



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Wednesday 13 November 2019

PRESENT: Patricia Bruce, Paula Durward (Chair), Andrea Forster, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Carol Howie, Kim Milton, Elaine Mitchell, Marion Montgomery, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Lisa Macaulay, Cllr Dennis Robertson, Richard Sharp (via Skype), Fiona Stark (Depute Head)

APOLOGIES: Dawn Black, Morag Coull, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Lorna Findlay, Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Dawn Milroy, Karen McClymont, Aileen McKellar

IN ATTENDANCE: Sean Jamieson and Richard McKenzie (Public Transport Unit)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Chair, Paula Durward, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made and apologies for absence noted.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 2 October, were approved.

3. Matters Arising

School Bus Transport Issues

Paula explained that representatives from the Public Transport Unit (PTU) would be joining the meeting later, when the school transport issues would be discussed fully with them.

Reporting within the BGE Phase

Louise reported that detailed feedback had been received on the draft documents, tabled at the previous meeting, and said that revised documents for each subject would be brought to a later Parent Council meeting, for further feedback with a view to ensuring that the reports are easily understandable to parents.

Connect Training

Patricia advised that none of the training currently being offered by Aberdeenshire Council is being held locally, but she will keep a watch on it and let people know as and when something more local is arranged.



4. School App for Parents

Louise delivered a presentation on the plans to introduce a School App, to enhance communication with parents.

A mocked-up app was displayed to give an idea of what it could look like. It can include specific messages to parents; for instance to advise on transport issues, or to inform them of arrival times where students are returning from sports fixtures or school trips. There will be an information page, showing all the contact details, and there can also be a news function which will be helpful in sharing good news stories more promptly.

All parents present thought it was an excellent idea. Louise advised that it is intended to carry out the preparatory work early in 2020, with the intention of launching it around the timetable-change date. Louise reiterated that its main purpose will be to inform parents, and the app will improve the capacity for communication with them.

Cllr Robertson said that targeted information for specific parents will be very helpful.

Louise said that the platform is easy to use and will negate the need to wait until 8am for the office to open before communications can be sent to parents on subjects such as snow days. Louise advised that the app will cost in the region of £500, and all agreed that it would be money well spent.

5. School Transport Issues

Sean Jamieson and Richard McKenzie from the PTU joined the meeting and Paula introduced the subject of school transport issues. The questions that had been circulated prior to the meeting and provided to the PTU personnel were fully discussed.

The summary of the questions and answers is appended to the minute.

During discussions, Fiona Stark mentioned that the majority of Mackie's contracts are carried out by Stagecoach and Louise advised that the school has a positive, working relationship with Stagecoach's local manager, who is very pro-active and informs the school as soon as possible of any transport issues. Fiona said that it is obvious when the local manager is absent, and the service reverts to the Aberdeen depot where the staff are not familiar with the various routes.

Louise advised of the plans to introduce a school app for parents which will be very helpful in getting transport information to parents as quickly as possible.



In relation to the question about pick-up points, Fiona confirmed that there had been one example on the Netherley route when the pick-up point had been risk assessed and its location moved; thus the issue had been resolved successfully.

Andy Foster queried whether it is better to contact the school or the bus company direct, in the event of any issues. Mr Jamieson said that there is a school transport team and a generic email address, but ideally the school should be contacted in the first instance. Louise agreed and added that the details will be logged and passed on to the PTU.

Cllr Robertson advised that the local Councillors can be contacted too, and there are occasions when their involvement can provide additional support in getting a resolution.

Paula thanked Mr Jamieson and Mr McKenzie for their attendance and their considered responses to the questions posed to them and advised that the information provided will be passed on to parents. Louise suggested that the summary could be forwarded to parents in the December email.

Cllr Robertson said the Community Policeman is willing to address any behavioural issues and he could perhaps intervene if thought appropriate at any time. Louise said that the situation was quite settled at present and it is hoped to maintain that as much as possible.

6. Duke of Edinburgh Award Programme Update

Louise provided some background details in relation to the school's involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, for the benefit of new members, and explained that the bronze award being part of the S3 curriculum is currently under review. Louise advised that at present Aberdeenshire Council hold the overall licence for this area, but the intention is to devolve it to individual schools from April 2020. Louise pointed out that there are doubts that the school's scheme is sustainable, one reason being that the pool of volunteers is shrinking, and furthermore most Duke of Edinburgh activities take place outwith school, with limited classroom work; therefore it is probably more appropriate to other organisations. It had been wondered if it would be possible to pool resources with the other local organisations which offer the Duke of Edinburgh Award and it is intended to explore all the possibilities. Kim cautioned that it is important to keep financial costs to participants at a minimum. Louise confirmed that the 37 students currently participating in the bronze award will continue to be supported to achieve the award and then a different model will be given consideration. Clarity from Aberdeenshire Council, as to their plans, will also be sought.

Kim asked if the Council might reverse its decision and take full responsibility for the programme in future. It was recognized that running the programme is a huge amount of work for the school and volunteers who have to give up their own time over weekends and questioned why it is part of the curriculum and not an extra curricular activity. Cllr Robertson advised that the Council has set up a working group to look at different models, and see what is happening in local communities, and it might be that there is a transition period whilst the best way forward is determined.



