



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Thursday 21 January 2021

PRESENT: Dawn Black, Patricia Bruce, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Paula Durward (Chair), Colin Esslemont, Andrea Forster, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Carol Howie, Aileen McKellar, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Marion Montgomery, Fiona Ritchie, Cllr Dennis Robertson, Richard Sharp, Mandy Tulloch

APOLOGIES: Morag Coull, Lorna Findlay, Mhari Mitchell, Lisa Macaulay, Karen McClymont, Susan Purvis, Lisa Williams

IN ATTENDANCE: 3 Observers
Depute Heads – Laura Larkworthy, Fiona Stark, Kat Thoires
Mark Mitchell, Owen Forsyth, Craig Mathieson – Aberdeenshire Council

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the meeting was convened virtually by Microsoft Teams. Paula Durward (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 4 November and 9 December 2020 were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) Pool and Changing Rooms Development

Louise Moir introduced Mark Mitchell, Owen Forsyth and Craig Mathieson from Aberdeenshire Council and invited them to share the details of the project to refurbish the changing rooms and re-configure the pool area within Mackie.



Mark explained that it had been identified that the pool usage at Mackie is quite low and it is expensive to maintain. It had been decided therefore that the space could be better utilised with a multi-function purpose; and that it should be included in the proposed project for refurbishment of the changing rooms.

The project had then been submitted to Committee and had received approval earlier in the week for a spend of £1 million in approximate terms to refurbish the changing rooms, improve access, install a fitness suite, remove a temporary unit and re-configure the pool area. Following approval, the next step in the process is to put the project out to tender with the intention that the work will commence at the end of May. It is anticipated that the duration of the work will be in the region of 30 weeks and will involve some work during term-time. However, it will be ensured that disruption is kept to a minimum and as each space is completed it will be handed back to the school so that it can be utilised.

Owen provided a three-dimensional virtual tour of each area, highlighting and explaining various aspects of the project. Craig Mathieson advised that a similar project had been completed at Banchory Academy and Mark confirmed that lessons had been learned from that project in relation to making the best use of available space.

Mandy Tulloch asked if the school had been involved in the process. Mark confirmed that the school had been fully involved. The Senior Management Team understands all of the wider issues and so their input is important, and the PE team has been consulted since the outset of the project. Louise reported that Stuart Axten, Faculty Head, has been seeking students' views whenever the opportunity arose.

Louise explained that whilst participation in PE has increased significantly due to the broadened curriculum, swimming has historically and currently experienced a lower take-up. It is recognised that very few pupils come to Mackie unable to swim and keen swimmers usually did so elsewhere therefore swimming is not seen as a priority at Mackie. The pool area takes up a lot of space yet it is not used very often during the school day. On the other hand, there is a small fitness suite which is used often and being able to accommodate it in a larger space will be very worthwhile.

Louise said that, as is known, the school is well used by the community and it was important to ensure that the re-configured space is versatile; capable of being used for a variety of purposes. Louise emphasised that the PE team is delighted with the project and looking forward to its completion.

Craig said that it is usual to involve staff in the technical aspects of a project and then include pupils at a later stage. This is usually done via workshops which obviously will not be possible at present, but consideration will be given as to how best to involve pupils for the cosmetic details.



Richard Sharp expressed disappointment that swimming is being removed from the curriculum but acknowledged that it had been less popular of late.

Louise advised that Live Life Aberdeenshire (LLA) had shared their plans for the existing facilities in Stonehaven, including the leisure centre which is easily accessible from Mackie and could be used, if needed, for swimming lessons at a future date. Richard pointed out that the leisure centre is 35+ years old and wondered if it could cope with increased traffic. Mark explained that LLA has adopted a strategic approach to its assets; intending to reduce the number of facilities and focus on developing the remainder. The leisure centre is viewed as a flagship facility for Stonehaven and is seen as a priority. It is therefore intended to fully invest in its development and future-proofing. Currently there are 4 pools in Stonehaven which will obviously reduce to 3 when Mackie's is removed. It has been recognised that use of the leisure centre pool will increase but it will be possible to be more efficient in terms of staffing as well as investing in its development.

Richard said he was pleased to hear of proposed action in respect of pool facilities in Stonehaven, as well as the £1 million being spent on refurbishment/re-configuration at Mackie. Colin Esslemont suggested that a new school would be an even better prospect. Colin's comments were supported by Richard who made reference to the new facilities provided at Ellon, Inverurie and Laurencekirk.

Marion Montgomery expressed her opinion that the pool at Mackie is the best learning pool and will be missed so she hoped that a teaching pool would be included in the leisure centre development. Louise advised that it had been stated that the addition of a training pool at the leisure centre will be given consideration. Richard felt that this was a backward step for Stonehaven, with no commitment to replace or upgrade the existing facilities which would not compensate for the loss of the pool at Mackie.

