



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Thursday 27 January 2022

PRESENT: Alana Allison, Morag Coull, Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Colin Esslemont (Chair), Rhona Grant (Clerk), Chris Ann Holt, Jacqui Hutchison, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Marion Montgomery, Susan Purvis, Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp, Mandy Tulloch

IN ATTENDANCE: Nicola Hamilton, Gavin Morrison, Fiona Stark, Kat Thoires (Depute Head Teachers) Fraser Moffat, David Smith (Teachers) Maxine Booth, Rachael Golding, Paul Whalley, Ian Wyllie (Estates Team)

APOLOGIES: Dawn Black, Fiona Hogg, Carol Howie, Annette Leith, Hamish Loveday, Mark Lowey, Lisa Macaulay, Karen McClymont, Mhari Mitchell, Fiona Ritchie, Cllr Denis Robertson

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Colin Esslemont (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 14 December 2021, were approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

SQA Assessment Windows

Louise Moir reported that the assessment window had commenced the previous week and was going well thus far. Louise said that it was helpful that they had been able to adopt a "hybrid" model, utilising the hall and with invigilators whilst still maintaining some distance.

Litter Issues

Louise advised that she had met with Marion Montgomery and the intention is that they will develop a community project, beginning with S1 pupils. Cllr Sarah Dickinson enquired about public involvement and Louise explained that it is planned to involve the community once an Action Plan has been drawn up. Marion's charity is registered which means that regional and national contacts can be tapped into.

Colin said he was aware that some S2 pupils are beginning to pick up their litter so perhaps the young people are beginning to be more proactive in taking responsibility for disposing of litter.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) Tutor Time Update

David Smith and Fraser Moffat delivered a comprehensive presentation on the survey that the Health & Wellbeing Impact Team had conducted with students in relation to mobile phone use and screen time. It was reported that 582 responses had been received, making the study worthwhile, but it had brought out some very worrying statistics. For instance, the vast majority spend 5+ hours per day on their phones, mostly on social media; Tik Tok and Snap Chat being the most used.

Furthermore, 85% had said that there are no restrictions on their phones, either in terms of the length of time spent on their phones, or the material they are accessing.

It was pointed out that so much screen time must have a detrimental effect on mental health, concentration levels and social skills. One of the guidance teachers had been consulted who had advised that, at Mackie, 90% of issues relate to social anxiety, malfunctioning friendship groups and social media usage.

Other issues identified include sleep disruption, interrupted education (both in the classroom and at home (homework)), and literacy (visual media as opposed to written material).

Especially worrying is that some S1 students had been involved in an incidence of vandalism and violence which had been co-ordinated and celebrated over social media.

Colin pointed out that the young people would say that they use their phones for research. Also, the lockdowns have been difficult for them and at times their phone has been the only way for them to communicate with their friends. Colin thought that, in some respects, it has become a comfort blanket for young people (and for some adults too). It was agreed that, used appropriately, a phone can be useful and an asset.

Jacqui Hutchison expressed strong dislike for social media and its adverse effect on mental health. She pointed out changing habits in that, where she could spend the evening watching television, young people prefer to watch You Tube and media in general has changed completely.

Lindsay Robertson stated that it is acceptable for staff to restrict mobile phone usage within school. It was advised that there is a traffic light system for phone use within school and it has been promoted with S1 pupils. Restricting phone use within school can also be habit-breaking.

Richard Sharp asked if the findings will be passed on to parents. Fraser Moffat advised that they have gathered a wealth of information which will be put out to parents, including the findings with advice, for instance on how to impose restrictions. All agreed the information will be helpful.

David Smith reported that they are devising a project which will restrict usage of mobile phones to a bare minimum. David and Fraser will be participating, with others, and they would welcome some other volunteers. Louise explained that a couple of families are being

sought to join a case study for one or two weeks. Fraser said they are just at the stage of working out the details at present and asked anyone willing to volunteer to get in touch.

Mandy Tulloch indicated that mobile phone usage is a significant issue, and often the cause of arguments within families, so it will be worthwhile for people to know that technical support is available together with suggested strategies to try.

Colin thanked David and Fraser for their attendance and the wealth of information they had provided, which had given everyone food for thought.

(b) Learning Estates Team

The Learning Estates Team delivered a presentation on the proposed new school which it is intended will replace Dunnottar and Carronhill schools. It was explained that different sites are being considered but the site at Mackie is the favoured option, currently. It was emphasised that the process is lengthy and it has just begun. Informal information sessions will be convened throughout 2022 and the formal process will begin next year with a Statutory Consultation of all parties affected or impacted. A brief exercise has also been completed and it has been ascertained that any future academy could also fit into the site quite comfortably.

Delivery will not be before summer 2025, assuming the process progresses as hoped; including planning permission being granted obviously.

Jacqui queried anticipated traffic measures, given the area is already very congested. It was explained that it is necessary to locate the site at a specific distance from the railway line. It is intended to rationalise all pick-up and drop-off points, including Mackie, and it is hoped to alleviate the congestion.

