



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Tuesday 21 September 2021

PRESENT: Alana Allison, Dawn Black, Patricia Bruce, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Paula Durward, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison, Lisa Macaulay, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Marion Montgomery, Cllr Dennis Robertson, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp, Fiona Stark (Depute Head Teacher), 1 Observer

APOLOGIES: Morag Coull, Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Carol Howie, Hamish Loveday, Karen McClymont, Mhari Mitchell, Susan Purvis, Fiona Ritchie, Mandy Tulloch

This meeting was convened virtually via Microsoft Teams.

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Paula Durward (outgoing Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. APPOINTMENT OF OFFICE BEARERS

Chair and Vice Chair

Paula reminded/advised members and observers that she is now standing down as Chairperson and Patricia Bruce is stepping down from the role of Vice Chair. Colin Esslemont and Richard Sharp had volunteered for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair respectively. Accordingly, Paula's final act as Chair was to seek a proposer and seconder for each position. These were duly received and their appointment agreed by those present. It was also agreed that Rhona Grant would continue in the role of Clerk to the Parent Council.

On behalf of the school, Fiona Stark thanked Paula and Patricia for their efforts as office-bearers for the Parent Council. Colin echoed this appreciation on behalf of the Parent Council and chaired the meeting thereafter. It was agreed that a formal letter of thanks would be extended to former members whose young people had now left school thus ending their involvement with the Parent Council.

Parent Council Members

Colin extended a welcome to the new Parent Council members, attending their first meeting.



Co-opted Members

Colin explained that there are 2 vacant slots for co-opted members and it had been suggested that a representative from the Community Council or Stonehaven Town Partnership might be interested in participating in the Parent Council. Colin thought it would be worthwhile also to invite someone from the Sports Hub to serve as a co-opted member, given how much Mackie's facilities are used by various sports clubs.

This item was re-visited when Louise joined the meeting. Louise advised that she had thought that it would be worthwhile to co-opt someone from the chaplaincy team. However, if the vacancies have been filled otherwise, Mark Lowey (minister at Fetteresso Church) could participate as a parent member while also representing the local churches and the chaplaincy team.

It was agreed that the options would be explored prior to the next Parent Council meeting.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 15 June, were approved.

4. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

5. PARENT COUNCIL BUSINESS

Impact Teams and School Improvement

Fiona shared a comprehensive summary of each of the 4 Impact Teams – Health and Wellbeing; Learning, Teaching and Assessment; Towards an improving School System and Excelerate; and Rights Respecting Schools. She stressed that it was not expected that members would make up their minds that evening if they wished to participate, and if so, the extent of their involvement. It was intended to send round a doodle poll so that members could take time to decide whether or not they wish to be involved and if so, with which team. Thereafter there will be liaison with the Depute Head Teachers and staff members who are leading on the various elements in each Team.

On Learning and Teaching, Jacqui Hutchison observed that teaching has had to change and adapt significantly in the last 18 months. She asked if it is planned to look at the level of upskilling among staff to determine whether there is parity and to take steps to achieve parity, where necessary.



Fiona advised that, as part of the Improvement Plan, staff have been asked to provide details of the evidence on which they are basing their plan including digital learning; what teaching they did differently and how they plan to take it forward. This will be a component of each faculty's Improvement Plan. It is intended to ensure there is parity so that consistency is provided within each team and faculty.

Richard asked what it is hoped to gain from including parent members in each of the Teams. Fiona said it is anticipated that parents will bring knowledge, experience and advice to the teams and emphasised the importance of garnering parents' views on the different subjects.

She explained that GIRFEC Groups, for instance, are looking at how best to support whole families, not just the child/ren, therefore a parental perspective on their role is needed. Also, it is possible that parents have identified challenges that the school has not picked up on. Fiona stated that there has not been an overall decline in the students' emotional presentation but there are changes in how they conduct their friendships and how they interact with each other, therefore it is important to offer the most appropriate and beneficial support.

In response to Richard's question, Fiona acknowledged that it has proved difficult to promote successful parental involvement previously but it is more important now than ever to engage the parent body. The current challenges affect whole families therefore ideally everyone will be involved and included.

