



Meeting of Mackie Academy Parent Council

Thursday 28 April 2022

PRESENT: Cllr Sarah Dickinson, Rhona Grant (Clerk), Jacqui Hutchison, Karen McClymont, Elaine Mitchell, Louise Moir (Head Teacher), Lindsay Robertson, Richard Sharp

APOLOGIES: Alana Allison, Dawn Black, Colin Esslemont (Chairperson), Chris Ann Holt, Annette Leith, Mark Lowey, Lisa Macaulay, Marion Montgomery, Susan Purvis, Cllr Denis Robertson, Mandy Tulloch

This meeting was convened virtually, via Microsoft Teams. In Colin Esslemont's absence, Richard Sharp (Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Richard welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 8 March 2022, were approved. Their adoption as a true record was proposed by Jacqui Hutchison and seconded by Lindsay Robertson.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Proposed New School

Louise Moir advised that a public meeting had been scheduled for 12 May in Stonehaven Town Hall, details of which had been circulated to parents.

Richard informed that details of an online survey on the subject had been received and passed on to Parent Council members.

4. SCHOOL BUSINESS

(a) School Improvement Plan 2022-27

Louise shared the draft Improvement Plan for 2022-2027 and underlined that it was still a working document. She explained that the Wood Foundation prefer a 5-year plan but in any event it is realistic to consider longer-term aims as well as short-term targets, and it is also the school's preference.

Louise advised that she had recently met with all year groups in assemblies to look at vision, values and aim; and views had also been sought from staff and Parent Council members so that the evidence base has been wide-ranging.

Louise highlighted some of the key elements.

The 4 areas of focus are:

Health & Wellbeing
Attainment and Achievement
Ensuring Positive Destinations
Promoting Lifelong Learning

It had been decided that the introduction – setting the context of the school – would be in a visual format rather than verbal and it was agreed this has worked well. Together with the main document, there will also be a 1-page summary and an executive summary.

The layout for the Quality Indicators is repeated for each indicator, making it easier to follow. Having discussed with staff their thoughts and views on prioritisation, the next step is to discuss Action Plans with the extended leadership team. Short-, medium- and long-term goals will be identified and it is intended to have an overarching Action Plan with each Faculty having an individual Action Plan.

Louise said she would share the Plan with members but cautioned again that it is a working document.

Jacqui Hutchison pointed out that mirroring the format for each indicator makes it easy to follow and the visual context is eye-catching. She also thought that an executive summary will be worthwhile.

Louise advised that when the completed document is uploaded to the website it is planned to have the executive summary first, leading to the main document but it is recognised that, for some people, the executive summary will be sufficient. Parent Council members will become familiar with the parts of the document that relate to their respective Impact Teams.

Richard asked how progress will be measured. Louise said that various forms of data are utilised. Exam results are obviously the final outcome but by then it can be almost too late to take any action. Tracking and monitoring of reports has worked well and Kat Thoirs is working on Standard Assessments with P7 pupils, testing them again in S3 so that it can be ascertained if students are staying on track and attaining each of the levels in BGE. Advice is also shared relating to progress in the steps between each level, since the levels can be quite broad. The stepped approach keeps students and parents informed of advancement.

For the Health & Wellbeing Indicator, Fiona Stark has organised various initiatives such as surveys and wellbeing logs for the young people, as well as monitoring staff's wellbeing too.

Formal and informal evidence is gathered throughout the year and triangulated so that findings are not based solely on one small piece or snap-shot of evidence. For example, it is now 5 years since the Pupil Equity fund was introduced so consideration has been given on how the fund was spent and what impact it has achieved. There is also the Visible Learning Programme which has had varying success. Individually, staff benefited from the programme but Mackie did not become a Visible Learning School however it has helped to inform how best to develop the Excelerate programme. In 5 years' time it might be possible to look at whole school improvements but the Action Plans will be critical to achieving that and the aim is to have a realistic Improvement Plan that will help Mackie grow as a learning community.

Jacqui asked how achievements, other than academic success, will be recognised. Louise agreed that it is important to define attainment and achievement and capture all types of success. For instance, foundation apprenticeships cover a range of achievements within the apprenticeship, as well as a qualification, but it is vital to ensure that capturing attainment does not become just a box-ticking exercise. It is also intended to utilise the digital environment and encourage the young people to record their achievements themselves so that they can, for example be able to expand upon all they have accomplished during their time at Mackie.

