



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Wednesday 17 January 2024

PRESENT: Samantha Bradley, James Brogan, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Lyn Forman, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison, Craig Meikle, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher); Moira Paterson, Susan Purvis, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp (Vice Chair), Mandy Tulloch

APOLOGIES: Lewis Campbell, Sarah Cowling, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Fiona Ritchie, Sarah Smith, Cllr Alan Turner

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

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

In Colin Esslemont's absence, Richard Sharp chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone. Apologies for absence were noted. Richard explained that, due to work commitments being greater than anticipated, Colin had been unable to attend several meetings recently. He had apologised for this and had advised that he would ascertain future work commitments before deciding on the best way forward but in any event, Richard reminded attendees, Colin's and his term of office will come to an end this school year and accordingly he encouraged parent members to give consideration to the possibility of taking on either role.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 21 November 2023, were approved. Their adoption as a true record was proposed by Lindsay Robertson, seconded by Jacqui Hutchison and agreed by those present.

3. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) Wider Achievement at Mackie Academy

Ruaridh Cain shared a comprehensive presentation of progress in developing a system of acknowledging achievement at Mackie Academy, which had begun with the Baseline Survey process for students in S2 to S4; analysing the responses and giving consideration to the next steps. Ruaridh explained that there had been a gap in knowledge of students' activities outwith the curriculum. There had been some awareness, but no concrete data had been available.

Ruaridh advised that all classes had been visited to explain the purpose of the survey. Some pupils had been missed initially but they had caught up with as many as possible via US Time and 496 out of 617 pupils had participated in the survey. Of that 496, 388 students had recorded participation in at least one activity; equally across the 3 year groups.

Ruaridh pointed out that wider achievement is recognised as one of Mackie's strengths, with 42 clubs offered in school, of which 35 are attended regularly. The clubs are valued by students with 107 involved in 2+ clubs and 81 in 3 or more. Furthermore, there is involvement in 76 community-based clubs – 170 in sports; 113 in performance arts and 66 in uniformed organisations. However, 107 pupils recorded no involvement in any activity and it is intended to raise awareness of what is available to them and encourage participation.

SEEMIS was utilised for deeper analysis to provide a fuller picture; including participation of those in the following groupings : Free School Meals, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), Care Experienced young people and Young Carers to determine if there is a pattern of lower participation in these instances. Ruaridh said there was a general equity of participation in one activity for those eligible for free school meals although it dropped off a little in S4 and the reasons for this will be explored. The number involved in 2 or more activities was significantly less. In respect of SIMD, participation is lower in the lower deciles and perhaps consideration can be given to offering some activity that is tailored to their interests. As far as Care Experienced and Young Carers is concerned, the number of pupils included in the survey was too small to identify any trends.

Ruaridh stated that a follow-up survey is planned but they have still to decide on the frequency of future surveys and how best to set up a monitoring system, including focus groups and QR codes throughout the school. A shanarri survey once per term already exists, and achievement is included in that survey.

Jacqui thanked Ruaridh for the comprehensive presentation and asked if any overlap between Free School Meals and SIMD had been apparent. Ruaridh advised that there were some instances of participation and it would be helpful to pinpoint what works best for those students. Jacqui indicated that focus groups will be worthwhile and there will be skills identified via the survey that the young people are reticent about sharing. Ruaridh said that it will be interesting to see students use the same skills as they move through the school and how they are linked, for example commitment to studies and to sport.

Lyn Forman advised that she is involved with the Sea Cadets and invited Ruaridh to attend to see what is involved in participation. Ruaridh said that he was willing to discuss the possibilities and he was aware that the Sea Cadets had been represented at the extra-curricular fair. Richard pointed out that the extra-curricular fair had been a great idea and had been very effective. He pointed out that experiences outwith school complement school life and are very valuable. Ruaridh agreed and observed that there is a wide breadth and depth of clubs within school which are all free to attend.

Richard asked if out of school activities had been included in the fair. Ruaridh explained that mostly they had flagged up in-school activities but some out of school clubs had participated and it was intended to include both options at future events.

Susan Purvis advised that she is involved in the Duke of Edinburgh programme via Explorers and could provide further information on what is involved in that scheme. Louise thought that it would be worthwhile to raise awareness of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and ascertain if any support could be provided by the school. Susan explained that funding and equipment are current issues. Louise advised that Mackie's equipment was out on loan to Inverurie but it would be possible to request its return. Susan said it would be very helpful to pool resources. Susan stressed that some young people had joined Scouts at the Explorers level so that they could participate in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.

Ruaridh advised that staff from Brechin High School had visited Mackie to view what is on offer within the school and they had been very impressed by the number of activities available to students.

Ruaridh said it is intended to further develop inter-house competition and a number of events had already been organised this year. Louise underlined that the Christmas market had been pupil-led by the business skills group. It had provided leadership experience for S5 and S6 students and had been a very successful event.

