



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Tuesday 20 September 2022

PRESENT: Samantha Bradley, James Brogan, Lewis Campbell, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Rhona Grant (Clerk), Lisa Macaulay, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Heather Rennie, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp, Sarah Smith

IN ATTENDANCE: Lucy Angel (Principal Teacher – Developing the Young Workforce); One Observer

APOLOGIES: Alana Allison, Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Carol Howie, Jacqui Hutchison, Elaine Mitchell, Mhari Mitchell, Marion Montgomery, Susan Purvis, Fiona Ritchie, Mandy Tulloch, Cllr Alan Turner

This meeting was convened in person and also online, via Microsoft Teams.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Colin Esslemont welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially those attending for the first time. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 14 June, were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. CAREER READY PROGRAMME

Lucy Angel, delivered a presentation which explained the details of the programme. She advised that her previous involvement had been as a mentor at another school. Mackie had previously participated in the programme and of course recently there had been a break due to Covid. It was now hoped to involve a cohort this year and the application window had closed that week.

Lucy highlighted that the programme is very effective in building confidence and skills in the participants. It begins in October with classes throughout the year. A mentor from the world of work is matched with each student and they meet up every 4 weeks; mostly in person but also virtually. Resources are also available online.

Lucy underlined that the programme is not aimed at the very confident but rather it is tailored to those who need an extra boost perhaps in developing links and networks – an area where the mentor becomes valuable.

Lucy explained that it has been recognised that guidance staff are in the best position to know who will benefit most from the programme and who will commit to it and accordingly they have been asked to identify potential candidates.

Louise requested more information about mentors and Lucy advised that Aberdeenshire Council provides mentors from several departments and there is a wide range of private companies meaning there is a worthwhile spread of private and public organisations.

Colin, having participated as a mentor, confirmed that there is a broad spectrum of mentors and voiced the opinion that the programme is very effective. He advised, also that the relationship can continue with students keeping in touch with their mentor when they move on to university or employment.

Lucy stated that the outcomes from the programme are very positive. Louise asked how it is funded and Lucy explained that it is funded by the Scottish Government. There is a small charge to schools but other Authorities meet this centrally and it is anticipated that Aberdeenshire Council will do likewise.

Richard Sharp asked if there was any assistance the Parent Council could provide. Lucy said she would give it thought. She said they are aiming for 5 student participants and there might be an opportunity to raise the profile of the programme and to capture the students' experiences at an appropriate time.

Colin advised that information is posted on Linked In pages and on schools' websites and it is helpful to look at the programme from the students' perspective. Louise suggested that the participants could attend a future meeting at an appropriate point in the programme and Lucy thought it should be early in S6 when they have just completed their placement and it is still fresh in their mind.

Colin thanked Lucy for the comprehensive presentation.

5. CONSULTATION ON EDUCATIONAL VISITS – FEEDBACK

Details of the responses had been circulated prior to the meeting. Louise explained the background to the survey for the benefit of new members. She reminded everyone that trips had not taken place for 3 years because of Covid but now that the world has opened up again, the subject has to be re-visited.

One factor is that the Scottish Government has changed what can and cannot be charged for, depending on whether or not it is a core curriculum provision; for example music lessons or home economics classes which are no longer subject to charges to parents. There are central funding streams which can be accessed but there are shortfalls in the majority of the streams, meaning additional funds have to be found which has an adverse effect on budgeting. For instance, a science trip used to be organised for all S2 students. If this is

classed as core curriculum provision, school has to pay for all transport and tickets. Consideration has also to be given to making trips accessible to all when there is a charge. It would be helpful if clear guidance was forthcoming from the Scottish Government but schools are having to decide for themselves and no account is being taken of equity.

The results of the survey demonstrate that parents are very much in favour of extra-curricular trips ie during holiday periods but with an educational element. Louise indicated that different suggestions had been expressed on how to make trips affordable but it is doubtful that all trips could become inclusive. Lindsay Sharp pointed out that has always been a factor. Louise agreed but underlined that the cost of living crisis has underlined it. Also, would families be willing to plan 2 years in advance, and if so, what would be a reasonable timescale for a payment plan?

Another element that has to be considered is that staff have had 2 years of not using their own time to run trips and have had the benefit of their holidays. It has to be ascertained if they would be willing now to use their own time to lead trips. There are also current travel uncertainties so consideration is not being given to foreign travel, initially. Heather agreed that UK trips made more sense; risks are reduced, travel is cheaper and organisation is easier. Colin pointed out that travel in Europe is problematic and has become expensive. Lindsay said that confidence too may be lacking, and it might be worthwhile to begin with trips in this country and consider trips abroad when things become more stable.

Louise said she is aware of one school which has a set programme from S1 so it is known what to expect. The price for the 5-day trip in S3 is fixed from S1 so parents know the price well in advance. Perhaps something similar could be considered.