Councillor Sarah Dickinson advised that the Education Committee is given sight of schools' Plans and she agreed that it is valuable to take a longer-term approach and have something to build on for the future, rather than just short-term aims.

Louise reported that she had asked the Director of Education if they could devise a model that would work for Mackie and he had given permission for them to do so. The model had also been discussed with the Quality Improvement Manager as well as the Director. There are some 170 primary and secondary schools in Aberdeenshire, all of which are very different, so one format would not work for every school and it is helpful that they have been able to pick a format that works best and tweak it to suit. Cllr Dickinson said it will be interesting to watch how it develops.

Richard indicated that it is worthwhile to include prioritisation since it can be quite challenging to adapt a way of working and sometimes do less but achieve more; deciding along the way if some piece of work should still be worked on, or if it is time to move onto something else.

(b) Education Scotland Visit

Louise reported that she has invited Education Scotland Inspectorate into school for a Recovery visit. An inspection has not been carried out during Louise's time in post (9 years) so it will also be helpful to see how they operate. Self-evaluation is ongoing but it is important to have others challenge procedures and ask pertinent questions.

Richard asked if there was anything more that Parent Council members could do by way of support. Louise said it had already started with participation in the Impact Teams and when the Action Plans are live it is anticipated that they will stimulate more specific discussions. Student ambassador programmes are now beginning to develop. The Community Coach is quite keen that students are listened to when they become involved. Adults can have a tendency to request a young person's views but then carry on regardless, and it is something to be mindful of and avoid.

The Inspectors will be in school from 9 to 11 May and the visit will be led by the school, principally looking at Continuity of Learning and Wellbeing of Communities; as well as Safeguarding and Child Protection (statutory requirements). It is likely that 9 May will be carried out remotely and it is hoped that representative(s) from the Parent Council will be able to participate in discussions. Input will be requested from members once the details are known.

On 10 May the Inspectors will be in school either in class or possibly with focus groups. They will be provided with a timetable and they will choose where they want to be. Fiona Stark will lead on Health & Wellbeing and the various initiatives within that remit. It is hoped to focus also on the enhanced provision and how vulnerable students were supported in the hub during lockdown and how they were impacted when school opened up again.

Louise stressed that it is felt the time is right for an external evaluation. There has been much sterling effort in trying times but it is anticipated that challenging questions will be asked. Richard pointed out that, given senior students are on study leave, the Inspectors will not get a true picture of the school. Louise accepted that but explained that not only has it been interesting watching the dynamics of the S1-S3 students rising to the challenge of being the only years in school but they are the young people who will be involved for most of the 5-year journey so it is important that they are consulted now.

The baseline exercise which began the Excelerate Programme has now been completed and the results collated. There was a 100% response from S1 pupils and their answers indicated strongly that initially they had struggled to feel they were part of the school community. It is hoped, 6 months later, that they have now settled into school life as things begin to return to some form of normality, and it will be interesting to see if their opinions have changed. As part of addressing that, consideration is being given to rebuilding the House activities. When the current 1st year arrived, obviously there were no activities and no inter-house competitions. It will be worthwhile to include the wider community within Stonehaven too.

(c) Excelerate School Leaver Profile Event

A Profile Event is being organised by the Wood Foundation, scheduled for 20 May. Mackie has been allocated 15 places: 4 staff, 7 pupils in different years, business/community representatives and 3 places for parents so that everyone's perspective is gathered. It should be an interesting and worthwhile event and it was hoped that 3 parent members would be free and able to participate.

It is a key output from the school and will be reported on at the next Parent Council meeting.

(d) Educational Visits

Now that restrictions are lifting and returning to some form of normality, educational visits are being resumed and the subject is being discussed within school. There have been 2 ½ years of no trips and staff have become used to having all their holiday time so it is recognised that there might not be the same appetite for leading school trips. Also, term-time is very busy and involved so down-time is much appreciated. Rising costs have to be taken into consideration too. For example, previously the ski trip to Austria cost £1200 but now it would probably be in the region of £1400 to £1500. The Wild West trip had cost almost £3000. It will be much more expensive now. Furthermore, there had always been a long lead-in time allowing families to save up for the trip but now there are so many uncertainties around finances.

Lindsay Robertson agreed about the challenges for trips abroad but indicated that her son had missed out on the P7 residential trip because of lockdown which means that that year group have not had that experience and it would be disappointing if they did not have any opportunities for a trip at some point.

