



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Tuesday 21 November 2023

PRESENT: Samantha Bradley, James Brogan, Sarah Cowling, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Lyn Forman, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison, Craig Meikle, Louise Moir (Head Teacher); Susan Purvis, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp (Vice Chair), Sarah Smith, Cllr Alan Turner

APOLOGIES: Lewis Campbell, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Elaine Mitchell, Marion Montgomery, Moira Paterson, Fiona Ritchie, Mandy Tulloch (representing the Parent Council at an informal Aberdeenshire Council Parent Council meeting)

IN ATTENDANCE: Lucy Angel (Principal Teacher, Developing Young Workforce (DYW)), Nicola Hamilton (Depute Head Teacher (with responsibility for DYW)), Scott Marshall (Business & Community Support Officer)

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

In Colin Esslemont's absence, Richard Sharp chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 3 October, were approved. Their adoption as a true record was agreed by those present.

3. MATTERS ARISING

RAAC – Update

Louise Moir reported that it was anticipated that all issues caused by RAAC would soon be resolved satisfactorily, thanks to the Aberdeenshire Council team and teamwork within the school. The learning plaza work had been completed during the October holidays which was helpful. The front-of-school work had taken longer to complete because of asbestos but the reinforcements had been carried out and the suspended ceilings were being reinstalled and all being well the rooms should be available for use by the beginning of the following

week. Louise underlined that the Council staff had worked very hard to ensure disruption was kept to a minimum as much as possible.

Richard observed that it appeared that the issues had been resolved very efficiently. Louise agreed and pointed out that the janitorial team had also expended a lot of effort and the music team had been very accommodating in working round the disruption.

Richard queried how the work is funded and Louise explained that it is met centrally by Aberdeenshire Council central budget. Louise acknowledged, however, that funding the repairs will adversely affect some other area.

4. MACKIE ACADEMY BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Louise introduced Scott Marshall and explained that he would provide an updated overview of the partnership with the Wood Group Foundation, and its impact on learning. He would then share information relating to his role, especially highlighting the tools that are utilised to add value to learning wherever possible; being the point of liaison between school, employers and the wider community.

Scott shared an in-depth presentation which demonstrated how the school engages potential partners, with a view to developing and sustaining a relationship with them – progress, not perfection, is sought within the partnerships. Scott explained that a “menu” is made available to potential partners, requesting a commitment of time and talent whilst recognising this is a significant request. One example of a partnership is ESS Compass some of whose staff members are working with BGE students from S1 to S3. Scott’s presentation also highlighted salient elements of his role and Louise stressed that Scott’s role is significant, and its purpose is to add value to learning across the school.

Scott’s presentation will be circulated so that all members can peruse the information contained therein.

Jacqui Hutchison noted that very worthwhile work is being carried out and asked how potential partners are approached, or if it is a case of waiting for partners to approach the school. Jacqui recommended that the presentation is showcased to potential partners since it would encourage involvement. Scott advised that he seeks out and approaches potential partners and he also welcomes enquiries. He explained that he is looking for an expert or skilled individual within an organisation. Scott said that the intention is to begin showcasing the school from March onwards with Aberdeenshire wide events from April 2024; and including current partners too.

Richard queried the process of contacting an organisation. Scott explained that most larger companies have a community officer, who would be his initial contact. Aberdeenshire Council has a bank of organisations and he works closely with the DYW Team who also have a directory of contacts but Scott would be the point of contact to avoid duplication of effort or confusion.

Louise underlined that Scott had introduced a different way of working within the school and they were now almost at the point where they can demonstrate positive examples of effective and sustainable partnerships (so that progression and long-term work is evident). It is exciting that existing partners can see the benefits of long-term involvement – for them as well as for the school.

Louise highlighted also the benefits of Foundation Apprenticeships. For example, Home Economic teachers can be challenging to recruit but now there are pathways into the hospitality industry via Foundation Apprenticeships levels 4 and 5, which are being offered this year. It makes sense that progression pathways are available to students but not necessarily provided in-house; rather, where appropriate, the school sources and facilitates the best options.

Scott said that their efforts are now being recognised at a national level too. Gavin Morrison had attended a conference at Edinburgh University and an Education Scotland representative had stated that they are hearing great things about Mackie Academy.

Nicola Hamilton reported that S1 students are creating a skills profile so that every time they participate in a project they can demonstrate examples of developing skills as well as their wider achievements.

In S3 it is intended to introduce the school leaver profile, which will include CV writing and job applications; at the same time encouraging a student's ability to articulate all their achievements. Beginning the process within the BGE means that the process is not rushed or left until the student is at the moving-on stage.

