



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Tuesday 14 December 2021

PRESENT: Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Marion Montgomery, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp

APOLOGIES: Alana Allison, Dawn Black, Patricia Bruce, Morag Coull, Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Carol Howie, Jacqui Hutchison, Annette Leith, Hamish Loveday, Mark Lowey, Lisa Macaulay, Karen McClymont, Mhari Mitchell, Susan Purvis, Fiona Ritchie, Cllr Denis Robertson, Mandy Tulloch

IN ATTENDANCE: Nicola Hamilton and Gavin Morrison (Depute Head Teachers)
Dale Harris, Sarah Watt

Due to a misunderstanding the link to join the meeting was not sent to all members and, because of this, fewer than 10 parent members were in attendance at the beginning of the meeting. However, given the importance of the information to be shared in relation to the SQA update and the proposed timetable and structure of the school day for 2022/23, those present agreed that the meeting should proceed whilst recognising that it was not quorate.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Colin welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised for the confusion as detailed above. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 4 November 2021, were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Any matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) Tutor Time Update

This item was deferred to the next meeting, scheduled for 27 January 2022.

(b) SQA January Assessment Window Update

Nicola Hamilton delivered a presentation in respect of current information from the SQA. She offered an assurance that although changes are ongoing every effort is made to pass on updated information to parents as soon as possible but it is of course an ever-changing picture and sometimes it is thought that it is wise to await further detail before passing on information.

Also, the Information page on the school's website is updated regularly and pupils are kept informed on an ongoing basis but it is intended to convene a virtual assembly on 16 December when more detail will be supplied to students. It is also intended to record the assembly so that the details will be available to parents and to those students who are unable to attend. More detail, including the timetable for the assessments, are expected in January

All information is accessible on the SQA website and they also publish a National Qualifications booklet which is updated every year.

Nicola then shared a document detailing three different scenarios, as identified by the SQA, and the measures by which each will be addressed.

Nicola emphasised that there are no plans for additional assessments, this year. She explained that the evidence will be gathered as follows. Between 24 January and 4 February there will be an assessment window. Following discussions with the Senior Leadership Team and Faculty Heads, it is felt that this timeframe will allow some time following the holidays so that students can revise and plan ahead. How best to offer support is still being given consideration but there will be study leave for S4 to S6 students. Practical assessments will be scheduled for the previous week. One subject per day will be helpful for practical subjects since they need a longer time slot, and pupils will be given time to prepare and to practise. When students come into school for revision they will be expected to wear school uniform and to sign in at Reception, and they will be made aware that available space will be limited. Google classroom will also be utilised as and when appropriate to do so.

Consideration will be given as to the best way of ensuring that pupils are well prepared, while at the same time keeping them safe and bearing in mind that the rest of the school carries on as normal. Key areas to consider include reducing disruption and alleviating anxiety where possible. With that in mind, it has been decided to defer issuing a full timetable at present in case the plans change. Faculty Heads have studied the timetable and they will decide how best to manage their subject. It will be ensured that the assessments are spread across both weeks. It is important too to be mindful of staff workload, bearing in mind that there are 26 subjects and in excess of 500 students. Logistics will be a challenge and while there will be 3 key locations for the assessments; for those subjects requiring specialist equipment, eg Home Economics, the assessments will take place in the classroom. It is also important to put across to the students the purpose of the assessment windows. Whilst they are not a full replica they will provide an opportunity to experience the intensity of a number of assessments in a short period of time; as well as the assessment being timed, in a non-classroom environment and with invigilators. Students could well make errors of judgement and the assessment windows will be a trial run so that they can identify any potential issues and highlight where further work is needed.

As far as integrity is concerned, staff are impeccable as far as their role is concerned but obviously there is no control over what happens outwith school. It may be the case that the same assessment will be held on different days but that has always happened. It will be emphasised to pupils that if they share the details with other students it could result in driving

up the pass mark which would not be of benefit to them. Plagiarism and collusion is monitored on an ongoing basis in any event but pupils have to take responsibility too.