Louise wondered if some form of activity days could be arranged, with perhaps a residential option being available. Aberdeenshire Council has an Outdoor centre which could be used to arrange a residential trip and it might be helpful to resume trips with a closer to home approach initially. Also, expensive trips can become divisive. There has been an increase in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals so there is a change in the landscape of the school, and the local community, and it has to be reflected.

Jacqui thought there was scope to offer some form of trip to S1 students but cautioned that nothing should be rushed into. She pointed out that as well as significant financial challenges for families, staff are facing another taxing year and need their free time.

Richard concurred. He underlined that eligibility for free school meals is a helpful indicator of the realities of life at present and it makes sense to base decisions on that factor. However, both types of trips are very worthwhile and should be “kept on the radar”, including overseas trips, although there are so many uncertainties in the world at present; not only financial ones. Perhaps an overseas trip in, say, 2- or 3-years’ time could be considered.

Louise said she was aware of Easter ski-ing trips where, because of the delays at Dover, some groups had been on buses for 27 hours by the time they arrived at the resort which is far from ideal but it was hoped that such issues will have been resolved by the time overseas trips resume.

Louise reported that it is intended to organise social events for the students. For instance, the Sports Day, as well as athletics, will include activities that everyone can get involved in. The sponsored walk will resume in September with additional elements, and perhaps in May 2023 it might be possible to offer activities to younger pupils and perhaps include residential trips.

Cllr Dickinson advised that her sons had participated in the ski-ing trips which they had really enjoyed but mostly they had just enjoyed being able to spend time with their friends.

Louise said it will be ensured that nothing is rushed into and anything that is organised will be as inclusive as possible.

5. RECRUITMENT FOR PARENT COUNCIL 2022-23

Louise advised that information sessions would shortly be arranged for new S1 parents and also the pack containing all relevant information will be issued to all new parents at the end of May. The pack includes details of the Parent Council and it would be worthwhile to update the details and also to give consideration to other ways of raising awareness of the upcoming AGM and how to become involved in the Parent Council. Previously, flyers have also been handed out at the prizegiving (28 June) and at the summer concert. Possibilities can be discussed at the next meeting but it always makes sense to inform new S1 parents of the Parent Council given existing members will be leaving as their child moves on, or they have served their time on the committee so it is important to recruit new members.

Richard agreed that all opportunities to raise awareness of the Parent Council should be taken and said that the flyer and the information for the pack will be updated.

6. AOB

Jacqui requested an update on school uniform. Louise reported that a working party with S1 pupils led by S3 students has been established. The student survey closes tomorrow and a framework will thereafter be drawn up reflecting the responses, and it is also the intention to consult S2 and S3 pupils.

Louise reminded members that they had not insisted on uniform during the cold weather and the increased ventilation, and pupils had been allowed to wear PE kit to school on PE days but it now appears that every student has PE every day.

During the SQA assessments window, Kat had encouraged pupils to wear uniform but some of the students had advised that they had outgrown it.

Louise stressed the importance of working around affordability and more flexibility; and taking account of the environment. For instance, they used to be strict about footwear. It was the most expensive item to purchase yet the young person did not want to wear them outside school, so there will be more flexibility here. It will be possible also to choose between shirt/blouse or polo shirt but there will be a clear distinction between PE kit and non-PE kit. Louise said it was still a work in progress but they were aiming for a clear remit by mid-June so that parents are aware of the expectations when school resumes. They did not want families buying uniform items in May which could be too small when the young people return after summer holidays. More information would be forthcoming relating to PE days and non-PE days, but it was recognised that pupils prefer not having to negotiate the changing rooms and accordingly participation in PE has increased significantly so it has been decided that for core PE pupils can come to school in kit, but for options PE students should come to school in uniform and use the changing room. In this case, the size of the class will be smaller so the changing room should be easier to negotiate. Again, circumstances have changed and it is hoped to achieve the middle ground. As far as tie-wearing is concerned, there is an even split between positive and negative and other forms of ID have been suggested such as wearing an ID badge, similar to members of staff.

Lindsay pointed out that wearing a lanyard would be like the world of work which might appeal and it could also hold the young person's Young Scot card. Jacqui said she was pleased to hear that the views of the young people themselves are being sought.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for 14 June. It was agreed to meet in person (in the library to allow distancing) but also to offer the online option too.

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