided details of forthcoming parents evenings and requested that people let her know their availability so that a rota can be drawn up, to ensure that there is Parent Council representation and thereby raising its profile.

Karen advised that the 7 February subject event would be most worthwhile to attend, as it is not appointment-based therefore parents have more time to browse the various "stalls". Louise agreed that that evening would probably provide more feedback. Vicky voiced the opinion that it is important for the Council to be visible at every opportunity. Jacqui pointed out the importance of trying to ensure that parents have access to information by all means possible.

Louise advised that it is intended to try a different approach to parents evenings. She indicated that whilst many parents welcome the chance to attend school to discuss their child's education there are some parents who never attend, and it is crucial to attempt to engage with those parents and pupils where there are concerns.

Using the tracking tool, a core group of pupils giving cause for concern for differing reasons has been identified. The parents of these pupils will be allocated appointments in the hope that it will be the beginning of positive engagement. Thereafter general appointment slots will be available and consideration is being given to an electronic booking system with a view to making it an easier process, in future.

It is also planned to run rotational sessions on various topics of interest to parents who could be in the school for only a few appointments so it would make their time worthwhile. Victoria suggested that the Parent Council could run one session too, perhaps highlighting forthcoming educational changes. Jacqui said that parents often feel distanced from secondary education and it could be that they would welcome informative sessions when they are in school anyway. Louise said that the plans will be developed and feedback sought following the event.

TIMETABLE CHANGE

Louise explained that it is proposed that the timetable change for S1 to S3 takes place on Tuesday 2 May which coincides with the start of Senior Phase study leave and will allow more time for preparatory work for those moving into the Senior Phase, with a view to maximising attainment. Louise underlined that there will be no increase in staff workloads. She pointed out that those pupils who are not sitting exams will not be granted study leave but will be asked to commit to attending school or alternatively seek a college placement. Other pupils will begin their new timetable when they return to the school in June.

The earlier change of timetable means however that activity days will not be revived. The reasoning behind this had been explained to students via the Pupil Councils and they had understood that there was no educational value to activity days, and had asked if consideration could be given to organising weekend trips. It had been explained that whilst it was a possibility it was dependent on the goodwill of staff.

Louise advised that S4 pupils will be given a month to settle in to the Senior Phase and then their induction day will be held. The induction days will utilise the Tree of Knowledge material, and as well as parental involvement there will be ample choice so that pupils can pick their best options. Louise clarified that there will be 2 induction days; one for S5 and S6 together and one for S4.

Jacqui agreed that there is a lot of work to fit into a finite space of time. Fiona Ritchie concurred and voiced the opinion that it will be helpful to change the timetable earlier. Jacqui asked if staff were willing to accept further changes and Louise confirmed that they were. She explained also that previously pupils had to pass USAPs to be eligible to sit an exam. If the pupil failed, the teacher then

had to find time for the pupil to re-sit the USAP. However, John Swinney (Education Secretary) has made the decision to abolish USAPs, thereby removing that added pressure. Jacqui asked if the USAP had been helpful for measuring a pupil's progress. Louise stated that the school's tracking and monitoring system is proving to be very accurate as are staff predictions therefore she was very confident in their ability to monitor a pupil's progress.

Karen confirmed that the USAPs had been very time consuming and whilst her dept would still utilise them informally as a preparatory measure, a level of bureaucracy had been removed. Vicky pointed out that some pupils do benefit from the USAP system to build up to the exam. Louise said that with the removal of USAPs there will still be assessments and tracking points and, for instance, where appropriate, pupils would be encouraged to consider studying for a Higher over 2 years with the possibility of thereby attaining a better grade. Louise explained that each subject would have a different structure over the 2 years but there would be a degree of flexibility and repetition would be avoided.

Jacqui pointed out that education is evolving, and said it is positive that Mackie is responding appropriately. Karen confirmed that she thought it made sense to bring forward the date of the timetable change.

BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION TRACKER

Louise delivered a detailed presentation on the tracker for the Broad General Education phase. She explained that previously it had been difficult to judge what level a pupil had achieved however this is being addressed by standardised assessments as well as professional judgement. Furthermore, the Scottish Government had given clear guidance on how to measure achievement.

Louise explained that Mackie had created its own system to provide benchmarks for the BGE phase which will provide concrete information and will be used to lead meaningful discussions at parents evenings.

Parents commended the school for creating a comprehensive tracking database which will be a very useful asset to staff in monitoring a pupil's progress through the year groups.

AGM ISSUES

Jacqui pointed out that some of the issues identified for discussion at the AGM were receiving attention, but otherwise 2 or 3 of the issues would be debated at each meeting as time allowed, unless it was deemed appropriate to bring the matter forward.

Estates Strategy

Jacqui said that keeping an eye on developments within the LEA's estates strategy will be ongoing. With reference to the curtain walling project, Louise reported that she had been advised that things were still on course for tenders being sought after the Christmas break.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENING

Louise raised the possibility of arranging a community engagement evening, with a number of agencies and covering a wide range of topics such as police, safety, drugs/alcohol, NHS services, available supports and services. Louise suggested that it could perhaps have a focus groups format and Jacqui agreed that it was important to make it as interactive as possible rather than just delivering information. She pointed out the importance of ensuring a good turnout if a number of different organisations attended.

Louise advised that one possibility being considered is to issue a personal invitation to a random sample of parents. Jacqui cautioned that care would be needed in the wording of the invitation as parents might wonder why they had been selected for an invitation. Jacqui added that parents often

have no idea of the pressures being faced by their children today and she thought it was worth trying to see if a targeted approach worked.

Victoria suggested creating a doodle poll to see what would be of interest to parents, which all agreed would be worthwhile. Jacqui said that it should ask specific, rather than generic, questions and Vicky recommended that it is ensured that it is user friendly.

FACULTY HEAD NIGHT

In response to Jacqui's question, it was agreed that it would be worthwhile to again organise a Faculty Head night but with a change of format, and ensuring it benefits staff as well as parents.

The date of 23 November was pencilled in and possible topics for discussion were requested to be forwarded to Jacqui.

Louise agreed to consult Faculty Heads to ascertain what they would like to gain from the evening.

AOB

Evelyn Gillies advised that there had been instances at lunchtime when hot meals had run out. Louise asked that specific incidents are noted over a couple of weeks and the details passed to her, so that she can raise the issue with the canteen staff.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Jacqui said that the date of the Faculty Head meeting would be confirmed as soon as possible.

As already notified the next scheduled meeting will be held on 6 December.