Colin agreed and advised he fully supports parent council involvement and encouraging the wider parent body to become engaged. He pointed out that workplaces are facing similar challenges in relation to social behaviour. Everyone has had a different journey and people have become reclusive and have forgotten how to speak appropriately to people face to face. Fiona pointed out that it is noticeable even in the volume and tone young people are using to speak to each other. Personal boundaries can be an issue too although the young people are really enjoying being outdoors and are making full use of the outside space.

Patricia indicated that there must have been an impact on teaching staff's mental health and asked if any counselling is available to them. Fiona advised that the Senior Leadership Team and Faculty Heads have been participating in training on Creative Supervision, which includes how to link in with staff and ascertaining their wellbeing. Aberdeenshire Council has also provided access to a counsellor, and a fully trained counsellor will be available to Mackie staff. Fiona stressed the importance of building on support available to staff and explained that she has seen an increase in people seeking advice from her (in light of her Health & Wellbeing remit).

Jacqui referred to a letter sent to parents which had detailed support available to students during covid absences. Jacqui voiced the opinion that the letter had seemed to imply that there are different levels of support depending on the reason for the absence. Fiona advised that the letter had been issued following direction from the Council. She explained that its purpose had been to inform students and parents that work would be uploaded to Google classroom no later than 24 hours after the lesson so that they were aware that work might not be available on the day while staff were teaching class. In effect, the letter's purpose

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had been to offer an assurance that support will be available to students who are, of necessity, absent for 10 days. In any event, staff have adopted a uniform approach and there is little difference in what is being offered. However, Fiona undertook to report back to the Senior Leadership Team that the letter could have given an erroneous impression to students and parents. Colin advised that when his young people had been required to self-isolate work had been available for them to access.

Fiona said that, generally there have been 7-8 positive tests per week plus some waiting time for results of tests. However there seems to have been a decline in figures recently and hopefully that will continue. As already noted, the local primary schools have been badly affected which in turn has had an effect on teaching staff who have primary age children. Fiona said they are aware that their numbers are low compared to other secondary schools and think that the way the timetable has been structured has been a major factor in the level of transmission. Jacqui asked if the senior phase timetable had been introduced in response to Covid and if it is planned to retain it. Fiona confirmed that the timetable structure had been a response to Covid and it had been challenging for pupils to adjust initially but feedback now from young people and staff is increasingly positive. Practical elements, in particular, are ahead of schedule because of the “chunk” of teaching time. The young people have said they find it easier to organise their day and if they are absent for one day they only have to catch up on one subject. The benefits have been seen in terms of attendance and performance but if consideration is given to retaining the structure post-Covid there would be a consultation with all involved.

Jacqui asked if the structure worked better for some subjects than others. Fiona confirmed that it had been challenging initially for some subjects but teachers had risen to the challenge of mixing up the lessons and seeking different ways of delivering learning and teaching. Staff have advised now that they have seen better engagement and more feedback from students (both positive and negative, but mostly positive) and it seems to be working well with staff making a real effort to engage pupils.

An observer asked if there is any guidance relating to digital teaching for S1 students. Fiona said that responsible use of IT is addressed with S1 pupils in PSE lessons in the first term and passing on that information to parents is currently a work in progress. There will be an opportunity for parents to sign up for various tools in the Google Suite. This comes under Kat Thoires’ remit and information will be available shortly.

What do you want to learn about Mackie Academy?

It was agreed that this will be an item for ongoing discussion in future meetings.

Structure of Meetings

Colin asked for members’ thoughts and Dawn Black advised that the Parent Council meetings are very worthwhile. A lot of information is provided by Louise and members of the Senior Leadership Team and the format works well. Colin said he wanted to support the school whenever possible especially in areas where parents’ knowledge and experience will be helpful. Richard asked if it is intended to continue with virtual meetings. Colin confirmed that is the intention since attendance at meetings has been consistently high but perhaps

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one meeting per quarter could be in real life. Jacqui pointed out that virtual meetings make participation more accessible to everyone.

Louise joined the meeting. She explained that she had been attending a session of the Scottish Learning Festival (online) which had focused on the functions of the SQA and Education Scotland both of which are under review. The SQA will be reformed and Education Scotland will be split so that Learning & Teaching and the Inspectorate will have separate entities so it will be interesting to watch how it all develops. Louise said that the links to the sessions would be sent out with the minutes, for those interested in further details.

