



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Thursday 25 March 2021

PRESENT: Dawn Black, Patricia Bruce, Morag Coull, Paula Durward (Chair), Andrea Forster, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Carol Howie, Aileen McKellar, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Marion Montgomery, Fiona Ritchie, Richard Sharp

APOLOGIES: Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Colin Esslemont, Lorna Findlay, Fiona Hogg, Chris Ann Holt, Lisa Macaulay, Karen McClymont, Mhari Mitchell, Susan Purvis, Cllr Dennis Robertson, Mandy Tulloch. Lisa Williams

This meeting was convened virtually via Microsoft Teams, due to Covid-19 restrictions.

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Paula Durward welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

Return to School

Louise reported that the Scottish Government had produced a document the previous day which set out measures intended to reduce potential risks when all pupils return to school full-time on 19 April. It has been decided, however, to wait for the update on 6 April before finalising plans. It is hoped that the 2m distancing ruling

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will be removed which will mean that it will be possible to implement the arrangements that were in place prior to the current lockdown which will mean not massive changes. The guidance just released places much emphasis on ventilation and underlines that the ultimate responsibility lies with the respective LEAs. It is of course necessary to balance ventilation with the temperature in the classroom but it is hoped this will become less of an issue with the arrival of warmer weather. Another requirement is the utilisation of carbon dioxide monitors. Mackie already has them installed in practical teaching spaces and they are checked regularly. For other spaces it is important to ensure a through-flow of air, with windows and doors open where possible. This will of course result in the ability to concentrate battling with increased noise levels.

S1-S3 students have been given forms in relation to lateral flow testing kits. Forms have now been returned and uptake has been positive. Louise advised that test kits would be issued during the following week so that pupils can begin testing prior to returning to school, and the kits supplied will be sufficient for testing up to June, on a 2-weekly basis.

There has also been a change in the contact/trace process which is happening more frequently now. The regular update sessions with NHS Grampian are ongoing and continue to provide helpful local information. Transmission rates in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire are low and, where there have been outbreaks, they have been traced to specific incidents. Updated guidance has been received in relation to pupils and staff members who are shielding, and, eg, staff members who are pregnant, with ongoing risk assessments being required. There is also expanded information in respect of outdoor learning.

Louise explained that they will review the guidance but, as previously stated, they will await the further update on 6 April with a view to providing details to pupils and parents before the return to school on 19 April and the first period of the first morning back in school will be used to remind pupils of the key changes.

It has been decided that S4-S6 students will have a standard lunchbreak at 1 pm for 40 minutes (ie reduced by 10 minutes). Their school-day will end at 3.05 pm meaning that they will exit the building 10 minutes before the S1 to S3 students leave the premises. The slight variation is in recognition of the transmissibility of the current strain of the virus.

Dawn Black asked what S3 students will be doing with subjects they are not intending to take forward to S4. Louise advised that extensive plans for S3 students are being developed and Kat Thoires had met with faculty heads earlier in the day. It has been decided that initially pupils will be given time to settle into the routine of being in school. Thereafter, some pupils will be given the opportunity to continue



studying a subject up to the end of the school year where there is value for them to complete the course but pupils will be given the choice of whether or not they continue with a subject. For those who decide to opt out, a programme of activities will be formulated utilising a variety of options including the Active Schools Network, Enterprise activities, learning intervention and the library service. The programme is still under development but Kat is intending to communicate the details to S3 students prior to the Easter break.

SQA Update

Louise reported that 2 virtual SQA sessions have been arranged for the following week; one covering National 5 and the other focusing on Highers, Advanced Highers etc. Louise emphasised the importance of explaining clearly to parents this year's qualifications model and underlining that it is completely different to previous models.

Louise explained that once it had been decided to cancel exams this year an alternative model had been created, with a variety of Bodies involved in its development. Schools have been working within this model since the decision to cancel exams was taken. Louise stressed that this year's model is not comparable to last year's. The academic year had been further along last year when exams were cancelled. Inferred attainment had been required last year; demonstrated attainment only is acceptable this year. Louise underlined this important difference. Louise emphasised that no algorithmic adjustments will be employed this year and quality assurance checks will be undertaken at all levels (school, LEA and SQA). This year's appeals system was still under consultation but closed the following day however there is strong feeling among the teaching staff that the process must lie with the SQA and not with schools or LEAs.

