

Ellon Academy Parent Council Meeting Minutes

12th May 2020

All participants took part virtually due to current Government guidance on social distancing. Furthermore, the attendees were restricted to Senior Leadership Team from the school and the current Committee members as this was our first attempt at a virtual meeting.

Attendees: N Topping (Chair), D McCulloch (Vice Chair), K Gray (Previous Chair),
H Wilson (Acting Secretary), P Buchan (Rector), P McCabe (Deputy Head Teacher)
T Booth (Deputy Head Teacher), F McLachlan (Deputy Head Teacher)

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

These were posted on the Parent Council Facebook Page on Friday 8th May 2020. No comments were received on the page or privately to any Committee members. All present were content with the accuracy of these minutes.

2. Treasurer's Report

We continue to have the same issues we have faced for the past four years. We still cannot access the funds in the Parent Council Bank Account, despite many meetings, forms being completed and ongoing assurances from the Bank that the issues could be resolved. A formal complaint has now been raised but due to the Coronavirus, we have been advised that there are delays in dealing with such complaints.

3. Rector's Update

Recruitment

- Recruitment is ongoing for vacant posts. We are in a better position staffing wise than we were at this time last year. Details of recent appointments and current vacancies have already been communicated to parents through the "Ellon Academy Up-Date for Parents/Carers" dated 7th May 2020.
- The school has requested three probationer teachers this year and they are due to hear next week about who they have been allocated. Two of these are to cover maternity leave vacancies.
- Mrs Moir is due to return to the school in August following her Maternity Leave.

School Finances

- These are healthy due to strong management by Susan McGill (The School Business Manager).
- Nobody in school is spending money on resources.
- The reconciliation year end spend has not been received yet from Aberdeenshire Council.

Professional Learning

- Teachers have been undertaking unprecedented levels of professional learning over the past few weeks to ensure that they have the necessary skills to teach and guide our pupils in their learning through the online platforms.
- This has been a particular challenge for some teachers.
- This should be helpful going forward as pupils will be accessing much more digital learning for the foreseeable future.

Digital Platforms

- As a school, we are deciding what is best. We plan to use just one platform across the school to ensure consistency. At the moment, Google Classroom is being favoured by staff, rather than Microsoft Teams. The reason for this is because there is an add-on available for Google Classroom (Google Guardian) which allows teachers to communicate directly with parents. This would allow teachers to send messages about homework being set (similar to Show Me My Homework – but without the cost implications for the school).
- TB has been in conversations with Inverurie Academy who have been involved in a pilot of Google Guardian.
- The school is also checking out the benefits of using Microsoft Teams.

4. Covid 19 Update

- Every week, Laurence Findlay (Director of Education for Aberdeenshire) meets virtually with Head teachers across Aberdeenshire to provide updates.
- Laurence Findlay is also involved in a special National Taskforce looking at issues regarding the re-opening of schools. This is effectively an education recovery group which is considering the options for gradually returning pupils to school across the country. It is clear, that this return is unlikely to be before the summer holidays.
- Aberdeenshire has a separate group looking specifically at the local issues we will face in planning the return to school.
- When pupils do return, there is likely to be a blended approach to learning. This means that the intention is to continue the hubs for pupils of key workers and disadvantaged children, there will be a gradual introduction to some in-school experience and there will be continued focus on online learning.
- Twenty seven Ellon Academy staff have volunteered to help to cover the Ellon Hub at Ellon Primary School during this challenging time.

New Timetable

- The school is developing their own plans to ensure that pupils can all receive meaningful learning opportunities. PM has been developing the new timetable for June to ensure that as many pupils as possible can study the courses they want to. There has been a significant challenge with the Food and Technology course as has already been communicated by the school. The forty children who are unable to take this course are now choosing alternative courses and every effort is being made to adapt their individual timetables to allow them to study these new choices. This has been complex as it has meant significant changes of columns for their other courses.
- A new timetable will begin on Tuesday 2nd June. Pupils should have been told in advance if any of their subject choices have not been possible. Pupils will be placed in new Google Classrooms or Teams to reflect their subject choices (S3 to S6) or new groupings (new S2). More information about this will be shared with parents and pupils in the coming week.

Return to School Planning

The school currently expects there to be a requirement for different timetables again when pupils do return to school as the current guidance is that pupils cannot all return to school at the same time. The following challenges are expected:

- a) pupils will not be attending school on a full time basis. This may mean a day or two – or a week at a time, followed by significant time working from home
- b) there will be a need for social distancing which may mean significantly restricted class sizes and restricted movement both in classes and around the school
- c) deep cleaning on a regular basis may be required
- d) challenges around breaks and lunches
- e) there is likely to be a requirement for regular handwashing by everyone
- f) there are particular challenges for practical work- Home Economic, Science, PE, Music, Drama, Technology
- g) specific care will be taken with organising the return for transition pupils

These are just a few of the challenges which face the school in ensuring a safe return for staff and pupils, which is the priority.

