



## Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Wednesday 27 May 2020

**PRESENT:** Patricia Bruce, Morag Coull, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Paula Durward (Chair), Andrea Forster, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Carol Howie, Kim Milton, Elaine Mitchell, Marion Montgomery, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Karen McClymont (Teaching Representative), Aileen McKellar, Fiona Ritchie, Richard Sharp

**APOLOGIES:** Lisa Macaulay and Cllr Dennis Robertson

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Kat Thoires (Depute Head); Lucy Angel (Principal Teacher); Maarten Ligtendag (Observer); Stuart Alexander (Observer); Janey Irving, Education Officer (STEM), Education Scotland

Paula Durward (Chairperson) welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

### 1. Understanding Progress in the BGE – Final Update

Kat Thoires, Depute Head, advised that since previously meeting with the Parent Council, the document had been “tidied up”, to standardise terminology etc, and an introduction had been included which outlined the purpose of the document and the details which it contains. Kat then shared the document with attendees and highlighted various pages, drawing attention to specific features.

Louise Moir, Head Teacher, explained that although some plans have naturally been deferred at present, the feeling is that implementation of this document should continue because clarity of communication with parents is more important than ever, especially in respect of reporting on their child’s progress.

The timing for implementation still has to be decided, but it may be that reporting in October is utilised as a trial run before it becomes part of the full reporting cycle.

Kat thanked everyone for their input to date and offered to send out the document again for any final tweaks.

Paula noted all the effort involved in producing the document, and thanked Kat for her participation in the meeting. Kat then left the meeting.

### 2. Gender Equality in STEM Subjects

Lucy Angel, Principal Teacher Developing the Young Workforce, reported on the gender balance in each faculty, and what action is taken to address gender



imbalances; encouraging students to consider studying certain subjects, or career pathways that they might not otherwise have thought about. This included various initiatives and activities, both generally and subject specific.

In respect of Developing the Young Workforce, Lucy advised on the participation of girls in Foundation Apprenticeships; and highlighted that two girls had been very successful in their chosen subjects. Lucy also advised that several girls are participating in an Open University course.

Lucy said that, because of the Covid 19 restrictions, the Work Experience week will not be proceeding in its usual format, and she is currently working on developing a virtual work experience programme.

Paula enquired specifically about encouraging girls to consider a career in engineering, noting that when her employer had recently recruited graduates there had been very few female candidates. Paula said she had subsequently requested statistics from Aberdeen and Robert Gordon's Universities and had been informed by each university that the number of females studying engineering is very low.

Lucy voiced the opinion that it is a difficult issue to resolve, and it is likely that time will be required for perceptions to change but it is important that girls are given the opportunity to see role models at an early stage in their education, and to ensure that all pupils, boys and girls, are provided with all the options that are open to them career-wise. Paula agreed and suggested that girls in primary school should have different pathways explained to them, and particularly how many careers can open up to them if they study engineering.

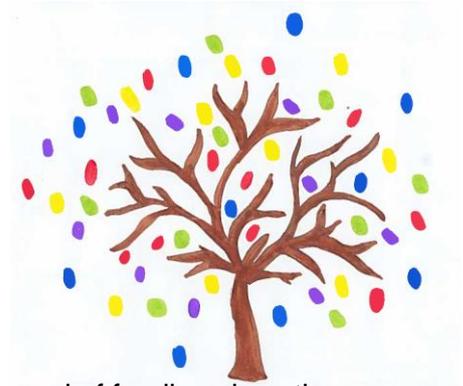
Karen McClymont, Teaching Representative on the Parent Council, advised that she had invited Janey Irving, Education Officer (STEM), Education Scotland, to participate in the meeting and talk about national initiatives to encourage under-represented groups into STEM subjects.

Janey Irving said she was delighted to have the opportunity to present details of local and national research which will help to inform what is required at a local and national level to successfully address the issue of gender balance.

Janey shared a comprehensive Powerpoint presentation which demonstrated the strategies that are currently being utilised, or will be utilised, and how initiatives can be customised to recognise key sectors specific to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

One area mentioned by Janey was a cluster approach, beginning with Early Years Education and covering a pupil's entire educational journey.