Louise stated that robust procedures will be put in place at all levels of the process and stressed that the national standards against which the evidence will be based have not changed.

Louise explained that each subject will carry out assessments throughout the month of May by the methods which Faculty Heads believe is the best option for their subject and there will be contingency planning to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. The assessment period will conclude on Friday 28 May when the moderation and verification process will commence; with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity.

Louise highlighted that some schools had arranged prelims prior to Christmas whereas Mackie's, scheduled for January, had been cancelled. Louise expressed doubt however that prelims which took place prior to the festive break would have provided a better evidence base. She explained that it is necessary for evidence to



cover 70% plus of the coursework and it is unlikely that 70% of a course would have been completed before the Christmas holidays. The prelims could be used to show progress but Louise did not view it as a disadvantage that Mackie's prelims had been cancelled.

Louise stated that she was quietly confident that the young people will be as prepared as possible and there will be time for revision between assessments. It is also anticipated that the timetable structure – 1 subject per day – will be of benefit to the students.

During the moderation and verification stage all schools will participate in the quality assurance process; as well as within school or the LEA there will be a regional collaborative where there is not a comparative subject within the LEA.

Marion Montgomery advised that the students are feeling under pressure and are stressed about the forthcoming tracking reports. Louise said that the reports should be viewed as only one piece of the jigsaw and advised that it is recognised that the students who have only been working at home could be feeling more stressed and therefore during the week beginning 19 April there will be no assessments so that staff can spend time with the students, talking to them face to face, and reassuring them about the assessment process. Louise emphasised that, generally, the level of engagement has been significant and the young people are doing all that is being asked of them. But staff are aware that pupils are putting pressure on themselves and so it will be helpful to be able to reassure them in person.

Paula agreed. She indicated that there is still uncertainty around the specific details of what pieces of work the students are being assessed on so clarity and reassurances will be very helpful. Louise undertook to send out a reassuring message the following week to all the senior phase students.

Marion pointed out that it could also be the case that some students are being pressured by parents who do not understand the process themselves. Andi Forster agreed. She indicated also that some young people have coped better at working online than others. Parents are trying to encourage engagement but do not know how much work, if any, has been missed and whether their child is keeping up with the coursework.

Louise pointed out that senior phase pupils had benefited from uninterrupted learning until December, unlike many others. Staff have been precise in setting work and have sought feedback from their students. If a teacher had concerns about a student's engagement, parents would know via learning intervention. The young people have been doing all that has been asked of them and handing in their work



as required. They are on track and steps will be taken to reassure them, especially when they return to school.

Patricia Bruce said she was confident that the young people are being well supported and she felt reassured that the school would contact her if they had concerns about her child's level of engagement.

Louise acknowledged that there are a couple of areas which require specific attention, but they are very aware of them and plans are in place to address them effectively.

5. AOB

Marion enquired about the possibility of organising a uniform exchange. Louise advised that a "uniform swop shop" had been arranged in previous years and something similar could be organised in the summer term, working within the 72-hour quarantine guidelines. It would be scheduled outwith school hours to minimise footfall when pupils are in school but it could be arranged that, for instance, items are dropped off one Saturday and made available to collect the following week.

Wearing uniform will be required as from 19 April with the exception of days when PE is timetabled. It is anticipated this arrangement will be in place until September/October due to the refurbishment works but it will be adapted as necessary. One parent indicated that her child much preferred to wear uniform, and Louise advised that it had been very enlightening to hear the differing views that had been expressed on this subject.

Louise thanked everyone for the positive and productive relationship that exists between the school and the Parent Council; so that even on the occasion when a decision is queried or challenged it is done so in a supportive manner.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As previously agreed, the next meeting is scheduled for 6 May. Paula requested that any suggestions for agenda items be emailed in prior to that date.

By way of advance notice, Paula informed everyone that she and Patricia would be standing down as Chair and Vice Chair respectively at the AGM in September leaving these two positions requiring to be filled.



Paula thanked Louise and staff for all the time and effort they have expended in the provision of learning and teaching to all pupils, and especially in fully preparing Senior Phase students for the upcoming assessment periods.

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