Previously, Activities Days had been held in May, just before the summer holidays, meaning parents having to fund that just before the holidays and perhaps the costs of a family holiday.

Louise said she would prefer trips to be resumed in a smaller scale to begin with; rather than launching straight into big trips. Perhaps a UK-based trip could be organised initially with a proposed plan and timetable for future trips. Samantha Bradley asked if the students had been consulted. Louise said she had talked about the subject in passing but she intended to discuss it with the student group the following day, and decide how best to collate students' thoughts and then see if staff are available and willing to lead trips. An additional factor is that previously there was a slow turnover of staff and plans could be made 2 years in advance but that is no longer the case and plans cannot be made with any certainty.

Colin said cost of living is a major factor but it seems that people are continuing to spend on their hobbies and are cutting back elsewhere. He wondered if it might be better to defer trips until 2023/24. Louise said they would listen to students' points of view and might consider reintroducing activities days perhaps as a starting point.

Lindsay pointed out that the younger year groups have missed out on residential trips but emphasised that it would not be ideal to start with a 5-day residential trip for them. Louise agreed and indicated that the size of Mackie has also to be taken into account.

Sarah Smith suggested the possibility of classes studying an area or location and then visiting it which could be kept reasonably local. Heather Rennie agreed and said there are lots of possibilities "on the doorstep" and just being out of school can be exciting in itself. Colin said that local career-linked trips can be very worthwhile. Cllr Dickinson asked if public transport for trips had been considered. Louise said all options are given consideration with a view to keeping down costs. Young people now have travel cards which are used for

attending college or work placements but logistics for trips can be an issue. Train travel as a group can be an option if booked in advance. Heather advised that parents can usually be relied on to provide a taxi service too especially for evening trips.

Colin suggested putting out a message sharing the vision for future trips with potential timeframes. Samantha recommended sharing the statistics about potential costs. Richard agreed and underlined that there should also be emphasis on the challenges that have to be resolved before trips can resume. An observer asked if parents could be involved in trips. Louise said it could be considered subject to the PVG process and determining how best to manage it. Obviously, their parents' participation might deter students but, for instance, an S3 parent could attend an S1 trip.

6. PUPIL EQUITY FUND SPEND 2022/23

For the benefit of new members, Louise explained that the fund had been established five years ago, its purpose being to close the attainment gap. A sum of money is allocated per S1 to S3 student who is eligible for free school meals. The number of eligible pupils in Mackie has increased significantly since Covid however the statistics used are one year out of date. When funding does catch up it is hoped to use that money for several possibilities including financing pupils to attend trips.

Previously, the funding has been used to finance the Tree of Knowledge and Mind the Gap which relates to the transition into secondary school and parental involvement and has been successful.

Other areas could include the library to promote literacy and the Homework Club, and hopefully the ability to bring in another counsellor from the Place to be Counselling Service. Lewis Campbell requested further information and Louise explained that predominantly the counsellor sees S1 to S4 students but availability has just opened up to P6 and P7 pupils and in future it will become a cluster-wide resource. The resource is well-used by Mackie students and funding an additional counsellor would ensure that their access to this service is not reduced.

Louise suggested adding this subject to the agenda for a future meeting, perhaps in January, for further discussion on where best to direct the funding.

7. CONFIRMATION OF PARENT COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Colin welcomed the following new members: James Brogan and Samantha Bradley (parent members); Heather Rennie (teaching staff representative); and Lewis Campbell and Sarah Smith (Chaplaincy Team).

He explained that he had contacted Annette Leith to see if she or another person from the Sports Hub could be available to participate in the Parent Council. Their representation would be worthwhile since the school and grounds are widely used by sports clubs.

8. AOB

Louise reported on the ongoing national debate and consultation on the future of Scottish Education. She advised that Phase 1 of the consultation had closed on 2 September. It had covered a draft vision statement and principles and the school had submitted a response.

Phase 2 runs from October to December 2022 and relates to qualifications and assessment. As well as staff, it is important to engage with pupils and parents and Louise suggested that it is included on the agenda for the next meeting so that a collective response can be submitted. It is intended that this meeting will be virtual so breakout rooms can be utilised and the different elements of the document shared out to make it feel less overwhelming. The debate is very important therefore it would be worthwhile to engage with it.

Cllr Dickinson advised that she is involved in the Sports Hub so she can provide liaison.

Richard passed on his thanks for resolution of the recent issues in the boys' toilet.

Colin asked how the PE kit/changing rooms arrangement is progressing. Louise said that it is being managed well but the students themselves had been involved in the process. The refurbished changing rooms are a more pleasant place and that has also helped.

Colin thanked everyone for their attendance and participation in discussions and closed the meeting.