Colin said that members want to know where they can help; especially in light of the letter which had been issued recently. Louise said she and Fiona had a lengthy discussion because of their reluctance to send out a blanket communication, however there had been a significant increase in litter and vandalism recently and so the letter had been sent out. Louise stressed that the vast majority of the young people do whatever is asked of them. Most of them are happy to be back in school but some of them are struggling with social interactions and recognising others' cues and a situation can spiral quite quickly. Everyone, therefore, needs to work together as a community to help the young people find their way back to the social norms. Also, everyone wants to fit in with the crowd. The Senior Leadership Team forgo their lunchbreak to keep an eye on things at lunchtime but it does provide an opportunity to chat to the young people and have individual conversations.

Single use plastic is an environmental issue and Louise regretted that currently Aberdeenshire Council's catering team appears to be promoting its use. Louise said she is aware, however, that it is an agenda item for the upcoming Education Committee and she had raised the subject with Cllr Dickinson so she knew it would be discussed.

Colin voiced the opinion that it seems to be a specific year group who are the worst offenders and although they are in the minority litter in the vicinity of the school is a problem.

Louise said that another factor had been the ruling from the Scottish Government relating to healthy eating; reducing sugar content, limiting red meat etc. The catering team is outstanding and do encourage healthy eating but one victim of the ruling has been the Mackie Brownie. What this means is that pupils are going out of school and purchasing goods from local shops that contain far more sugar than one brownie would have contained previously. Furthermore, it has now been decided that it's acceptable to sell fizzy drinks because they contain artificial sugar and the vast majority of the litter in the field is plastic bottles. Louise voiced her frustration that there was no consultation prior to the change and Mackie had gone to considerable effort to install water fountains and encourage the use of reusable bottles; all that work has now been undone. Patricia confirmed that the young people are missing the brownies.

Richard queried if the prefects could be utilised at lunchtime, if their presence would make a difference. Louise advised that there have been discussions about how to use the prefects effectively while building up the relationships between the pupils and it is thought that perhaps the prefects could organise activities. For instance, some boys like to play football at lunchtime and maybe senior pupils could organise a game.

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Richard stressed that parents have a role to play too and they should be discussing the issues with their young people. Colin thought that organising sports at lunchtime could work well, especially since youngsters have forgotten how to be active because of lockdown. Louise reported that they are also developing a Learning Centre and the school librarian is coming up with ideas on how to make best use of that space. The Homework Club is up and running again and it is hoped that senior pupils will be available on certain days and times to provide support with specific subjects for anyone who feels they are struggling.

Louise said it was also hoped that a reduced sugar recipe for brownies can be sourced so that they can be reinstated.

Colin asked if the presence of police officers in school would help address the vandalism. Louise explained that the service is understaffed and stretched although they have attended at the Redcloak area on a couple of occasions. The vandalism had occurred in the boys' toilet where there is a blind spot and the decision has been taken to close it during lesson time which has made the situation more manageable.

Cllr Dickinson advised that the Community Council receives relevant information from the local police and it was noticeable that levels of anti-social behaviour had been quite high but they are now beginning to drop. Cllr Dickinson expressed the hope that the litter around the school will begin to drop too since it is frustrating as well as damaging to Mackie's reputation.

6. AOB

Jacqui asked about the staffing situation and the possibility that it might be necessary to send classes home. Louise explained that they had reached a critical point recently. Only one member of staff had tested positive but others had been self-isolating and waiting the result of a PCR test. Mackie has a core group of supply teachers but it is small and they are not available at all times. The communication was put in place as the school did not want a situation to arise whereby classes were sent home, without parents having had prior warning. Louise stressed that such an action will be a last resort when no supply staff is available but the circumstances are such that it is not possible to predict with confidence that it will not happen. As already noted, primary schools have been hard hit and a number of teachers have primary age children which has a knock-on impact at Mackie Academy.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting was scheduled for 7 pm on Thursday 4 November. Louise and Rhona will liaise to set the remaining meeting dates for the rest of the school year, details of which will be issued with the minutes.



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

Proposed dates of future meetings:

14 December 2021

27 January 2022

8 March 2022

21 April 2022

14 June 2022