Cllr Dickinson reported that the project had been given very careful consideration by Councillors at the committee meeting who had asked several pertinent questions. It is anticipated that the new space will be well used by the school and the community, and Councillors are looking forward to seeing investment in the leisure centre, at a future date but plans are not yet at the stage of being submitted to Councillors for approval. Cllr Dickinson stressed that a new secondary school will be built in Stonehaven at some point.

Louise underlined that the school roll is increasing significantly with the possibility that it could reach 1200 by the new school year so the extra, multi-purpose, space will be very helpful.

Cllr Robertson pointed out that Carronhill's pool has been identified as a suitable learning pool. He emphasised also that at some point in the future a community campus will be developed in Stonehaven.

Mark advised that any further questions could be submitted via Louise.



(b) National Update

Louise said that, as expected, lockdown had been extended to mid-February, with a review on 2 February. There is a mid-term break in February so if it is decided that students are to return to school it will be around Thursday 18 February. In the meantime, remote learning has returned. Lessons have been learned from the first lockdown and it is hoped that a more co-ordinated approach to learning is being achieved this time.

The enhanced provision is there in its entirety for 5 or 6 young people for whom school is continuing as normal. The provision for children of key workers is being manned by a group of staff members who are not significantly involved in remote learning so the support mechanisms are all in place. This time there will be more scrutiny of remote learning by HMIE, which will include requesting feedback from students and parents, and will form part of the greater feedback to Education Scotland which will be used to inform future decisions. Fortunately, Mackie is in quite a strong position because there had been little disruption to learning prior to the holidays.

Louise advised that Head Teachers meet very regularly with the Director of Education and Head of Service and with NHS Grampian so communication is going well. The briefings with NHS are especially helpful in understanding the reasoning behind the current restrictions; for instance the additional pressures on the NHS because of the new strain of virus.

Louise said that current thinking seems to relate to a phased return to school beginning with senior pupils. It may be necessary to re-think social distancing within school and on school transport but decisions will be based on whatever is decided nationally at that time.

Colin requested a long-term review of the volume of work for S1 to S3 pupils since it appears that they are feeling swamped by the level of schoolwork they are being asked to complete.

Louise confirmed that Faculty Heads had picked up on that fact, especially for S1 and S2 students who could have 10 or 12 google classrooms to attend, and it seems to have improved. Faculty Heads have been asked to continue to monitor the volume of work so that students do not feel overloaded. Similarly, those pupils who are in school are participating in fun activities as well as doing their schoolwork. It is hoped to achieve a balance for students, whether in school or at home.

Richard voiced the opinion that remote learning has been well organised thus far with a consistency of delivery. Louise said that feedback from pupils to teachers is important to ensure the balance is correct and, while it may be necessary to adjust the curriculum at some point, that will be workable.



Dawn Black advised that she has twins who are S3 pupils. They have different teachers for the same subjects and in some cases there is a noticeable difference in the volume of work being assigned. For one subject, in particular, it is very obvious since one teacher hands out a substantial volume of work whilst the other gives out very little. Louise reiterated the importance of ensuring there is a balance and offered an assurance that it will be picked up by Faculty Heads when they carry out Quality Assurance checks.

Mandy queried the best method of providing feedback. Louise advised that it can be provided via guidance teacher, the form on the website or an email to the school; whichever is the preferred option, it will be forwarded to the appropriate member of staff. Mandy suggested that parents should flag it up to their children too so that they can be prepared if and when their teacher requests feedback.

An observer asked about staff perceptions of remote learning. Louise explained that information is just filtering through now. During the first week engagement had been very positive but engagement with sessions had dipped during the second week when students were catching up with the work that had been assigned. Mechanisms have been established so that the level of engagement can be tracked. For S1 and S2 pupils a traffic light system is being used and for S3 the learning intervention tool will be utilised. Overall, the level of engagement has been positive but it is anticipated that more conversations will be needed to encourage continued engagement.

Louise said that it will be worthwhile to ascertain what method of learning works best for each group and be flexible to some extent. An additional factor is that primary school pupils have a greater requirement to be online this time, meaning that access to devices will be an issue for some households.

(c) SQA Update

Laura Larkworthy reported that little in the way of updates is currently being issued by the SQA. The 17 academies in Aberdeenshire are meeting weekly with Aberdeenshire Council's SQA Co-ordinator, Rob Fraser, and everyone is trying to make progress with what is already known. A broadly co-ordinated approach has been adopted in Aberdeenshire. Rob has stressed that focus should be on learning and teaching so the assessment windows have been postponed and there will be no written assessments meantime. Optimistically, it is hoped that students will return to school so that written assessments can be completed at some point. If it transpires that is not possible, a national response will be forthcoming.

Laura explained that the SQA is still discussing timelines and planning strategies for different scenarios. The SQA had been asked to share the possible scenarios and strategies but it had been decided that they were still at an early stage and providing that information might cause confusion. It is known that evidence-based assessment of grades will be required this year, whereas previously attainment could be inferred. The 4-stage model of verification



which was due to start in January has been delayed because of the current lockdown. It is also known that there will be Quality Assurance checks to ensure consistency but it is not yet known if the

deadline for submission of grades will be extended to allow for the possibility that work can be completed with students within school.