Staff will offer support as usual and will keep watch for stress and anxiety. Results will be supplied by the class teacher and thereafter work will focus on areas where extra effort is needed. It has still to be decided how to resolve the situation if a student misses an assessment but procedures will be put in place to address it.

Louise confirmed that all information is available on the SQA website and suggested that a link could be included on the school's SQA page on its website. Louise stressed that staff's professionalism is at a high level and the extended leadership team (which includes Faculty Heads and Guidance Teachers) are meeting weekly to debate and decide the way forward. She clarified that the assessments will be used as part of the suite of evidence if it turns out that scenario 3 comes into play. Compiling a portfolio of evidence is a better system for the young people but the delay in receiving updated information and communications from the SQA is not helpful for staff or pupils alike.

Nicola agreed and indicated that it has been pointed out to students that the current system should be likened to a marathon rather than a sprint but there are of course pupils who tend to leave everything to the last minute and it is important to get that message across to them in particular. There is also the weighting of papers for the practical subjects and those pupils will be made aware of the gradings so that they can play to their strengths.

Louise advised that it had been thought that it might be worthwhile to convene a parents' evening during the following week to share current information. However, they were aware that it is a busy time for everyone and also updated guidance is not expected until later in the week. Accordingly, parental opinion was requested on whether it would be better to wait until after the holidays when circumstances could have changed; for instance restrictions on large gatherings of young people would mean that the main hall or the library could not be used to replicate exam-like conditions. The date of 11 January was suggested which would allow time for the information to be digested before the assessment window and it may be that plans A and B will be developed. In the meantime, the information shared at the assembly will be available to parents thereafter, and then the presentation in January would provide all the updated information.

Colin thanked Nicola for the informative presentation and voiced the opinion that a parents evening in January would be more helpful. In the meantime, parents and their young people can discuss the information shared at the assembly. Marion Montgomery concurred. She pointed out that it is important to share the current thinking with the students just now because they are anxious and she recommended that it is highlighted that the assembly will be recorded and made available to parents. Marion indicated that some of the young people have never faced exam conditions so the experience will be completely new to them and the more information provided the better, with a further briefing in January.

Louise advised that all current information will be accessible on the school's website and Nicola is also in the process of compiling a booklet which will provide all the relevant information.

All parents present agreed that it would be worthwhile to defer the parents evening until January. Louise suggested that it would be useful to request any questions prior to the parents evening so that meaningful answers can be prepared. It was agreed this would be helpful. Nicola said that students too will be encouraged to get in touch with any specific questions they may have.

(c) Structure of the School Day 2022-23 and Timetable

Louise reported that work has begun on constructing the 2022/23 timetable. As part of the process, Faculty Heads have been consulted and Fiona Stark is monitoring the school roll projection for 2022/23 which is sitting at 1175, based on a few changes. For instance, the S1 intake is 30 fewer than the current S1. The projection is visited regularly to update with information as it becomes known, for example staffing changes. Louise said that the new timetable will take effect from June 2022. She reminded everyone that the Senior Phase timetable, with blocks of periods, had been introduced to mitigate against restrictions, limit movement and keep everyone safe. For 2021/22 it had been decided to retain that model because of all the unknown factors and, with hindsight, it had been the correct decision although some students had struggled with that structure.

Gavin Morrison shared a presentation detailing the proposed structure for 2022/23. He advised that it is intended there will be a 30-period week with 6 periods over 5 days. The school day will start and finish at the same time as usual. The level of learning and teaching will stay the same too with double periods on 2 different days which will provide balance and continuity, consolidate the teaching and should maximise energy levels.

There will be a different structure for tutor time and different models are currently being given consideration. Period 4 for the Senior Phase will be extended giving a later start to their lunchtime. It is only a minor change but, for instance, it will make food delivery easier to manage.

Louise advised that a proposal paper will be issued with the agenda for the January meeting. She stressed the importance of maximising learning time and underlined that feedback had been sought from staff and pupils and acted upon accordingly. It has been decided to use a model of 2 + 2 + 1 periods. The timetable structure is in 5 blocks but if another variant brings a return to further restrictions it will be relatively simple to revert to the 4-block structure if need be.

