



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Tuesday 3 October 2023

PRESENT: Samantha Bradley, Sarah Cowling, Lyn Forman, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison, Claire Kennedy, Craig Meikle, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher); Moira Paterson, Susan Purvis, Fiona Ritchie, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp (Vice Chair), Cllr Alan Turner

APOLOGIES: James Brogan, Lewis Campbell, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Marion Montgomery, Sarah Smith

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

In Colin Esslemont's absence, Richard Sharp chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone, especially staff representatives Claire Kennedy and Craig Meikle, attending for the first time, together with new parent members. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 29 June, were approved. Their adoption as a true record was proposed by Jacqui Hutchison, seconded by Elaine Mitchell and agreed by those present.

3. MATTERS ARISING

BGE Award Scheme Proposals – Update

It was decided to defer this item to the November meeting, when Gavin Morrison and Ruaridh Cain could be invited to provide a detailed update on the BGE award scheme. *Please note that we will now do this at the meeting on 17.01.24 so that it fits in with other discussions being held this term; should lead to it being more informative at this time.*

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) Local Community and Litter Issues

Louise stated she accepted that litter issues are an ongoing problem, but she did not believe that Mackie students are guilty of all the littering for which they are being accused.

There had been some improvement at the Redcloak area. Louise had recently met there with the Waste Management Manager when they had reviewed the distribution of bins and had noted that there are no bins close to the picnic area. Louise explained that litter is a seasonable problem for the school and it will not be an issue during the winter months. Louise advised that they had also looked at the astroturf area, where some students spend their lunchbreak. It was noticed that the fencing is in disrepair and some of the top panels looked quite dangerous. It was explained that responsibility for the astroturf pitch lies with a community group. The site is not locked but access is restricted to keep out bikes. It was noted that there is only one small bin at the site as well as the large waste disposal bins. Again, litter is less of an issue during the winter months.

Jacqui emphasised that, while more bins would be helpful, parents have to take some responsibility for ensuring their young people know what is expected of them and act accordingly. Louise agreed and suggested local businesses should also accept some responsibility. Samantha Bradley suggested that they could, for instance, consider the possibility of reducing packaging. Louise explained that any hot food purchased in the canteen has to be eaten in the canteen but plastic bottles from the vending machines contribute to the problem. Jacqui wondered if it would be worthwhile to bring together all parties with a view to seeking some resolution of the issue.

Cllr Turner stressed that the problem is challenging. He advised that Cllr Dickinson had worked hard to address the issue with local businesses. Some companies are proactive in considering the environment but others have expressed little interest. Jacqui pointed out that some companies utilise packaging as a means of advertising their company or products.

Louise conceded that it is difficult to find a solution; and wondered if perhaps it would be useful to begin with something small but that will have an impact; perhaps beginning with the two Redcloak businesses.

Samantha suggested encouraging students to use refillable water bottles. Louise advised that pre-Covid it had been addressed very effectively. However, the Reduce, Reuse and Recycle Group were working on a plan to address plastic bottles use however it could cause conflict with the catering service. Louise said she was aware that Cllr Dickinson had argued the case for refillable water bottles to no effect.

Louise wondered if it would be worthwhile for the Parent Council to put out a newsletter to the Parent Forum; covering several issues including littering. Jacqui thought it could be helpful to provide a different perspective on issues and Richard pointed out that it would raise the profile of the Parent Council at the same time.

Cllr Turner asked if the litter issue was worse than pre-Covid. Louise explained that Redcloak is now a really nice space with picnic tables so littering has increased. Cllr Turner noted that more bins including some sited nearer to seating areas would be helpful and Louise agreed and added that the right type of bin too would be worthwhile.

Cllr Turner advised that more bins had already been requested at the Astroturf pitch. Craig Meikle advised that he had occasion to visit the area in the evening when the bins had been full so they are being used.

Jacqui indicated that the bins in the Redcloak area and on the Slug Road need to be emptied more frequently too. Cllr Turner explained that there are 500 bins to empty on the driver's route. Louise suggested that the Reduce, Re-use Recycle Group could empty the bins near the school, depositing the waste in the school bins; and at the same time

discussions could begin with the Redcloak businesses. Cllr Turner explained that one item placed in the wrong recycle bin contaminates all its contents.

It was agreed that a newsletter from the parent council would be worthwhile and decided that its format could be considered during the November meeting in time for putting it out in December.

