



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Wednesday 29 April 2020

PRESENT: Dawn Black, Patricia Bruce, Morag Coull, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Paula Durward (Chair), Andrea Forster, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Elaine Mitchell, Marion Montgomery, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Karen McClymont, Aileen McKellar, Cllr Dennis Robertson

IN ATTENDANCE: Ian Mackay

WELCOME

The Chair, Paula Durward, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting. She pointed out that, if successful, virtual meetings could perhaps be held in future, for instance in inclement weather.

MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTE

Paula said that arrangements will be made for a representative from Destiny Partnership to attend a future meeting. Louise Moir advised that Kat Thoires would welcome the opportunity to attend, virtually, to present the finalised Reporting within the BGE document. It had also been intended to invite Lucy Angel, to share how Mackie addresses diversity and gender imbalance in the STEM subjects. It was agreed it would be worthwhile to invite Kat and Lucy to attend the next meeting.

UPDATES

Members then requested information/updates in respect of a variety of issues affected by the Covid-19 restrictions. Louise answered each, in turn, as follows:

SQA PROCESS 2020

The information being provided by the SQA to teaching staff is available to parents and accessible on the SQA website. It was explained that under normal circumstances schools are asked each year to provide estimates of the grades their students could achieve in exams. These figures are used by the SQA for the post-results process including statistics analysis of individual schools and the national picture. In the absence of exams this year, the SQA is utilising the professional judgement of staff to a greater extent through the estimates process. Louise emphasised that this is an area of strength for Mackie and therefore she was certain that staff will have a clear picture of each pupil's capabilities and progress to date. There are 19 bands this year, as detailed on the SQA website, and staff



are currently completing this work, taking account pupils' progress to date, which is a holistic view in its totality. The number of bands has risen from 7 to 19 so a greater level of detail is being requested by the SQA given the importance of this process for our young people. Pupils are also to be ranked within each band in each subject; for smaller classes this is not such an onerous task, but for subjects such as Maths and English it is quite an undertaking. The SQA has worked hard to get the necessary information to staff and have also ensured that it is accessible to parents too, so that there is transparency for all involved in this process.

All schools will be provided with the last three years' worth of data (estimates versus actuals) so that there is an awareness of where estimates have been less accurate, but again this is not an area of concern for Mackie, since it holds three years of solid data.

The deadline for submitting the information to the SQA is 29 May 2020. Mackie is working to collate its information by 11 May, to allow sufficient time for quality assurance and for the admin staff to input all the data into the system. It is helpful that admin staff have now been supplied with laptops so that they can work from home.

The Director of Education will be issuing a letter to all parents of S4-S6 students outlining the information as detailed above.

A holistic view is being taken of all evidence that staff hold on a pupil. Karen McClymont, teaching representative on the Parent Council, confirmed that account is being taken of all work completed but in any event teachers already hold a wealth of evidence for each pupil. No pupil will be disadvantaged by the period of lockdown.

Aberdeenshire Council has now completed a risk assessment so that staff can go into the school to collect evidence, for instance for practical subjects, where essential. However, Mackie's extensive use of technology means that practical elements can mostly be accessed from home. For example, some art portfolios had been scanned and can be accessed electronically.

The results will be published on 4 August 2020. The appeals process is being developed and information is awaited from the SQA as to what it will look like. Appeals will be submitted where appropriate to do so.

Steps have been taken to ensure each family has access to at least one electronic device, but the quality of Wi-Fi strength and speed is of course out with the school's control. It has however been recognised that it is an issue in some areas and it is something that the attainment team are working on since it is an important component of the learning curve. It has also not been possible to provide multiple devices to larger families therefore there is an awareness of the need for flexibility within learning/teaching to make it as easy as possible for families to engage effectively. This is an area that is also being reviewed at a national and local authority level.



Mackie has successfully utilised Google G Suite via the GLOW platform through Aberdeenshire Council and managed by Education Scotland. This means that it is a very secure system but it comes with restrictions; for example Google Meet cannot be used for staff/student meetings. Representations have been made about lifting that restriction, however it is a national decision and there is an understandable child protection element to the decision. Currently, live videos are being piloted (Microsoft Teams), which pupils can respond to via audio. The concern lies with it merging two different platforms for staff and pupil usage so there are implications and its success will be monitored. Parents can be assured of the security of the IT platforms used by Mackie and that the issues of video are being looked into at all levels going forwards.

P7/S1 TRANSITION

Obviously, circumstances are very different this year and Fiona Stark has been giving thought as to how best to manage the transition. She, and others, will be working extensively on this over the next month or so, and a working party has been established with staff from Mackie and the feeder Primary Schools.

Work is currently ongoing with pupils who will benefit from an extended transition, and these pupils will be able to access a virtual tour of the school which will help to familiarise them with new surroundings alongside other resources.

It may be that not all S1 students will start at Mackie on the same day, and it could be that transition days are organised for each group as they arrive at Mackie. A dedicated team of staff is exploring all possibilities to ensure that the transition is as smooth as it can possibly be for the new S1 pupils. There has been significant sharing of best practice between schools, which will be customised to best suit Mackie's requirements.

Correspondence will be issued to P7 parents very shortly. ***Please note a letter from Mackie Academy went out to P7 parents through their primary schools during the week beginning 4 May 2020.***

S3/S4 TRANSITION

S3 students will transfer to S4 on 1 June as planned and will know what their options are in advance of that date. Where there are timetable clashes, pupils and parents will be consulted and care will be taken to ensure that the correct information is sent to the right email address.

