



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Tuesday 8 March 2022

PRESENT: Alana Allison, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Rhona Grant (Clerk), Chris Ann Holt, Jacqui Hutchison, Lisa Macaulay, Karen McClymont, Susan Purvis, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp

IN ATTENDANCE: Nicola Hamilton, Gavin Morrison, Fiona Stark, (Depute Head Teachers) Alan Clark (Cluster Business Manager)

APOLOGIES: Dawn Black, Morag Coull, Fiona Hogg, Carol Howie, Annette Leith, Hamish Loveday, Mark Lowey, Elaine Mitchell, Mhari Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Marion Montgomery, Fiona Ritchie, Cllr Denis Robertson, Mandy Tulloch

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Colin Esslemont welcomed everyone to the meeting. All agreed how good it was to be able to meet in person and everyone introduced themselves.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 27 January 2022, were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) School Meals Feedback

Fiona Stark referred to the survey on pupils' experiences of school meals which had been conducted in 2021 after the latest changes to the food & drink in schools policies had been introduced.

Fiona reported that there had been a high number of participants and the findings painted a positive picture of catering facilities at Mackie. The survey had been quite long therefore it had been decided to encourage participation via PSE lessons which also meant that there had been a good spread of the year groups.

Fiona shared the details of the findings and highlighted the salient points. For instance, it had emerged that a large number of students skipped breakfast before school which is quite concerning. Accordingly, the Health & Wellbeing Impact Team have met to discuss how best to address this, and one possibility being considered is the reintroduction of Tutor Time in some format. If it takes place at the start of the school day it would mean that staff could monitor students' wellbeing including whether or not they have had breakfast.

Jacqui Hutchison pointed out that it would be interesting to learn the reasons why pupils have not eaten breakfast. Fiona said that once they have been able to put measures in place to gather that information they can begin to collate some stats. If the reason is financial, it is important to inform parents that eligibility for free school meals includes a sum allocated for breakfast and it will be ensured that parents are made aware that a sum is added to the young person's card for this purpose. The school had paid for this for the first year when it was introduced and it is now covered by the Authority. Fiona advised that 100+ pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Nicola Hamilton said she was aware that a number of students seem to have energy or fizzy drinks for breakfast, rather than have something to eat. Colin indicated that some students have breakfast at home, but visit the canteen for a drink; and it could be cultural; like adults getting coffee en route to work.

Fiona reported that the catering staff came out exceptionally well, not surprisingly. They know the young people well and have a nurturing attitude towards them, feeding back any concerns they might have. It will be ensured that the findings are shared with the catering staff.

(b) SQA Update

Nicola delivered a detailed presentation on the latest SQA update. She advised that scenario 2 has been adopted meaning that exams will be convened and no additional assessments will be required for the purpose of determining grades. Staff have gone above and beyond the necessary when gathering evidence, in case scenario 3 was invoked.

Nicola emphasised that estimate grades have always existed and that has not changed. There will be no inferred grades and estimates will not be based solely on the assessment window. Conversations with learners will be ongoing in relation to their progress throughout the course. Estimates grades will be used in the event of exceptional circumstances and for the appeals process.

The exam calendar runs from 26 April to 1 June and during that time, appropriate measures will be put in place, including other pupils being asked to be considerate of those sitting exams. Senior pupils will be advised of the details of study leave and the arrangements for when they are in school. All information will be posted on the school's website and shared via an assembly.

It was noted that the assessment window had been useful in preparing students for exams by sitting assessments under exam conditions. It was agreed that everyone is adjusting to the new normality, and it is not only young people who have been affected.

Colin asked about the future of the SQA and Nicola pointed out that the revamp of the SQA is ongoing but decisions relating to qualifications and whether there are exams or continuous assessment in future will be political in nature.

Jacqui indicated that there are arguments for and against exams, and Higher Education is looking at the subject too, including issues such as weighting. Nicola said that a lot of pupils like the “security” of an exam. Colin pointed out that there are pupils who find exams challenging but Fiona advised that nowadays a wealth of tailored support is available to students from S1 onwards; for instance, transcribing, extra time allowed, and digital papers. Lisa Macaulay asked if it is known whether the students who missed out on exams had been adversely affected. Fiona advised that stats show that more young people went on to further and higher education and she was not aware of anyone who was disadvantaged in terms of missing out on their preferred destination.

Fiona underlined that as far as Mackie is concerned the difference between estimate and actual grades is negligible demonstrating the integrity of the tracking and monitoring system, as well as the efforts of the teaching staff. Richard Sharp asked if the new scenario is quite close to how it used to be. Nicola confirmed that it is. Also, teachers had borne in mind the requirements of scenario 3, just in case, and so they had gathered more evidence than was currently required.