(b) Aberdeenshire and Transformational Change 2018-2030 – Presentation

Louise shared the presentation from Aberdeenshire Council which detailed the challenges facing the Council and highlighted the funding gap which will have risen to £91.778 million by 2027/28.

Cllr Turner underlined that addressing the funding gap is the biggest challenge facing the Council, and different ways of delivering services have to be found so that savings can be made.

Expected changes in population within Aberdeenshire were also highlighted and Louise stressed that significant variations in population have an adverse effect on the school roll which in turn impacts on planning. It was acknowledged also that there are now more options available outside school and some pupils are moving on where previously they would have remained in school. For instance, some advanced higher classes are very small. Jacqui queried teaching delivery to smaller classes. Louise advised that the Developing Young Workforce team is working closely with Aberdeen City Council colleagues. Obviously, collaboration in the city is easier since the schools are all working to the same timetable and travel is less of an issue, whereas transport is problematic within Aberdeenshire.

One option being considered is the possibility of developing a model for teaching outwith the school day; perhaps late afternoon, and with a virtual platform for Advanced Highers. Jacqui acknowledged that the lack of external services will have an effect on collaborative efforts.

Richard asked if the Parent Council should be proactive in addressing potential issues affecting education in general and Mackie in particular. Louise explained that education has to some extent been buffered from savage cuts but it is anticipated that favourable situation will not continue for much longer. Louise pointed out that cutting the teaching workforce would create the greatest saving. Perhaps radical thinking will be required; for example, eliminate S6 or consider the possibility of a 4-day week. Jacqui asked if the latter could become a reality and Louise confirmed that it could become so. She explained that the presentation will be delivered to Parent Councils and the Parent Forum so that parents have a level of understanding of the challenges being faced by the Council.

Cllr Turner emphasised that there are no easy decisions. Aberdeenshire Council had decided to keep the swimming pools and the libraries open and so they need to find savings elsewhere. He explained that a 4-day week could work in some departments within the Council but Louise clarified that it would have a significant impact in schools; recruitment for example. Jacqui underlined that education is unique in what it delivers to students and virtual learning is totally different to face to face teaching. Richard said that lockdown had proved that point. Jacqui said that a clear plan would be needed – it could not just happen “overnight”.

Richard stressed that the Parent Forum would not want to see a reduction in the service provided by education but it could become a reality, unfortunately. How best can the Parent Council communicate that to the Parent Forum?

Cllr Turner advised that there is liaison with COSLA but it is recognised that funding is needed if services are to be maintained. He stressed that it is entirely possible that a Council in Scotland could become bankrupt.

Richard queried what role the Parent Council could play. Louise suggested that when consideration has to be given to introducing changes it would be helpful to bounce ideas off the Parent Council as well as deciding the best way to keep the Parent Forum informed. Obviously, while some changes or issues could seem trivial, they do not seem so to the parent of the young person affected. Change will be unavoidable and it will be crucial to seek the best possible solutions. Richard confirmed that the Parent Council would be happy to express their opinion and communicate to the Parent Forum, as necessary.

(c) Exam Results – Overview and Insight Analysis – First Stage

Louise shared a detailed overview of exam results with an introduction to Insight and analysis of 4 key areas where results are measured: Literacy and Numeracy; Positive Destination; Improving Attainment and Addressing Disadvantage.

Louise demonstrated the various ways that the results are analysed and how comparisons are made with the virtual comparator, as well as other Aberdeenshire schools. Elaine Mitchell asked if, where another school is performing better at a particular subject, contact will be made with that school to “pick their brains”. Louise confirmed that they would do so. She advised that the extended leadership team would be meeting later that week to consider the results, and decide upon any action required. It has been noted that some students underperform in S4 but improve in S5 and S6 so it is intended that consideration will be given to ensuring that S3 students are better prepared for S4.

5. AOB

Louise reported that RAAC had been discovered in the learning plaza and in 2 gym halls. The process requires 2 visual surveys and an intrusive survey. The plaza and the gym halls were at the intrusive survey stage and it was known that 3 skylights in the plaza need to be reinforced. Further information would be available by the end of that week but it was hoped that the work could be carried out during the October holiday.

However, asbestos had also been found in several ground floor classrooms requiring them to be closed off. One room’s use is peripatetic and the other 2 are music rooms. Equipment will be moved into the hall and during this time senior phase music students will be given priority.

Jacqui requested that the cost of school day be included as a discussion item at a future meeting, including the possibility of passing on textbooks no longer required.

She also asked about peer support and Louise advised that this is available via student leadership but perhaps this is an area where parents could also become involved.

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