Richard Sharp queried why Mackie is the preferred location, as opposed to Braehead, for example. It was explained that Braehead had been included in the capital plan because of planned developments which had not materialised and therefore it had been removed from the capital plan. Mackie is in a central location and the new school can fit on the site, while leaving a significant external area.

It was emphasised that the process to identify the preferred site is still ongoing but it is desirable to create blended learning and to seek a campus approach because of the positive impact of a campus facility. Unfortunately, Mackie is not "next on the list" for a new building but colleagues from the team with responsibility for new builds could perhaps attend a future Parent Council meeting to provide further detail.

Colin pointed out the new developments in and around Stonehaven and asked if the new school will have capacity to accommodate the resultant influx of pupils. It was explained that consideration is given to capacity in whole terms, and they are comfortable with the projections.

The asset disposal programme is another process and it could be that Dunnottar and Carronhill become green spaces but the best option for those sites will be sought.

Susan Purvis observed that although other options are being considered there is a sense that they have already been ruled out. An assurance was given that the process is ongoing and 5 sites had been studied in broad terms. A more detailed review will now be carried out and if Mackie continues to be the preferred option the reasons why will be clearly specified.

Susan asked if plans are available for the other sites but only Mackie is drawn up currently however the other sites will be given more detailed consideration. It was reported that the site at Dunnottar has already been ruled out but all the information on each site will be available at public meetings and drop-in sessions. S? queried the timescale. It was explained that the consultation with Councillors was scheduled for the following week and the timescale will be drawn up thereafter. They are hopeful that as restrictions begin to lift they will be able to organise face to face meetings at some point.

Richard also voiced his concerns about congestion and it was advised that an initial viewpoint had been obtained from the Roads Dept, since the Estates Team had similar concerns. A wider assessment of each option will now be undertaken, including the congestion and how it could best be addressed. Planning permission will include a traffic survey. The engineers appointed are traffic specialists and there can be confidence in their findings.

Jacqui emphasised that further discussion would be welcome on the impact on the outside space which is a significant resource for Mackie.

Louise agreed that they would be reluctant to lose any of the outdoor space and they too had concerns about traffic congestion but they also recognised the value to education of a single site with provision for teaching 3 to 18 year olds. One example of a positive factor for Mackie is that Early Year Training is a large growth area for foundation apprenticeships and having a nursery facility on-site would be a great asset for work experience placements.

An assurance was offered that consideration will be given to what will benefit the whole campus. Outside space for a school used to be given little consideration but its benefits are now recognised and it will be included in plans. It would be worthwhile if senior pupils could become fully involved in the project and provide their input. Colin stated the importance of ensuring that a variety of sports and athletics can continue within the grounds.

Louise suggested that the Estates Team could be invited to a future meeting, when the process has moved forward. The Team confirmed they would welcome the opportunity and would also appreciate assistance in advertising the public meetings once these are arranged. This was agreed.

Colin thanked the Team for their attendance, and all the information they had provided.

(c) Impact Teams

Attendees departed to their respective Impact Teams for 20 minutes. On their return, it was agreed that discussions had been worthwhile.

5. AOB

Louise reported that the Excelerate Programme is now gathering pace and a team of 4 would be heading to Doncaster during the following week for a fact-finding mission looking at project-based learning. Also, Beth Grzelak is coming across from America to carry out a number of visits to participating schools. As part of this, a virtual meeting is planned for lunchtime on 15 February when parents will be invited to share their perspectives. It was noted that participation from 4 or 5 Parent Council members would be helpful and any volunteers were asked to advise Rhona of their availability.

Louise advised of a study being led by Aberdeenshire Council into the impact of Covid locally (on children, families and communities). A meeting is scheduled for 3 February and

Fiona Stark is participating from Mackie and a parent member would be helpful too. Richard advised that the details had already been shared and Alana had volunteered to attend.

Mandy Tulloch requested an update on face masks. Louise said that nothing had been received recently but she was hopeful that after the February break the restriction on wearing masks in the classroom might be lifted. Mandy pointed out that this would be beneficial and Louise agreed, indicating that teaching in masks is a challenging experience for staff.

Richard asked if it was known when lockers will be reinstated. Louise explained that again they hoped there would be some movement soon but she could not give a definitive answer currently. The new PE changing rooms should be available for use shortly since the project had run very smoothly. Louise suggested that Parent Council members might like to see the reconfigured area before general release and all agreed they would be very interested to view the improvements.

Richard requested a volunteer to attend the meeting scheduled for the following week which formed part of the consultation on draft interim policy on relationships, learning and behaviour. Mandy volunteered to attend. Richard pointed out that Aberdeenshire Council organise useful training for Parent Council members and he recommended that members have a look to see what is on offer.

Colin said that he much preferred the new format for Parents Evenings and he hoped it would continue in that format. Louise confirmed that feedback received has been positive and while it is desirable to convene face to face events, time is always a factor at Parents Evenings and the new format has worked well.

Louise advised that the Learning Estates Team's presentation would be circulated and advised that the Team were due to present the information to the Cluster meeting scheduled for the following day.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

As already notified, the next meeting of the Parent Council is scheduled for 8 March.

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