It is recognised by the school that pupils are not receiving the same volumes of work as normal. There is an assumption being made that most parents will want their pupils to return to school, but there is also an acknowledgement that some will be concerned. There are members of staff who are shielding, have underlying conditions or live with people in these situations.

Equity Issues

- The Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council are keen to ensure equity in provision of education. Every parent of a pupil at Ellon Academy should have received an invitation by email to take part in an electronic survey to identify any pupil who may have issues in accessing the virtual learning being set; either due to lack of a suitable device or due to connectivity issues with the internet (or for any other reason). Please only complete this questionnaire if your child does have problems accessing the learning.
- Ellon Academy handed out a number of devices when lockdown first happened to pupils they were aware of who needed these. Further requests have been received this week and these pupils are also now receiving devices.
- It is also possible to provide textbooks, but there are very strict hygiene requirements surrounding these.
- It is expected that teachers will primarily be providing screen shots or providing links rather than distributing the textbooks which would ordinarily be used.
- No information has been received by the school regarding the National Resources which were mentioned by John Swinney in news conferences in April.
- Scholar may be used by teachers.

5. Support for Pupils Planning on Leaving School this year

- If pupils are planning to leave this year, the leaving date is 31st May.
- Usually, pupils would be provided with Leavers Forms which would require them to speak to each of their subject teachers to both say goodbye and to receive sign off from them that they have returned all school owned resources (textbooks, booklets, materials etc).
- The school has not yet decided how this process will be completed this year due to the exceptional circumstances.
- These Pupils can still access individual support from Guidance teachers by emailing them.
- No events have been scheduled yet but the school is hopeful that they will be able to arrange something.
- There may be a listing of pupils who would have received prizes this year.

6. Senior Pupil Queries

Many of these questions we had are answered under the section on SQA Exams below.

- Will there be an opportunity for senior pupils to contact the school (virtually if necessary) to change subject choices or gain other support following the SQA Exam results this Year (including applications for appeals)?
 - Yes – the specific arrangements have not yet been made for this as the school waits to see what the circumstances will be closer to the time. Parents and pupils will be contacted with this information.
- The Appeal process is free this year – does this mean that if a pupil is unhappy about results, they will automatically be allowed to appeal? Or will the school have to agree that there is an anomaly to support the appeal?
 - The school has not yet received much information about the Appeal process (other than it is free). It is expected that there will be a much higher number of appeals than usual this year and this is being planned for.
- Senior Pupils are generally experiencing relatively low levels of work in comparison with their BGE siblings – are there plans to provide more?
 - This will be reviewed and information will be provided to the Parent Council.
- Is there any sign of the National Resources mentioned by John Swinney in April?
 - This would be welcomed by the school, but no information has been received by the school yet.
- How is Pupil Engagement being assessed?
 - Teachers are keeping records of pupil engagement and there are plans for Guidance to get in touch with parents if they have any concerns.

7. SQA Exams

- Teachers are currently working very hard to provide estimates for each pupil who was due to sit an SQA exam this year. These are completed every year but are particularly important this year due to the absence of exams.
- Teachers have been asked to look at the broadest range of evidence that they have. This will mean different things in different subjects but may include prelim results, pre-prelims, end of term assessments, class tests, written homework and class work.
- The evidence will also be ranked as to how reliable it may be as a predictor (of the final grade).
- The range, quality and robustness of the evidence will go through a quality assurance process
- Internal verification activities will also ensure the integrity of the estimates.
- Faculty expertise will be used - some of our teachers are markers or verifiers for the SQA which means they have particular knowledge and understanding of the SQA standards.
- The SQA have provided every school with the last 3-5 years of data related to estimates and actual grades. This will allow the school to check that there are no anomalies – for example everyone in a class suddenly getting As or Ds!
- “Pivot Tables” are used to see how close teachers have been historically in estimating final results to ensure estimates are as fair as possible.
- Some departments encourage pupils to work hard by being particularly harsh in marking prelims so that pupils can fully understand what they need to do to reach their potential in

the final exams –Over- or under-estimation will be taken into account when producing estimates using historical patterns/trends

- Each Faculty Principal Teacher will meet (virtually) with the Rector and SQA Co-ordinator to get estimates ‘signed off’ before sending to the SQA as part of the Quality Assurance process.
- The school already has data relating to where pupils were and where they were expected to be with the additional teaching time, revision time and effort they were likely to expend

8. Home School Working

- Parents are providing generally very positive feedback relating to the new Weekly learning schedules which are now being produced by the school. This is helping parents to understand what work is being set for their children.
- When feedback is provided by teachers, it is generally timely and comprehensive.
- Some subjects are not setting a lot of specific work – especially for senior pupils.
- Questions were asked around whether there would be opportunities to be more social in learning opportunities as many pupils are really missing the social interaction which is usually involved in learning. This would help to maintain relationships which are fundamental to learning and transitioning back to school.
 - The school understands that pupils are using social media to maintain contact with friends.
 - There are restrictions from a child protection point of view with using some of the platforms which allow social interaction.
 - The school is hopeful that they will be able to provide some kind of social learning going forward.
 - Video Platform learning is also being looked at as part of the blended learning however there are some challenges around this that need to be overcome.