Louise said that Mackie Academy had received money from the Scottish Government in 2019-20 to develop such a cluster approach, and staff members had gone into primary schools to work with, and challenge, the pupils, while other colleagues had worked through progression with primary school staff. There had also been an Art Design & Technology initiative via Google Classrooms which has proved very helpful currently.



Louise explained that they had deferred applying for the second round of funding since the current restrictions meant that the work could not be carried out in an effective manner.

Richard Sharp advised that a recent vacancy in his workplace had attracted 20 applications, but no females had applied. However, he was aware that the number of females working offshore is increasing and around 50% of participants in the Technicians and Engineering Graduate Programme is female, which percentage is increasing over time. Richard pointed out that there is a spectrum of engineering roles available to females and the steps being taken to encourage more girls to consider a career in engineering is a positive factor.

Louise said that of 27 students studying Higher Engineering, only one is female. The number of girls studying this subject drops off significantly when they reach the Highers stage.

Richard said his company is re-branding as an energy company, rather than an oil company, which it is hoped will broaden out perceptions of potential career pathways.

Fiona Ritchie advised that her son is studying engineering in Glasgow where there is a higher percentage of female students.

Louise said that Maths has a more equal gender balance compared to Physics and Design Technology, and it would be worthwhile to explore the reasons for this. Janey said this is something she could take on, given that it is a national issue. It was pointed out that parents had a role to play too, promoting family learning and learning by enquiring, as part of the cluster approach.

Louise said that there are specific areas of work that can be picked up together with Janey, at some point in the future. Paula recommended targeting S3/S4 girls specifically.

Louise thanked Janey and Lucy for their participation and said they would be invited to a future meeting, to provide an update.

### **3. Q&A Update – Recovery Phase**

Louise said the country is now on the verge of moving out of Lockdown and into Phase 1 of Recovery. The Government have produced two documents – the Scottish Government route map and the Strategic Framework for Education. Accordingly, Mackie Academy is working with both documents to prepare the school for re-opening in August, whilst continuing to teach virtually for the remainder of this school year.

The intention is that staff will begin to return to school during June to prepare for students' return. Staff's wellbeing has to be considered too and all staff will not be in school at the same time. Students will return to school from 11 August. This is a full week before Aberdeenshire schools were due to start back meaning a week of holiday has been lost and talks are ongoing as to how the week will be recouped.



Louise underlined the extent of the work that is required before 11 August, to implement the changes required to achieve the physical distancing that is required; and all the different challenges that have to be addressed. These include the following:

Consideration has to be given to the key worker childcare hub, and how it can be managed. It will require to be re-located from Mill O' Forest School, and re-staffed when workers return to their usual posts.

There will be a phased/blended form of learning when pupils return.

Normally between 350 and 400 pupils use school/public transport. Guidelines recommend 18 passengers per bus. There are not enough coaches locally to cope with this scenario and it also means that all pupils will not be in school for 8.45 am.

S1-S3 students move up on 1 June. S5 and S6 students will move to their new timetable on that date too, which is earlier than usual. Every child in S3 to S6 is timetabled. This has had to be completed manually, to factor in the social distancing.

Currently the school is working on a model of timetabling of blocks which will mean minimal movement round the school; for example, in S4-S6 where a pupil would have four or five periods of one subject throughout the week, instead it will be taught in a block of time. Class sizes are a factor too and for larger groups a fortnightly timetable will be necessary. In some cases class sizes could be less than 50% of the group size e.g. HE and that is going to prove very problematic going forwards.

Timetable models are currently being worked on and by the next Parent Council meeting should be in place to share. There are also complex staffing issues and the

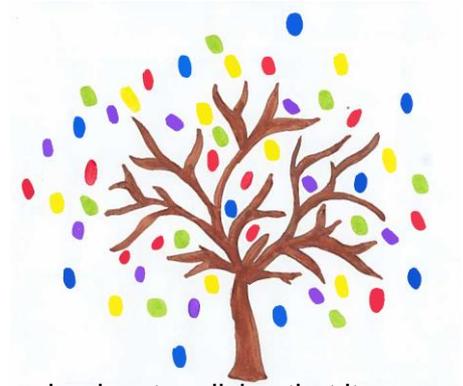
Working Time Agreement has to be taken account of with regards to teaching staff going forwards. It is likely that the start and finish of the school day will be staggered for different year groups. Breaks too will be staggered and probably taken wherever the student happens to be.