Louise stressed that the school did not want to offer something that it is unable to fulfil, and it is unlikely that the programme will be offered to S3 next year. It is something that has to be looked at objectively, and there are other options available locally.

Louise stated that an awards evening will be organised in January for current participants and consideration will be given to progression to the Silver Award.

7. AOB

Patricia advised that a parent had raised concerns about a driver vaping whilst driving a school bus. Fiona said that the school is aware of the incident, it has been reported to the PTU and the contractor, and she will follow it up to ensure appropriate action has been taken.

Patricia said she had received a query about the provision of drinking water within the school. Louise advised that there are water fountains in various locations around the school. The two that are situated in the cafeteria were out of order; but one has been fixed and the other will be repaired shortly.

Kim asked if it is expected that all homework is posted on Show my Homework. Louise confirmed that it is and requested specific examples where it is not being posted so that they can be followed up.

8. Date of Next Meeting

As already notified, the next meeting is scheduled for 16 January 2020.

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

Q&As from Parent Council meeting with the representatives from Aberdeenshire Council Public Transport Unit

- Q. The transport contract was recently retendered and despite hopes that the service would improve, there is evidence to suggest the service is in fact poorer and there are more issues this term than ever before. It was confirmed that a CPMS (Contract Performance Management System) is in place. Can you share your providers performance against these measures to date?**

Under Terms & Conditions of Contracts, breaches will incur penalty points and monetary fines, up to a certain level and if there is not an immediate improvement the contract would be terminated. A transport surveyor carries out compliance checks and parents and schools report concerns too. If there was a serious breach the contract would be terminated immediately. The circumstances would be fully investigated but an independent witness, preferably a Council employee, would be required. It is often the case that "guilt" is assumed, and penalty points issued, and then the contractor will come back with reasons/excuses/mitigating circumstances why the incident occurred. When a contract is terminated tenders will be sought for a short-term contract, with a different operator.

- Q. The process to be followed when a bus breaks down has been shared but what is considered to be acceptable with regard to the number of breakdowns in a given period?**

Contracts stipulate that vehicles have to be maintained, and buses are serviced every 4 weeks. Recurring breakdowns will be dealt with under CPMS. If always the same bus, it is expected that the contractor will resolve. It was acknowledged that there had previously been a high level of breakdowns which companies have tried to resolve and performance has improved.

- Q. What risk assessments are carried out with regard to break downs and lateness of buses resulting in young people waiting by the roadside for lengthy period of time? And what thought is given to pupils exiting buses in country locations directly onto overgrown and uneven grass areas?**

There is a road safety team and any concerns that are flagged up, eg a narrow verge, will be looked at, risk assessed and resolved.

- Q. We would be keen to understand more about lighting and bus stop provision, as well as the installation of crossings. Who makes decisions on these matters?**

The Passenger Transport Unit has responsibility for bus stops and shelters. The PTU (Public Transport Unit) designates pick-up points for pupils. If a pick-up point is assessed as dangerous, its location would be moved.

- Q. What is the policy with regard to high winds and the impact this can have on services?**

The decision to travel in adverse weather conditions lies with the operator. The policy is that with winds of 45mph+ double decker buses will not be used. Obviously, operators do not have sufficient replacement buses to hand (costs being excessive) and a plan will be devised in liaison with the school. Double runs may be required but plans for improved communications with parents (School App) should mitigate lengthy waits at pick-up points. On homeward journeys, the policy is that S1-S3 students will be sent home first, and again parents will be informed as early as possible. It is

recognised that there were quite a few occurrences last year and parents will be advised/reminded of the policy.

- Q. How do the drivers monitor if all the pupils have been collected and what is the procedure if a pupil is missed? There have been instances of buses driving past pupils and leaving them behind.**

This should never happen. Drivers have a manifest and although it is not possible for them to know who may choose to travel on a particular day, drivers should not drive past pupils. Buses have CCTV cameras and any such occurrence would be dealt with appropriately by the bus company as well as the PTU.

- Q. There has been much discussion over the safety of the children whilst on the buses. The Council expects all school transport vehicles to have seat belts available for pupils to use. Can you share the Council's policy and expectations on bus safety and what you expect of your providers with regard to the use of the seat belts during travel?**

Passengers on small buses have to wear seatbelts, however, it is not compulsory on larger buses. The onus is on the operator to advise drivers to encourage seatbelt wearing, and students can be educated on personal safety, but ultimately it is the students' decision as to whether or not they choose to wear a seatbelt.

- Q. Can you confirm who the responsibility lies with should a young person be injured on a school bus.**

It depends on the circumstances. The prime responsibility lies with the operator but everyone has a role to play. If passengers are not sitting safely and they hurt themselves as a result, then they will be accountable for their own actions.

- Q. Where a public service is more efficient than a school bus service, can you advise if a school pass can be used on this service? Example being Drumlithie service taking 40 minutes to an hour which is unacceptable.**

We believe that this situation was as a direct result of issues with roadworks in and around Stonehaven which have now been resolved.

- Q. With Nicolls ceasing to trade in November and the contract being retendered, how will the Council maximise on this opportunity to engage a contractor who can provide a more efficient and safer service?**

Hopefully the service has improved; the PTU has not been made aware of any issues since August.