Ruaridh explained that they have begun to widen opportunities to recognise achievement; for instance via the weekly bulletin and students are becoming more willing to share their achievements. The faculties' methods of acknowledging success run well and are valued by the young people, with a variety of methods adopted by each faculty.

Thought will also be given to organising a BGE prizegiving, with consideration of the various elements including the format, the date, the different categories (whilst recognising wider achievement including school values and success outwith school.) Views on the possibilities will be sought from pupils, staff and parents.

Richard indicated that it was evident that a lot of time and effort has gone into progressing the initiative. He advised that something similar exists in industry, and in his organisation they review performance on a weekly basis, with goals in various areas, and the different teams mark themselves – noting who slipped up; who made a difference and deciding how success should be rewarded.

(b) BGE Award Scheme Update

Gavin Morrison explained that they had based the system on a 3-tier model with the classroom as the first level. Each learning area does recognise achievement and US Time groups also post successes on the classroom wall. Each faculty has their own method of recognising success, as decided by teachers and students. It is acknowledged however that recognition is due too to the quieter students who consistently work hard and that is one area where views will be sought; from parents as well as from students.

Jacqui underlined the importance of obtaining students' views and highlighted that a prizegiving should also include those who add value to school life, and not just relate to academic success. Ruaridh queried whether the event should be held during the school day or in an evening, similar to the existing prizegiving. Jacqui indicated that an evening event seems to be more for external recognition for the benefit of parents and it should be for the students themselves to decide which they prefer. Ruaridh agreed and advised that students

do like recognition within their US Time groups. Mandy Tulloch thought that quieter and shy students might prefer just an email to their parents.

Gavin stated that they wanted to make recognition wider and more extensive, for example picking up the quieter hard workers as already noted, as well as those students who make a positive contribution to school life. Gavin emphasised that there were numerous strands to be considered and they were currently at the advice-gathering stage. Samantha Bradley pointed out that Seesaw had previously been a helpful platform for recognising achievement, but this was no longer available.

Louise explained that there had been an issue relating to data storage and the provider had been unwilling to adopt a more stringent approach to protection of their data storage and accordingly it had fallen foul of GDPR. Any personal data being stored will incur similar issues when it comes to home contact, however the School Leaver Profile will include achievement and so parents will at a future date be able to view successes via the profile.

Lindsay asked who will decide the recipients of awards, pointing out that peer nominations would be more powerful. Louise agreed and advised that they meet regularly with US Time representatives, who have a role as leaders within their groups and are ideally placed to gather nominations. It is apparent that some students would be uncomfortable being recognised within a larger group setting but a smaller group would be acceptable. Lindsay said that feedback from the Doncaster visit would indicate their system worked well and something similar would be worthwhile. Louise agreed and said the plan is to build up a mechanism whereby the young people take ownership of the discussions within US Time.

Ruaridh had raised several questions requiring parental response and Jacqui requested time to give thought to the queries and respond with any ideas and suggestions. Louise said that the presentation would be issued to parents with response requested within a couple of weeks. Richard offered a ½ hour Teams meeting to Ruaridh and Gavin so that he could share how his organisation structures recognition.

Gavin explained that he and Ruaridh have been meeting regularly; usually weekly, to talk through all the scenarios and possibilities. He emphasised the importance of ensuring that everyone be given the opportunity to feed into the discussion; and with that in mind, parental views are being sought with the intention to progress the process thereafter. Furthermore, as many views as possible from the students will be captured so that whichever system is developed, it will be a process that feels relevant and comfortable to the young people. It is also intended to implement a system that enhances school life and is a model that can continue to be developed year on year.

Louise thanked Gavin and Ruaridh for all their efforts thus far.

(c) Staffing and Curriculum Update 2024/25

Louise advised that January is always a busy time of year for the school, with S2 students choosing their options for S3 as well as the Senior Phase assessment window. Preparations were also in hand for the Pathways event on 6 February when students and parents can come into school and are made aware of all available options. There are also two online events for S3 and S4 students which include outlining all the relevant resources to ensure that students know where they can obtain all necessary information thus enabling them to make the most appropriate decisions in respect of their intended pathway.

Gavin explained that a lot of effort has been expended in supporting students especially those moving from S3 to S4 as well as developing alternatives to a level 5 qualification within

the framework; for example in Maths. Other qualifications are beginning to be offered so that a student can consider a sideways alternative rather than dropping down a level. The exam element can become a barrier for some students and an assessment technique can be a better option thereby providing a pathway for them to move forward. Staff have worked hard to develop this initiative and it should be very worthwhile.

Also, in S5 and S6 there will be a broadening of what is available at levels 6 and 7. In some instances, there can be insufficient uptake to make a course viable but alternative Open University modules will become available. Foundation Apprenticeships have been very well subscribed this year and they will be developed further.