Lucy Angel explained that she works closely with Scott especially on the S3 programme but her focus is more from the perspective of the curriculum. Lucy shared a presentation which provided details of apprenticeships and college courses; with an overview initially and then more detail. For instance, the hairdressing and beauty therapy courses provided via college/school links courses could not be taught within school since the required facilities are not available.

Lucy reported that there had been a significant increase in the take-up of Foundation Apprenticeships this year – levels 4, 5 and 6. There is a wide variety of apprenticeships on offer and, for example, accountancy is well subscribed this year. As well as the curriculum element there is also a work placement but there is parity with traditional SCQF subjects. Placements are timetabled throughout the school year meaning the student gains ongoing work experience.

Lucy stressed that the Apprenticeships are recognised by universities and students see the benefits of them, and appreciate the fact that more options are now available to them. There is also the Young Applicants in Schools Scheme with the Open University which is a level 7 SCQF Course and it is intended to develop that relationship. Lucy underlined that there is an ever-growing list of options for students and she is keen to continue that trend. Lucy explained that the S3 Discoverers Course is currently at the development stage but it will include, for instance, an insight into industries element. In response to Richard's query, Lucy explained that students would study Apprenticeships at levels 4 or 5 in S4 and level 6 in S5 or S6.

Jacqui acknowledged that the process is still at an early stage but wondered if there was any evidence of a positive effect on attainment. Lucy advised that they are beginning to see the positive effects but there is also a necessity to eliminate the negative perceptions of apprenticeships among older people and much work has gone into underlining that Foundation Apprenticeships are a prestigious qualification. They do suit pupils whose skills lie more in practical components. For example, with the Accountancy Apprenticeship – a student who could perhaps struggle in a traditional Maths setting can manage it in a real-life context. There is a mixed level of ability in this year's cohort but feedback from the lecturer indicates that they are all progressing well.

Jacqui asked if more pupils are staying on in school or if free travel is a factor in students moving on. Louise advised that the Apprenticeships fit well with S6 pupils because they have more flexibility and they enjoy spending more time in their placement so they view the Apprenticeships as worth staying on for.

Lindsay Robertson asked how the different options are flagged up to students. Lucy advised that they are advertised in a variety of ways. During the Senior Phase options process the different choices will be discussed with guidance staff. Apprenticeships were included in the options form for the first time this year and this is likely the reason for the increased take-up. Aberdeenshire Council has great resources to promote apprenticeships and word of mouth works well too.

Samantha Bradley advised that she had delivered apprenticeships and thought them very worthwhile but she wondered if any data was available to show whether or not students go on to succeed at university within their exam structures. Lucy explained that students also study traditional subjects in school so they do gain exam experience. Also, the continuous assessment process is very rigorous and probably more attuned to the current university experience such as writing essays and building up portfolios of evidence. Louise said that Skills Development Scotland are tasked to track leavers' destinations up to the age of 25. A conference the previous week included a strong debate on the robustness of tracking to ascertain how well their qualifications set up a young person for a career. There is still a lot of work to be done in Scotland in respect of fostering skill-sets that will support young people to sustain a career or occupation. Having said that, Mackie had experienced the best set of positive destinations post-Covid with only one leaver who did not move on to a positive destination.

Louise explained that there continues to be significant resistance within the secondary sector to moving away from an exam-based system but most higher education establishments are moving away from exams towards continuous assessment and on-line learning. Also, a far larger number of leavers are entering into direct employment from school but any in-house training or funding of a degree course is not being recorded. In any event, it will take several years to build up a data picture. Nicola indicated that a statistic exists which shows that 41.8% of university leavers are working in a position which does not reflect their degree. Nicola emphasised the purpose of equipping pupils with relevant experience and exposure to working life so that they have as many choices as possible available to them.

5. SCHOOL AND PARENT COUNCIL BUSINESS

(a) BGE Award Scheme Update

It was agreed that the BGE Award Scheme update should be deferred to the January meeting, when a fuller update would be available.

(b) Cost of the School Day and Textbook Exchange

Jacqui enquired if there was any capacity to operate a textbook exchange given how expensive they are to purchase. Louise explained that the problem with an exchange is that the assessment model has changed every year meaning that the previous year's textbook will be out of date. However, meetings with US Time representatives from S1 to S4 have been arranged to look at ways of addressing the cost of the school day and there is an S1 Cost of School Day group. There is a PE kit exchange and a textbook exchange could possibly be organised with the caution that the textbook would not be up to date for that year's course.