9. PPE Production

- The Parent Council wanted to formally recognise and thank the fabulous work going on in our Technology department in producing face shields for keyworkers locally.
- Mr Cruikshank and Mr Macbeth have been spending many hours in the school producing these essential supplies for local NHS workers, carers, pharmacies and other key workers.
- The school have confirmed that this work is ongoing and that the school has provided funds to ensure they can continue to source resources to make the PPE.
- The Parent Council asked if we could assist in any way – creating a “Go Fund Me” page, providing raw materials or additional volunteers.
- The school will let us know if any assistance is required

10. Return of Pupils to Ellon Academy

- This is a huge project requiring wide ranging and detailed planning. Information was provided in the section above entitled “Covid 19 Update”.
- The school will engage with the Parent Council with regards to the risk assessment and the planning for pupils returning to school.
- It is highly likely that this will not take place until after the summer holidays.

11. Work Experience

- Pupils in fourth year who were expecting to take part in work experience at the end of May have now received an email confirming that this has been cancelled. A copy of this will be posted on the Parent Council Facebook page shortly. (UPDATE – this was posted on the Parent Council Facebook page on 13th May 2020.
- Every effort will be made to attempt to provide this cohort with appropriate experience at a later date.

12. Transition into First Year

- Mr McLachlan has been meeting virtually on a regular basis with all the cluster Head-teachers and p7 teachers to plan for the transition of young people from the primary schools up-to Ellon Academy.
- The transition plan will be as simple and clear as possible.
- The school will be encouraging clear two way communication throughout the process.
- Letters will be sent out to parents providing further information at the start of June and July.
- A Facebook page has now been set up to aid the communication process due to these exceptional circumstances this year. Every parent has been provided with a link to the page. Parents who choose not to use Facebook will be able access all of the information by using a link allowing access without being a user.
- The current head girl, head boy and deputies will all be involved in supporting the transition of p7 pupils. This will take various different forms.
- If we are unable to access the school building prior to August, the plan is to provide pupils with a virtual tour of the school to help them to understand the layout of the school.
- It is hoped that the school may be able to arrange a transition day in the physical school in July or August, but this will depend on how guidance from the Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council changes over the next few weeks.
- The nine Faculty Heads in Ellon Academy will be providing tasks for all primary 7 pupils and this may include video footage.
- Some parents have been asking about enhanced transition. The school will ensure enhanced provision is provided for all pupils who require this support. This may be virtual, but again the school will be guided by the Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council.

13. Additional Parent Council Support

- Nothing specific has been requested by the school at this time over and above the general assistance with communication.
- Please note that if any parent has any questions they wish to be raised at a parent council meeting, they can contact the parent council publically through the Parent Council Facebook page, or by sending a private message. Email messages can also be sent to ellonacademyparentcouncil@gmail.com and parents can also contact members of the committee personally.

14. Strategy / Planning if school closure continues beyond Term 4

- Mental Health and Health and wellbeing will be priorities when planning for the return to school.
- As previously mentioned, there is a National Taskforce and a more local Northern Alliance one who are working on providing guidance to schools on how they may return.

- At a local level, thought is being put into how a blended education system may work but also a significant amount of work has been taking place relating to delivering a comprehensive education through various online platforms. More information will be available in due course.

15. Communication

- Parents have been appreciative of the weekly “Ellon Academy Up-Date for Parents and Carers” document which is being emailed to parents every Friday.
- The “Weekly Online Lockdown Learning Update” has also been received positively by parents this week.

16. School Pitch Update

- Unfortunately, as expected, the remedial work which was due to start on making our school pitches playable has been delayed once more due to Coronavirus complications.
- An update on when this work may be completed is being sought by the senior leadership team.
- It is understood that some scoping work may have been completed prior to lockdown.

17. Oversized PE Kits

- This item was discussed in the last Parent Council meeting.
- The school confirmed there is no update on this yet due to the current situation.

18. Next Parent Council Meeting

- It is hoped that the Parent Council will meet with the Senior Leadership Team every two weeks during this time.
- Next meeting date: 2nd June 2020