Catering is another challenge. Usually some 700 students are catered for at lunchtime. With distancing, this number will reduce to 50 seating capacity in the canteen and it could be that only vulnerable students and those eligible for free school meals are catered for, however the catering service have still to advise their views on this.

Paula pointed out that it is difficult to imagine all that staff members are working through, and offered the services of the Parent Council; even if it is just to bounce ideas off.

Louise suggested it would be helpful to convene a further meeting in 2/3 weeks' time, when she could present the timetable model.

Other challenges include pupils having to bring in their own pens/pencils etc and possibly their own devices, otherwise cleaning after each use will be required; which presents another challenge. Cleaning is usually kept to a minimum, therefore how can cleaning in between lessons be facilitated and how realistic is it in a school of Mackie's size?



Furthermore, the young people are looking forward to returning to school, not realising that it will be very different, and that could be difficult for them to process.

Morag Coull suggested that parents could begin now to prepare their child/ren for the differences when they return to school.

Louise said parents are very supportive but significant preparation is needed to prepare the young people for the new models. P7 parents are apprehensive too and things will be so different to the normal for the new S1 pupils.

Marion Montgomery pointed out that Scotland can watch the transition back to school in England, and learn lessons from that. Louise agreed and explained that the role of track and trace will play a part too and, if the system is robust, it could mean that it is possible to increase the classroom sizes at some point. In any event, the situation is a “moveable feast” and circumstances could have moved forward by August, with a corresponding move in timetabling.

It is anticipated that the initial Recovery Phase put in place for Mackie Academy will last until the October holidays.

Chris Ann Holt queried the possibility of teaching classes virtually. Louise advised that Aberdeenshire Council is addressing internet access for pupils where there is none at home. The school has supplied devices (chromebooks) to those pupils who do not have access to devices at home, and consideration is now being given to those whose only device is a mobile phone, or where there is one device with multiple users, but of courses resources are finite. There is Scottish Government funding for this, but it is targeted to specific communities and it is unlikely that Mackie will be able to access this substantially.

Louise explained that currently it is not possible to convene Google Meets between staff and pupils. However, this decision has been reversed nationally and Aberdeenshire Council is currently looking at the protocols. Once it is in place it will prove very helpful. Louise stressed that pupils access Google through the Glow Intranet therefore it is very secure. Staff are keen to utilise this resource and should there be any misuse by pupils it will be handled appropriately.

Dawn Black suggested that local children could go home at lunchtime, thus taking some pressure off the catering facilities.

Louise said there are huge challenges all round, but she was thankful that staff are remaining positive and are up to meeting the challenges.

Further down the line, the structure of the school day will be looked at to see what can be done differently, and more effectively.

Paula said it is a very difficult situation and realistically everything cannot be resolved immediately. She indicated a couple of positives in that there has been good communication between home and school and the young people seem to be coping well with the changed circumstances.



Louise said that she was hopeful that another week will bring a little more clarity and added that a contingency plan has also to be developed in case there is a local break-out or another national outbreak.

Richard asked about consultations with other schools. Louise advised that the 17 Head Teachers in Aberdeenshire have been meeting weekly with the Director and the Head of Education. There are also work streams working on key areas and digital support is being provided by the Northern Alliance, as well as national networks looking at practices in different schools. Louise underlined that networks work well, and someone is always available to call upon.

Andy Forster queried the possibility of schools breaking up a week early to recoup the week that will be lost. Louise said that different options are being considered, and nothing has been decided yet.

Andy asked if any information had been received from SQA in respect of next year's exams. Louise advised that nothing had been forthcoming from SQA, however Teaching Unions are pushing for some clarity, given that course work has now started or is about to do so.

#### **4. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed to convene a further meeting on 24 June at 19.00.

Louise said that it is helpful to use the Parent Council as a sounding board and she would arrange an impromptu meeting if she felt it would be worthwhile. Louise thanked everyone for their support and positivity.

Paula thanked everyone for their participation and contribution to discussions and closed the meeting.