Richard recommended that exam conditions are emphasised to students, such as arriving on time. Nicola agreed and said it would be done in a supportive manner. Gavin Morrison stressed that the SQA is an entity separate from the school. The SQA runs exams and the school hosts them. Conditions for exams are uniform all over Scotland and there is little wiggle-room for any deviation.

Jacqui asked if feedback will be sought from students. Nicola confirmed that it will but explained it is a question of timing. Informal feedback is ongoing but once the SQA booklets are received the feedback will be shared more formally then. Nicola advised that S4 students had grasped the exam conditions more easily but obviously it was an entirely new experience for them. Lindsay Robertson pointed out that everyone has been affected by lockdown restrictions beginning to lift and becoming used to returning to some form of normality, and it will be no different for young people.

(c) Options and Timetabling Update

Gavin Morrison provided an overview of the timetabling process. He explained that students at Mackie are offered free choice and highlighted the logistics of accommodating everyone's choices, if at all possible. Gavin reported that the options process had just been completed. S2 students moving into S3 choose 9 subjects and S3 into S4 etc choose up to 5 subjects plus core subjects. Information meetings were held, all relevant information was available online and then the student completed an option form.

Last year this had been done electronically and it had worked so well that it had been repeated this year. It was underlined that the total of choices made amounts to around 4000. The next step is to input all the information into the computer and the aim is to give as many pupils as possible all their chosen subjects but sometimes it is necessary to ask a student to change a choice, once the columns are drawn up. When a workable combination is achieved the information is then fed into SEEMIS to develop the building blocks of periods; ready for the timetable change in June.

Also to be factored in are courses at NESCOL and Dundee & Angus College, as well as Foundation Apprenticeships. The subjects offered at Mackie usually stay quite stable but new courses can be introduced; for example this year there are the additional options of Higher Psychology and National 5 Food Technology.

Nicola emphasised that free choice is not offered at all schools but it is a worthwhile undertaking. Gavin agreed. He offered to go further into the mechanics of timetabling at a later date, if it would be of interest to members.

6. BANCHORY STONEHAVEN ATHLETICS – FACILITIES AT MACKIE

Colin reported that Banchory Stonehaven Athletics Club had made contact because they want to refresh the areas they use at the rear of the field, but they had been unable to progress this. Alan Clark advised that he had only recently been made aware of the situation and had sight of the email trail so he could understand the club's frustration. Alan said he had discussed the proposals with Louise Moir, which the school is supportive of, and he was hopeful that progress could now be made. Alan emphasised that the process has to follow the appropriate Aberdeenshire procedures; including involving the landscaping team and using approved contractors. All the relevant information had been provided to the club and they were awaiting quotations.

7. PROPOSED DUNNOTTAR AND CARRONHILL SCHOOLS DEVELOPMENT

Colin said he was aware that there were mixed opinions about the new school being sited at Mackie including how the outdoor space would be affected but, if the Mackie site is chosen, he was keen to see that it is ensured that any sports facilities which are developed on the site are multi-use. He reminded attendees that funding is available for the development of sporting facilities. Nicola emphasised the importance of consulting pupils for their thoughts. Chris Ann Holt said that it is important also to ensure that facilities are accessible for Carronhill pupils too, in the event that the Mackie site becomes the chosen option.

Cllr Dickinson advised that a meeting with representatives from Dunnottar school had been held recently but the meeting at Carronhill had been unavoidably delayed. Cllr Dickinson emphasised that engagement is ongoing and the location of the new school has not been decided or presumed. Future proofing has also to be taken into consideration in deciding the best location of the new school and indeed every aspect has to be considered very carefully. A new school is much needed but the process has to be followed and it is still at an early stage.

Colin pointed out that it is a positive factor that lots of conversations are now taking place. Cllr Dickinson agreed and encouraged everyone to contribute and participate as and when an opportunity presents itself. Cllr Dickinson stressed that the Estates Team have a wealth of experience in developing new schools as evidenced by those most recently completed.

8. AOB

Nicola reported that donations in kind for Ukraine had been received in school and these had been forwarded on but logistics such as transportation made it problematic for the school to continue to do so. It had therefore been decided to advise students and parents of local initiatives which had the relevant resources/facilities/infrastructure where they could direct future donations should they so wish. It was agreed that this course of action made sense.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 28 April 2022. This is a change of date since the previously agreed date now clashes with the Senior Prom.

Colin thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to discussions and closed the meeting.

Following the meeting, attendees visited the new facilities and were very impressed by what has been achieved.