



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Wednesday 4 November 2020

PRESENT: Dawn Black, Patricia Bruce, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Colin Esslemont, Andrea Forster, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Chris Ann Holt, Carol Howie, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Lisa Macaulay, Karen McClymont, Susan Purvis, Cllr Dennis Robertson, Richard Sharp, Mandy Tulloch, Lisa Williams

APOLOGIES: Morag Coull, Paula Durward (Chair), Fiona Hogg, Mhari Mitchell, Marion Montgomery, Aileen McKellar, Fiona Ritchie

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the meeting was convened virtually by Microsoft Teams. Patricia Bruce, Vice Chair, chaired the meeting in Paula Durward's absence. Patricia welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 7 October 2020, were approved with a couple of amendments. Subject to these amendments, their adoption as a true record was proposed by Dawn Black and seconded by Richard Sharp. Rhona Grant undertook to circulate the amended minutes.

3. MATTERS ARISING

With reference to the discussion about the Management Information System, Louise explained that she had been awaiting further information before responding to Dawn. This information is still awaited but Louise will reply to Dawn. Louise advised that Gillian Milne at Education & Children's Services is the relevant contact in relation to SEEMIS.

Any other matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. UPDATES

All updates were covered in the agenda.

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MackiePC@hotmail.co.uk



5. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) Guidance for Schools – Summary of Changes

Louise reminded attendees that Scotland has now moved into a tier system. She advised that guidance had been issued on the Friday for implementation on the Monday. The document is lengthy but there had been few changes for Mackie since Aberdeenshire is in Tier 2 at present. The intention is to keep schools open and Education Scotland have a page on their website which provides a summarised guidance on the latest advice which has proved very helpful.

Louise advised that guidance in relation to wearing masks remains the same for Tiers 0 to 2 with the exception that the "sustained period" element has been removed and now mask wearing relates to distance between individuals rather than length of time. However, should Aberdeenshire move into Tier 3, pupils in the Senior Phase would be required to wear masks in school.

The ventilation guidance has been updated and as we are now in the winter months there is the added challenge of finding a balance and local authorities will support strategies to address the balance between achieving a flow of air and ensuring staff and pupils are warm. It has been decided that windows will be opened at breaks and at lunch time and outwith these times measures such as opening top windows will be employed. The janitors will open the windows first thing in the morning and close them at the end of the day and, where possible, doors will be opened too.

Some areas are more difficult to ventilate but space is at a premium and therefore not utilising these areas is problematic.

One helpful piece of advice is that jotters and similar equipment no longer have to be quarantined for 72 hours, since it has been decided that handwashing and using sanitiser, and avoiding touching your face, mitigates the necessity to quarantine these items. This is helpful because scientific evidence suggested that the risk of transition was very low but quarantining jotters etc for 72 hours was creating issues.

A surprising and significant change has been the advice in relation to PE; in that the new guidance states that in Tiers 0 to 3 pupils can participate in contact sports indoors as well as outside for PE. Louise voiced her concerns about this since a key area of transmission is known to be PE halls; also students would not be wearing masks and, naturally, they would be shouting to each other. The Faculty Head is now reviewing the guidance and putting together a programme including being inside, but the preferred option is that PE will be outside if at all possible and the changing rooms will not be in use.

Lisa Macaulay agreed and suggested that senior phase students, especially, should be outside for PE. Colin Esslemont said PE for all should always be outside.

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Louise said that participation in PE has been very positive and students have become used to it being outside. Obviously, weather is likely to become an issue during the winter months but this can be risk assessed and factored in. Louise said they had been very surprised by the advice; having thought that non-contact sports such as badminton might be permitted, but not all sports.

Patricia agreed that it was not wise for students to participate in sports in an enclosed space without wearing masks. She pointed out that PE outside could be adapted depending on the weather and her view was that cancellation of PE would be preferable to it taking place indoors.

Louise advised that the Faculty Head is quite keen to conclude the current programme before making any changes, in any event. S5 and S6 pupils do not have core PE so there would be fewer of them involved. S4 students have PE either first or last period. If the weather is favourable PE could go ahead outside. If weather is poor, PE could be cancelled and pupils would either attend school later than usual or finish early (Stonehaven pupils) and the public transport pupils can be accommodated within school.

Louise stressed that infection rates have been low locally but they are beginning to climb and it would not be advisable to implement something that could have an adverse effect on the transmission of infection.

Colin said that the proposal sounds like a sensible approach and preferable to PE indoors. Dawn agreed and said it sounded like a positive compromise.

Richard commended the school for their efforts in complying with all the necessary restrictions and asked if schools are subject to verification of the measures they have implemented. Louise advised that the Health & Safety Executive had visited schools in Aberdeen prior to the holidays and had been very pleased with all the measures that schools have put in place. Feedback had been passed on to other schools and it had been ensured that Mackie had covered everything noted in the feedback.

Also, Education Scotland had carried out a Quality Assurance exercise across all secondary schools in Scotland and, since the HM Inspectorate cannot carry out the usual school inspections currently, they have been asked to complete virtual assessments with schools, and there are also spot checks so the whole process has been quite rigorous.

Richard pointed out that complacency can set in, as time goes on. Louise advised that Mackie has an active Health & Safety committee who are monitoring to ensure that measures and standards are being maintained.



(b) SQA Update

Louise reported that Laura Larkworthy has returned from maternity leave and has taken over the role of SQA co-ordinator. It had been anticipated that further publications and details of the exam diet would have been received by now. Nothing has been forthcoming as yet but they were hopeful of receiving further information and the exam diet by the end of the week.

A general document has been published in respect of gathering evidence and producing estimates for the National 5 assessments. It is still assumed, at present, that Highers and Advanced Highers exams will be taking place.

Louise said that the SQA information is all contained on their website. So far, they have provided a wealth of detail in relation to the types of key evidence that will be required for English and Maths and there is a suggestion that internal exams might be expected so consideration is now being given to how best to meet that requirement. It is known that 4 key aspects and 4 key pieces of evidence will be required, and discussions have begun with staff to decide what evidence should be produced and what the assessment tasks should look like. Further decisions will be made at a later date.

English and Maths Faculty Heads are studying the information provided thus far and will then discuss with their respective teams, including their thoughts on how best estimate exams could be managed; ideally before the February mid-term break. It could be that there will be more flexibility for organising National 5 exams but further information from the SQA is awaited before any decisions are made. It could be towards the end of November before there is further guidance from the SQA relating to the remaining subjects which brings added pressure to those affected. National 5 pupils will not be sitting formal exams but if the SQA states that the best method of providing evidence is an internal exam consideration will be given to how best to organise that.

By early December the school will have a better understanding of the assessment process and will then be able to inform parents. Staff are keen that Highers pupils have an exam experience in preparation for a 2 1/2 hours formal exam. Dawn voiced the opinion that the blocks of learning now implemented will make it easier to organise exams. Louise agreed that the structure will be helpful but pointed out that it would not be wise to accommodate large numbers of pupils in the main hall or elsewhere in school. Usually, November and December bring weather issues and the hall is being used for wet weather provision so it could be that convening exams away from school might be helpful, and Laura Larkworthy intends to ascertain the availability of the Town Hall for this purpose. Louise stressed that if it is decided to offer National 5 pupils an exam experience it will be in a classroom setting.

Dawn said that if students are informed that the test will be under exam conditions most of them will prepare accordingly, and those who do not could perhaps learn a valuable lesson from the experience. Louise said that it will be ensured that pupils fully understand the



assessment process as it proceeds, and it will be ensured that there is a consistency of approach.

Louise said that she was hopeful that the processes being introduced will stimulate future discussions of the way forward post covid-19; for instance, for practical woodwork it would be helpful if the value of a written paper could be re-considered. It would be worthwhile to have a best-fit model for each subject rather than a "one size fits all" approach.

Richard Sharp sought clarification in respect of the National 5 proposed exams. Louise explained that they will be arranged where it is thought they will work best; probably late January/early February before the mid-term break when pupils will have been back in school for three weeks. There will either be a formal assessment or an exam experience within the classroom. Richard asked if whichever is decided will contribute towards the assessment process. Louise confirmed that it would and reiterated that there will be no formal National 5 exams.

6. AOB

Impact of Proposed Bill on Scottish Teaching Profession

Louise explained the background to the recent GTCS email which related to proposed plans for the teaching profession post-Brexit. She explained that currently teachers have to be degree-qualified in a specific subject to be able to teach it in Scotland but this is not the case throughout the UK. For example, elsewhere someone could teach Maths without having a degree in Maths. Louise voiced her concerns that, if the Bill is passed, teaching would no longer be a degree-led profession and she had written personally to her local MP to raise her concerns. She pointed out that the way the new Bill is worded means that anybody could enter the teaching profession yet the subject knowledge and skills learned through the degree process are very important. Louise requested that anyone who was similarly concerned used the template attached to the email to voice their disagreement to the local MP and request that the Bill be reviewed. Dawn queried whether a collective response could be formulated or if members should respond individually. Louise suggested that a joint letter on behalf of the Parent Forum would be worthwhile and those who wished to do so could send individual letters too.

Richard said he had been surprised to learn that entry qualifications to teaching were not consistent across the UK, and in fact there is a significant difference. Louise explained that Scotland has a uniform approach across all Local Authorities and to teach in Scotland a teacher has to be registered with the GTCS with a very comprehensive application process. She acknowledged that GTCS involvement can feel constrictive but it serves a purpose and the base line to enter the teaching profession should be a degree qualification.

Dawn recommended that the template is edited and circulated for comments / amendments / approval prior to signature and emailing to Andrew Bowie MP



Parents Evenings

Andy Forster asked if there were any plans to convene parents evenings. Louise said they were under review at present. She advised that the first phase of the Tracking Reports had been issued recently and it is intended to trial a virtual S3 Parents Evening on 25 November and if that goes well it is planned to hold a 1st Year Parents Evening on 1 December. Learning Intervention Forms for Senior Phase students have been issued so parents should have a good idea how their child/ren is performing.

For the virtual parents evening the online booking system has a video facility which it is intended to utilise, and the details are currently being worked out. Louise requested some volunteer “guinea pigs” to trial the system with Laura Larkworthy and the Office Manager before it goes live. Several parents volunteered and Louise said she would pass on their email addresses to Laura and the Office Manager. She explained that parents will be asked to request appointments only for subjects their child hopes to take forward, to help capacity. Louise said the volunteers would be contacted as soon as possible to arrange a mutually suitable date and time for a trial, since it is intended that details of the process will be supplied to S3 parents by 13 November. Richard asked if any other schools had already held a virtual parents evening. Louise advised that Aboyne Academy had held one which had gone reasonably well, other than connectivity issues which should not be a problem at Mackie. Richard pointed out the worth of trialling the system with parents who live outside Stonehaven where connectivity can be an issue. Louise agreed that would be worthwhile.

Carol asked how many would be participating. Louise said that 60 teachers would be involved plus parents but it was thought that the school should be able to cope easily with that number and chromebooks will be used to assist connectivity. Carol enquired what arrangements would be put in place for parents who did not have access to a suitable device. Louise explained that due to lockdown they are aware of where that could possibly be a problem and the Attainment Team are giving consideration to decide how best to address any potential issues.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Louise suggested that at a later meeting it would be worthwhile to discuss the Cost of the School Day.

Patricia said that the next meeting was scheduled for 21 January but it had been thought in view of the changing climate it would be worthwhile to arrange a short meeting in December so that updates can be provided. After a brief discussion it was decided this meeting would be held on Wednesday 9 December.

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