Louise acknowledged that there were significant benefits to the split lunchtime, both for behaviour and in learning but the new timetable allows only for a 10-minute difference. However, it is recognised that being outside is beneficial for the young people and it is not anticipated that will change. Lunchtime clubs have struggled with the split lunchbreak because senior pupils were unavailable to provide support so they will benefit from the new arrangement. It is also known that tutor time can be a worthwhile learning experience and other models are being looked at to see what could work best at Mackie. The new plaza area should be available to use from February which will provide extra space.

Colin observed that some schools in Aberdeen utilise separate blocks which seems to work for them. Louise explained that Aberdeen City Council has a joint campus approach which does not exist in Aberdeenshire so there is not that flexibility. It is also not possible to reduce teachers' lunchtime and bus times can only be altered during negotiations when the contract is due for renewal which happens every 4 years. Consideration could perhaps be given to working towards an asymmetric week, with some days longer than others, but that is something that would be introduced gradually. It will be helpful for S3 students that they have become used to double periods this year.

Louise advised that the proposals will be put out to the parent forum for consultation at the appropriate time.

5. LITTER ISSUES

Cllr Sarah Dickinson said she was pleased to see this item on the agenda, given that the litter problem is an ongoing issue; mainly in the Redcloak and Edinview areas but also in the Mineralwell Park. Cllr Dickinson pointed out that the issue is behavioural and everyone has a responsibility both personally and in terms of what they say to their own young people. Cllr Dickinson explained that she had written to Louise on the subject and her reply had been clear and helpful. It was noted that the community police and other local bodies are also picking up on the problem and seeking ways to address it.

Louise said that the issue is very frustrating. It is less of a problem within the school and there are ample bins outside so the challenge is to encourage the young people to see that it is their responsibility to dispose of their litter appropriately. Marion agreed. She suggested that the young people need to think about the consequence – what will happen if they drop litter and who it affects. Marion advised that the SSPCA is also involved in addressing the issue by highlighting the potential dangers to animals, and they are very keen to work with schools to educate the students. Marion underlined that primary-age children love litter-picking because they can instantly see that they have made a difference but stressed also that not all of the blame for litter lies with young people. It is a community-wide problem.

Lindsay Robertson asked if pupils could be given ownership of finding a solution to the problem. Louise said that it could perhaps be addressed via the agenda for the Rights Respecting School initiative and building on the impetus with the S1 students when they come up to Mackie although it is something that is usually lost in the transition. It is certainly something that can be looked at but it is important to involve other community groups since it is not only a problem for Mackie. Marion agreed and pointed out there is a good community spirit in Stonehaven and it would be worthwhile to work together to seek a community-wide approach.

Cllr Dickinson said it is important not to judge but it is about basic citizenship and showing consideration for the wider community and fellow residents. It is anti-social behaviour, as is the problem of dog poo which obviously is not Mackie's issue to address.

Louise emphasised the importance of ensuring that litter is not seen as purely a Mackie issue. She advised that the chat on the Stonehaven facebook page had left senior pupils feeling totally isolated from the community and perhaps a community-wide initiative could help to build up relationships too.

It was agreed that the blame for litter does not lie solely with young people but they are an easy target. Louise undertook to explore the possibility of S1 students becoming involved as part of the requirement for them to take on roles and responsibilities and will liaise with Marion, Nicola and Cllr Dickinson to discuss how best to take forward a community-wide initiative.

6. AOB

S1 Issues

Lindsay queried how the behavioural issues with S1 students are being addressed. Louise explained that it is currently a work in progress. Faculty Heads are itemising the learning and teaching strategies which have worked well with the S1 students and Fiona Stark will collate the findings to inform future decisions. Louise acknowledged that there has been a lack of consistency and much disruption for the S1 students since their transition to Mackie, because of Covid restrictions, and the level of maturity which would usually be expected by

now is not evident, therefore it is important to support them with the catching-up process. Fiona Stark will be invited to attend the meeting on 8 March to provide a progress report.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for 27 January 2022. The agenda will include the item carried forward from today's meeting as well as an Impact Teams update.

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