Louise underlined that staffing at secondary level continues to be a challenge and with that in mind it is intended to adopt a more proactive approach when advertising vacant posts, for example inviting candidates into school to view the facilities. Furthermore, there had been a significant drop in the school roll, sitting at just below 1100, which does have an impact on staffing requirements.

Louise highlighted a significant change in S3 next year with the Excelerate Voyagers course which will be run by the Developing the Young Workforce Team and will focus on 5 of the key employment growth sectors in the North East so that students can have a clear picture of workforce demands in this area which will help to influence their subject choices.

(d) School Improvement Plan

Louise reminded attendees that the School Improvement Plan is a live document and ongoing work continues throughout the school year. The latest version is accessible on the school website, with a one-page summary and an action plan.

Louise highlighted that there had been a significant increase in ASN pupils recently and also that a new primary school is planned in Chapelton which could be zoned to Mackie since Portlethen is at capacity – 2 examples of changing circumstances which have to be factored in when updating plans.

As part of the action plan process, Faculty Heads have been presenting their action plans to each other which has been a worthwhile experience.

The Insight Data Tool update is due in February and further information will be available then, but it is anticipated that school leavers going on to a positive destination should be in the region of 98%.

5. PARENT COUNCIL BUSINESS

(a) Aberdeenshire Council's Parent Council Meeting

Mandy had represented us at this meeting and provided the following feedback.

Mandy reported that the meeting's topics had been Parental Engagement and Learner Participation. The meeting had been informal and all 17 Aberdeenshire secondary school parent councils had been invited with a view to sharing good practice. Representatives from four schools - Banchory, Fraserburgh, Inverurie and Mackie had attended the online meeting. It was noted that all 4 schools currently have challenges with vaping, vandalism in toilets, mobile phone use, behaviour and staff recruitment. There was also discussion on the importance of having a fit for purpose constitution and the possibility of becoming a

charity, which Mearns Academy had done recently, with a view to being able to apply for grants.

The biggest discussion topic however had been communication - between each Parent Council and its Head Teacher; the Parent Council and the Parent Forum; and between the Parent Councils. Inverurie Academy now has a parent communication policy and Fraserburgh Parent Council have drawn up a parent handbook. Both of these detail what is expected of parents in this age of social media.

Mandy had shared details of Mackie's school app since the other schools do not currently use such a facility.

Claire Rennie, Chair of Fraserburgh Academy Parent Council, had written recently to the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Jenny Gilruth, seeking help in recruiting more secondary teachers for Aberdeenshire, underlining that only 12 of the 66 newly qualified teachers had taken up positions in this area during the current school year. The Minister had already replied indicating her willingness to meet and discuss this further. Director of Education, Laurence Findlay will co-ordinate the meeting and he was looking for representatives from 3 parent councils to attend.

No date was set for future informal meetings but Christine McLellan had requested 2 secondary representatives to join a Parental Engagement Group that meets quarterly.

Mandy asked if it would be helpful to be represented at the meeting with the Minister. Louise stated that the support would be very welcome. She explained that there is an ongoing issue in respect of allocation of probationers. Allocation is organised centrally and probationers can choose which area they want to go to, or indicate their willingness to go anywhere but this system has not worked well for the more rural Authorities. The General Teaching Council is relinquishing the role and Strathclyde University is taking it on for year 2025/26 but there is no indication how it will work in future so it is a concern and anything that the parental voice can influence will be helpful. As it stands, the allocation system is not working effectively and it needs to be revamped. Also, COSLA has acknowledged that there is no co-ordinated campaign for the secondary sector in Scotland, to promote it as a career and make it attractive as a profession.

Cllr Dickinson offered an assurance that the Chair and members of the Education Committee are very aware of the challenges relating to recruitment in Aberdeenshire.

Mandy undertook to attend the meeting with the Minister on behalf of the Parent Council.

(b) Parent Council Newsletter

Richard explained that, due to time constraints, it had not been possible to produce a newsletter in time for the school's December newsletter but he hoped it was something that could be picked up at some point. He personally had found participating in the Parent Council to be a valuable experience and raising awareness of its purpose to the Parent Forum would be worthwhile; perhaps something on a quarterly basis would be achievable. Jacqui thought that nothing too involved was required and offered to consider the possibilities. Louise advised that the next school newsletter would be issued during the week before the Easter break and, for instance, a summary of topics discussed could easily be included in the newsletter.

Also, an event for new S1 parents will be convened during the summer term and it would be worthwhile for a couple of representatives to attend and share what participation in the

Parent Council would entail. Given that it is very different from a Primary Parent Council it could pique interest.

6. AOB

Mandy asked what arrangements were planned for exams missed because of the snow. Louise explained that it is hoped to keep to the schedule, if possible, but arrangements will be made so that anyone unable to get into school can sit an assessment at the end of the 2-week window.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As already agreed, the next meeting is scheduled for 20 March 2024 and will be convened online.

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