Jacqui asked about access to revision materials. Louise advised that revision sessions are available on the website and they will be updated. Craig Meikle explained that, while the English course has remained very stable, there has been a number of changes in courses across the school and some course work has been reintroduced this year so students should be wary if using an older textbook.

(c) Peer Support

Jacqui asked if any sessions for revision are arranged within school. Louise advised that there are a few senior students who support classes and thought is now being given as to how best to develop and facilitate it so that pupils are supported to offer that service. There are lunchtime and after-school opportunities but these are mostly led by staff. It is hoped to ascertain the thoughts of the young people to see why they are reluctant to participate in such sessions. It is important also to ensure that there is less perceived pressure among the students to attain a certain expected standard; rather it should be about managing one's own expectations.

Jacqui agreed that, for instance, homework clubs are a fantastic resource, but encouraging participation is a challenge.

(d) Director of Education & Children Services' Meeting with Parent Council Chairs

Richard advised that he had attended a meeting between the Director of Education and Parent Council Chairs when 5 key challenges, identified by the Director, had been shared and discussed:

- Education Reform
- Performance improvement from inspections
- Secondary teacher recruitment
- Budget pressure
- Social media abuse - links to recruitment issue

Richard reminded attendees that at our previous meeting we had discussed budget issues in depth and had agreed that we wanted the education service to be maintained, as a minimum, if not improved upon but it had been recognised that the latter is unlikely to be achieved in the current financial climate.

Richard noted that Aberdeenshire covers a large geographical area and a lot of effort is expended in developing procedures and practices which are generic across Aberdeenshire, if not Scotland. He wondered if this is something that could be developed centrally. It happens in industry where common practices and procedures are developed centrally, countrywide and now globally too.

Louise explained that there is a degree of centrality but, while a "one-size fits all" model could perhaps work in other Authorities, the same cannot be said for Aberdeenshire. For example, standardised Health & Safety work was carried out within schools which had been challenging enough for the Cluster Business Manager but smaller schools, without the benefit of full-time admin staff, still had to have all the processes in place so any procedures have to be manageable for all the different schools within Aberdeenshire and achieving that becomes a significant balancing act. Richard agreed. He indicated that the Parent Forum has to be informed that they should expect that there will be difficult changes ahead with the added factors of geographical area and the size of the school roll.

It was noted that the Education Service receives the biggest part of budget funding yet it appears that there are the fewest complaints about the service. Cllr Dickinson advised that she had participated In the Education Committee for 5 years and she had witnessed the enormous commitment to education from Councillors but the significant budget challenges ahead mean that difficult decisions will have to be made.

Cllr Turner stated that, as Chair of Infrastructure, he will strive to retain its budget but he too recognised that challenging times lay ahead and they will have to work hard to come up with the best possible decisions. Richard acknowledged the difficulties faced by Councillors but emphasised the positive progress being made at Mackie at present and underlined that the Parent Council was available to offer whatever support was needed.

(e) Parent Council Newsletter

Louise said that it would be helpful to set out the key messages in the Parent Council newsletter so that the information is provided from another perspective. Cllr Dickinson advised that there is a budget engagement process and Education had been recognised as the most important priority.

Richard said that he values the part we play in supporting the leadership team but he had become aware that other Parent Councils also fulfil a fundraising role and he wondered if that is an area we should be looking at. Louise said that she values the discussions with Parent Council members and it is important that the Parent Council is involved in the Improvement Planning process. Louise explained that it is recognised that members' time is limited and discussions would be adversely affected if there was also focus on fundraising. In any event, there are other channels within Mackie for that purpose and ideally the time we spend together should be maximised. Richard agreed but asked if any members had any suggestions or thoughts of areas where we could be involved to inform Colin or himself.

Louise reported that the school's newsletter should be ready for issue by 20 December. If the Parent Council provide their material for that timeframe it can be formatted and put out with the school newsletter, and uploaded to the Parent Council page on the website. Alternatively, if it consists of only one article a link could be included in the school newsletter in which case only the information to be included would be required.

Richard emphasised that we represent the Parent Forum and asked that members give thought to what we want to communicate to them. Richard requested that members respond to him with their thoughts and possible dialogue so that something can be built up from that starting point; hopefully something that we can issue alongside the school newsletter. Richard advised that he would re-send his email with the blank document and asked again that folks get back to him at an early date.

7. AOB

There were no items for discussion under AOB.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As already agreed, the next meeting is scheduled for 17 January 2024 and will be convened online.

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