Aberdeenshire Council has also discussed how best to utilise the In-Service days in February, and staff are currently being consulted on what support would be most beneficial for them. Laura advised that guidance and materials for each subject continue to be

published by the SQA but it is anticipated that it will be several weeks before they indicate more specifically the evidence that will be required.

Laura offered an assurance that staff members are being as proactive as possible with the information already provided and are ensuring that the young people are given as much information as possible as soon as it becomes available. Students have been informed that there will be no written assessments but it is not yet known what will replace them.

Laura said that she intends to sit in on PSE Google Meets with S4 to S6 pupils and will take back their questions to the SQA. It might be possible also to set up a drop-in session for parents at some point, with questions submitted in advance so that answers can be prepared and the most up-to-date information sourced.

Paula pointed out that S6 pupils are worried that pieces of work already submitted will not count towards an award. Laura said that staff are explaining to students that a holistic approach is being adopted but it could be that S6 pupils are thinking that the system will be similar to what they had previously experienced. It is known that some evidence required will have a higher predictive value, and staff would like to defer gathering that evidence in the hope that students will return to school at some point.

Louise pointed out that previously if an exam had been missed for a valid reason it was possible to submit evidence so that an award could be granted. In a similar fashion, evidence will be gathered over a period of time to show a student's progression to the level they have reached thus providing a true reflection of the student's capability.

Chris Ann Holt asked if guidance had been provided in relation to practical subjects. Laura advised that there has been no update in relation to National 5 awards and nothing has been issued in respect of Highers but the information will be shared as soon as it is received.

Louise said that it is planned to issue a communication to parents shortly. The next Scottish Government review is scheduled for 3 February and decisions will be made on whatever is forthcoming then. If parents think that drop-in sessions would be useful this could be arranged, either in an evening or with a variety of times. Alternatively, all the information could just be passed on as it becomes available.



Patricia Bruce thought a mixture of both options would be helpful. Mandy agreed, and added that a range of times for the drop-in sessions would be most useful.

Andrea Forster queried the position in relation to prelims. Laura explained that since there are no exams this year there will be no prelims but there will be formal assessments if students return to school. The format has still to be decided but it will not look like the traditional model for a prelim.

Marion asked how subject choices will be processed without prelims to inform those choices. Louise advised that it is still under discussion at present. A Senior Phase Event will be organised in late-February when pupils will have appointments with subjects they are hoping to study and then complete an options form. There will be flexibility in case a grade is not

awarded as anticipated or the student changes their mind. Initially only in-school options will be processed so that students do not feel overwhelmed and Further and Higher Education courses will be considered at a later stage.

It is not yet known if the SQA intend to defer the submissions deadline to allow time for assessment windows therefore it is not possible to decide when the timetable change will occur. It could be earlier or later than usual but the school is keeping to the options process calendar since the growing school roll is an additional pressure.

The timetabling group will be meeting very soon which will include those parents who had volunteered their input.

(e) Health & Wellbeing

Fiona Stark provided an update in respect of the mental health survey and offered an assurance that the various support mechanisms are still in place for pupils and staff. Health and wellbeing of all is still seen as a priority in a time of great uncertainties and those pupils identified as benefiting from additional support are being contacted regularly to ascertain their welfare.

Fiona advised that 757 pupils (66%) had responded across all the year groups; painting a picture of their feelings around the different aspects of their wellbeing such as their strengths and where they are struggling.

The majority of students had responded that they feel well cared for and supported at home and at school but S5 and S6 students do feel anxious about their future; girls more so than boys. The findings will be used to provide or source the most appropriate support where it is needed but generally the results had been very positive.

Carol Howie queried why some pupils had not participated in the survey. Fiona explained that the survey had been completed during PSE lessons some of which had been covered by supply teachers so it could possibly be the case that the opportunity to participate in the survey had not been offered. However, the chance is still there to complete the survey

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should any student who had missed out wish to do so, but in any event the results received had been fairly robust with a good spread throughout the year groups.

5. AOB

Paula advised that further Connect training sessions are now available, the details of which will be circulated.

Andrea queried the position in relation to work experience and Louise recommended that Lucy Angel is emailed direct since she will be able to advise the up-to-date position.

Fiona Hogg asked if teachers can receive an early vaccination. Louise advised that teaching staff are not being offered an early vaccination but consideration is being given to regular testing of school staff as part of forward planning.

Louise indicated that it is a concern particularly for the Additional Support for Learning staff where keeping a 2 metre distance from some students is impossible thus staff are regularly putting themselves at risk. It has been requested that Support for Learning staff are vaccinated at an early date but a definitive answer is still awaited.

Paula asked if the Parent Council could take any action by way of support. Louise suggested feeding into the National Parents Forum. She emphasised that a proper return plan is needed otherwise staffing could become an issue.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As already notified the next meeting will be held on 23 February.

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