It was emphasised that this is a critical period for S3 students. The majority of them are capable of achieving National 5 qualifications but they need to consolidate now so that they do not miss the building blocks in S3, and finalise the base work now for fourth level outcomes so that they are ready to move on to National 5 outcomes.



S3/4 students have always timetabled seven options, even if they are intending to take up a course outwith Mackie Academy. This is to ensure that if they decide that course is not for them they still have a full offer at Mackie Academy.

S5/S6

The S5/S6 subject areas will be available from 11 May. This will allow staff more time to complete the extra work required by the SQA exam situation. Students will be able to log on to areas in Google Classroom and work will be there for them to access.

The whole school will transition to the new timetable on 1 June. This gives a three-week period to observe levels of engagement and contend with any changes of options. Further Education courses must be fitted in to the timetable too alongside options being taken elsewhere e.g. Foundation Apprenticeships. Students' level of engagement will be monitored, and it will be followed up where it is necessary to do so.

Another factor is that although S6 pupils have effectively left school, for some of them their anticipated destination is in doubt. Pupil Support teams will continue to support those involved and their destinations beyond Mackie Academy, both direct and through Skills Development Scotland.

In respect of college courses, information is awaited from NESCOL but it is anticipated that they could be delivered online initially which will also have to be managed, but the college is working hard to ensure they deliver the best option for students. Lucy Angel is the direct link with the college.

S1/S2 TRANSITION

Current S1 pupils will in due course receive a form to complete, detailing their elective choices. This should be a straightforward process but it is unlikely that elective options will start before August 2020.

SCHOOL TRIPS

The planned ski trip did not take place at Easter 2020. The World Challenge Group going to Morocco has been cancelled by the organisers who contacted parents direct. In both these cases refunds will be given but it does take time to be processed. Further information on this will be provided to parents directly by the school where appropriate.

There are three trips pending: The Performing Arts trip to London in September 2020, and the Wild West and New York & Washington trips in October 2020. Government advice is that there should be no educational trips for the foreseeable future and travel companies do heed that advice.



The school is working with Aberdeenshire Council and the tour providers at possible solutions and will be in contact direct with parents in due course regarding the viability of these trips. The key aim of any exercise around these trips is to ensure the safety of the pupils and staff involved whilst minimising any financial risk to those involved.

There is a Covid-19 page on the website, which is updated regularly with general information. Any urgent information will be issued as soon as possible.

PROVISION FOR KEYWORKERS' CHILDREN

The hub for children of categories 1, 2 and 3 key workers is sited at Mill O Forest School, but no secondary pupils have attended. There is a vulnerable students' hub which is operating at Mackie, and which is being managed by the ASL team.

RECOVERY PHASE

Recently there has been a significant shift, and consideration is now being given to the format of the recovery phase.

The next Scottish Government decision, following the end of the current three-week period, is awaited but in the meantime there is ongoing collaboration between the Government, the local authorities, Head Teachers and teaching staff, with focus on how best to move forward. Parental involvement in that phase is very important too and information will be supplied as and when it becomes available. It must be ensured that the move back into school takes place as smoothly as possible.

Cllr Robertson queried the impact that the restrictions have had on staff, and what support is available to them.

Louise said that they have been considering what staffing could look like when restrictions are lifted. She was aware that several staff members have received the shielding letter, and others could be living with similarly affected family members. However, the effects of reduced staffing levels could possibly be mitigated by students returning to school on a phased basis. The Probationers programme will proceed as usual, and Mackie has requested one probationer for History. There is a Work Stream looking at HR and staffing issues to ensure that there is a co-ordinated approach. Supply teachers are also available who will be able to help if necessary.

WORK EXPERIENCE

S3 students should be participating in their work experience placements in June. Since this will not be taking place in its usual format, it has been wondered if something virtual could be



arranged. This is perhaps something that could involve parents, possibly, for example, via a Q and A session, whereby students could learn about different fields of work. Members were asked to give it consideration and respond to Louise with any suggestions.

Paula stated that she would be happy to provide support. She suggested the possibility of work experience being deferred and taking place in the school holidays. Lucy Angel (PT DYW) and Paula will liaise to explore the possibilities. With reference to Modern Apprenticeships, Louise undertook to ascertain if, and how, it could be possible to organise a Microsoft Teams meeting between the students and current Wood apprentices to give them a better understanding of the apprenticeship and first-hand knowledge of the life of an apprentice.

GENERAL

Louise said that she had been contacted by a local businessman, who was keen to promote co-ordination of the community response to the current situation rather than piecemeal initiatives as it seems to be at present. Louise had explained the detail of the School App (plans for which are moving forward) and suggested that something similar could be developed on a community-wide basis.

Cllr Robertson said that the Hub platform, which is being developed will bring together businesses, leisure, tourism and education; covering Stonehaven and the surrounding area.

Cllr Dickinson offered thanks to Louise and all the teaching staff for their efforts in very difficult circumstances. Louise said that she would pass this on to staff and praised them for the way they have all pulled together to work round a situation that had never been envisaged. They have all tried to work as flexibly as possible to meet all the challenges and difficulties that have been faced.

Marion Montgomery advised that she had recently signed up to volunteer for Medical Supplies Scotland which aims to provide PPE for social care staff and NHS workers. Cllr Robertson advised that the Grampian hub is managed by the Health & Social Care Partnership and undertook to pass on contact details.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was decided that it would be helpful to meet again before the end of the school year. Karen suggested that discussion around STEM subjects would be worthwhile, which was agreed.

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 27 May at 7pm.

Paula thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting.