



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Tuesday 7 May 2024

PRESENT: Samantha Bradley, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Lyn Forman, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison, Claire Kennedy, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Susan Purvis, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp (Acting Chair), Mandy Tulloch, Cllr Alan Turner

APOLOGIES: James Brogan, Lewis Campbell, Sarah Cowling, Moira Paterson, Sarah Smith

IN ATTENDANCE: Ruaridh Cain (Teacher – Physical Education), Gavin Morrison (Depute Head Teacher)

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Richard Sharp welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 20 March 2024, were approved. Their adoption as a true record was proposed by Mandy Tulloch, seconded by Lyn Forman and agreed by those present.

3. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) Proposal – BGE Celebrating Success Events

The proposal document had been circulated prior to the meeting. Gavin Morrison expanded upon the details contained in the paper. He emphasised all the research and consultation that had taken place with a view to identifying the best way forward for this initiative.

Ruaridh Cain highlighted the fact that S1 and S2 students had stated their preference for an informal setting for presentation of awards but S3 pupils had indicated that they wanted more recognition and a higher profile for their acknowledgements, and they had been asked to expand upon their thoughts on what this could look like.

Gavin underlined that branding and other items would be used for all appropriate school occasions including future awards ceremonies. For annual costs they were reckoning on £150 per year group, per year. This includes nibbles etc for the presentation as well as the awards.

Richard observed that it was apparent that much thought had gone into developing the process and everything sounded very positive. He voiced the opinion that an informal celebration would be well received by the young people, especially S1 and S2 students. Jacqui agreed and suggested the possibility of presenting an award at the table if that was more comfortable for the recipient.

Gavin said the intention is to begin presentations in 2025, recognising that the process will develop as time goes on. Floor space could be an issue in the plaza so it is likely that the events will be spaced out over three weeks with each year group having their own celebration (limited to students only). Gavin added that it is planned to invite an interesting and relevant speaker. Louise explained that it is thought that former pupils could be a possible option; but not too much older than the students so that it feels relatable to them.

Susan pointed out the importance of projecting a strong message that recognition can be achievable. Gavin explained that they were at the stage of giving consideration to the criteria and they were conscious of making them meaningful to the young people; whilst creating a sense that anyone can achieve an award if they put in the effort. They were also keen to cement the School Values, as well as subject-specific awards, and recognising effort plus those who had gone above and beyond what is required. Richard thought including the School Values would make them more real. Jacqui enquired how information on the process will be passed on and how the nomination process will work. Susan pointed out that if it is flagged up early in the school year it could act as an incentive.

Ruaridh stressed that they intended to take the necessary time to get the process right so that students engage with it but they do not want it to turn into a popularity contest. Gavin said they do want to make it as wide-reaching as possible.

Jacqui recommended that it is underlined that this is the first year of the project, that feedback will be sought, and the process will develop as time goes on. Lindsay Robertson asked if the events will be publicised so that parents are aware of them. Gavin confirmed that they would be well advertised, and well photographed too.

Cllr Turner queried how many awards were anticipated. Gavin advised that they reckoned on 140-ish awards in each year for S1 and S2 students but S3 will have a different look. They do want the majority of the students to receive an award but Ruaridh said they would be cautious since awards will lose their value if everyone receives something, however this is one area that requires further discussion with students. Jacqui agreed that it is important to strike the right balance. Cllr Dickinson suggested widening the spectrum of awards which would attract more nominees.

Parent Council members unanimously agreed, in principle, to fund the initiative. Louise advised that pricing for the various items will be obtained; as well as associated costs of the

various elements of the events. Discussions on the process will continue within the US Time Groups.

(b) Parents' Evenings Feedback

Louise shared a presentation of the data collated from parents' responses to the recent questionnaire relating to parent's evenings and highlighted areas where future focus would be directed, in light of the replies.

Louise explained that it is intended to trial in-person evenings for S1-S3 parents and to continue with online meetings for the Senior Phase meetings; the first of which will be convened in October. It will be recommended to parents that they focus on subjects where there are any concerns. In February there will be one meeting for S4 parents, and another for S5 and S6 parents together. There is a possibility that the length of the appointments might be slightly extended for the February evenings only.

Claire Kennedy indicated that it can be quite helpful for the initial parents meeting to be in-person, especially for S1 parents, however online meetings for the Senior Phase work well when parents and teachers can be more focused. Furthermore, teachers are being encouraged to ensure that comments in reports are specific to the young person and clearly set out what is being asked of the student and how they can achieve it.

Parents have also been told that they can provide any further feedback via the Parent Council.

A potential issue is that the LAN Network is being upgraded which could possibly affect connection to events. In theory, it could be possible for parents to come into school and log in there, if necessary.

Samantha Bradley pointed out that with divorced parents, inviting the other parent to attend can be problematic. Louise offered an assurance that the absent parent will be provided with all relevant information.

(c) Student Feedback Survey

Louise reported that prior to the survey going live they had discussed terminology with students so that it was worded appropriately and they had trialed it before going live. They had surveyed a random sample of students, S1 to S4, and the mechanism had worked well. The questions had been broken down into different categories with some questions specific to an individual year group. Louise shared the feedback and highlighted salient responses, including the high percentage of S4 students who indicated that they feel they have someone they can talk to, if needed. Equally high, however, had been in relation to bullying concerns, and the indication that there is a sense that they are not kept informed of how an issue had been resolved. Fiona Stark intended to address this appropriately.

Cllr Turner asked if the survey had been broken down by gender. Louise said it had not, but she would be able to, if there was a reason to do so.

Other topics covered included healthy lifestyle (what does that mean?); Exercise; Encouragement (would like consistency); Achievements (do not always flag up or are unsure how to); Feel listened to (generally yes but has been identified that some work is needed); Behaviours (again consistency in addressing this is wanted).

Louise advised that the staff survey is due this year and consideration is being given to carrying out a similar survey for parents which would be trialed via Parent Council members.

Jacqui asked if a random sample had resulted in a better response and Louise confirmed that it had. Mandy queried if there had been any surprises. Louise said there had been none and they had been pleased by the level of positivity expressed. However, it was apparent that work on consistency as a Key Factor would be worthwhile. Louise explained that identifying the priorities to be worked on is looked upon as a partnership with the students and they plan to give the young people a sense of ownership. Extended US Times will be utilised with some preparatory work beforehand so that the students know what is being sought from them. The cut-off point for input will be September/October so that it can then be included in the Improvement Plan.

(d) Insight Presentation

Louise provided a comprehensive presentation on the updated data provided by Insight.

Louise explained how the analysis is utilised by focusing on specific areas. The virtue comparator compares like with like and is useful for measuring performance. Louise underlined several positive factors such as improving attainment and tackling disadvantage, as well as positive destinations for leavers being sustained.

It was notable that much effort has been expended by the Maths Dept to improve attainment; Achieving in Maths is causing concern, nation-wide.

Louise highlighted that the figure of 99.56% for leavers' positive destinations is impressive, and while the Foundation Apprenticeships are now coming through the data and is a success story, a high number of Mackie students sit Highers, while the S6 figures have improved significantly due to the Apprenticeships.

On the subject of Improving Attainment and Attainment -v- Deprivation (SIMD6) there is the ability to follow those students with a view to determining whether there is a trend, or a one-off circumstance. Jacqui voiced the opinion that it is likely there will be one person who skews the figures.

Louise advised that a meeting is scheduled with the National Adviser who will provide an appraisal of the data. Some deeper analysis had been requested on specific areas such as level 6 literacy. Richard queried when the Improvement Plan is fed into and Louise explained the plan covers 5 years. It is fed into between June and November and then solidified into identified actions. Richard asked if effort is expended where the most value is anticipated. Louise confirmed that they identify what actions will make the most difference; for instance work on literacy and numeracy is crucial. As already noted, the Maths Team has expended a lot of effort to encourage the students to engage with the courses being offered. Susan said that the support provided by the Maths team, and the Chemistry team, during the Easter holidays had been brilliant and very helpful.

Louise underlined that it is recognised that some measures are long-term and there will be a delay before they see the benefits coming through. For example, work continues to develop on support for the transition from P7 to S1.

5. PARENT COUNCIL BUSINESS

(a) Parent Council Representation at Parents Evenings

Louise provided details of the Parents Evening on 17 June for new S1 parents. She explained that it would only need one representative to talk about the Parent Council for

around 5 minutes. Richard undertook to flag up the meeting in advance, and request a volunteer.

(b) Office-Bearers' Roles 2024/25

Richard reminded parent members of the need for a Chair and Vice Chair for the new school year and encouraged parents to consider the possibility of serving in one of these roles.

(c) Parent Councils' Meeting with Jenny Gilruth

Richard thanked Mandy for representing us at a recent meeting of Aberdeenshire Parent Councils. Mandy reported that Laurence Findlay (Director), Susan Smith (Head of Service) and 10 Parent Council representatives (including ourselves) had met to discuss the issue of recruitment. It had been noted that 44 probationers had been requested for Aberdeenshire and 20 had been allocated. Laurence had undertaken to contact the Press & Journal in connection with promoting teaching as a career choice. Subsequently, 3 Chairs had a brief meeting online with Jenny Gilruth. Mandy said that she had not yet received any feedback from this meeting but she would share it, once received. Cllr Turner asked if an ageing staff force could become a problem at some point but Louise said she did not anticipate that would be the case.

Jacqui asked if it would be helpful for the entire Aberdeenshire Parent Councils to write to Jenny Gilruth. Mandy explained that a letter had been sent, signed by all Chairs, and Ms Gilruth had been due to attend a meeting locally but this had been postponed and instead there was only a brief online meeting.

Richard said it was apparent that the will and the effort is apparent from the local Parent Councils and Jacqui emphasised the importance of keeping up the momentum. Louise underlined that public transport in rural Aberdeenshire is a negative factor. If an employee does not have their own transport, getting to some rural schools can be problematic.

6. AOB

Louise advised that whilst the PTA had folded during the previous year there was still an outstanding matter which had to be resolved to finalise the closure. Richard said the Parent Council was available to assist, as required.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As already agreed, the next meeting is scheduled for 26 June 2024 and will be convened in person.

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