

Ellon Academy Parent Council Meeting Minutes

3rd August 2020

All participants again took part virtually due to current Government guidance on social distancing. The attendees were restricted to Senior Leadership Team from the school.

Attendees: N Topping (Chair), D McCulloch (Vice Chair), K Gray (Previous Chair), H Wilson (Acting Secretary), A Blanchard (Treasurer), P Buchan (Rector)

NP thanked all for attending – particularly PB for participating during the school holidays in this unusual year.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

These were posted on the Parent Council Facebook Page and no concerns raised regarding the accuracy of these minutes from the Parent Forum and all in attendance at this meeting confirmed they were happy with the accuracy of the minutes.

2. Treasurer's Report

No confirmation of the changeover of names process being successful yet and no update on complaint due to COVID19.

3. Rector's Update

Recruitment

One of the PE teachers who had agreed to join the school in August has now withdrawn. The recruitment process is in hand and interviews take place on Monday 10th August during the in-service day.

The successful candidate will most likely be required to work their notice period, but both Mr Corsar and Mr McLauchlan (DHTs) are qualified PE teachers and will cover these classes until the new PE teacher can join us.

Other Staffing Information

A couple of members of staff have pre-booked holidays and will not be in school in the first week of term due to the change in start date this year. Arrangements have been made to cover these classes with other suitably qualified teachers.

Deputy First Minister Announcement

- On Tuesday 23rd June, the Right Honourable John Swinney announced that all pupils in Scotland will be able to return to school full time in August as long as the virus remains under control.
- Since this announcement, the Senior Leadership Team have been working on a document which will be shared with parents on Friday 7th August with details of how the school will return on Wednesday 12th August.
- The most recent 49 page document of Guidance from the Scottish Government was issued on Thursday 30th July (last week) and the Senior Leadership Team have been working their way through the document and receiving advice from Aberdeenshire Council on how this Guidance should be interpreted.
- Unfortunately, there are still many unanswered questions.

- There was a meeting on Monday 2nd August with all Aberdeenshire Head teachers. Laurence Findlay and Vincent Docherty.

Transport

- Aberdeenshire Council was managing this centrally and information was provided at this meeting regarding arrangements. This information has already been superseded by new information which was shared with parents yesterday (Tuesday 4th August) as soon as it was received from Aberdeenshire Council. Please refer to this separate document.
- Parents should now contact the school for information relating to their child's school transport. Please be aware that this is a very fast moving environment, and changes are often happening by the hour. This is not the fault of the school, it is simply because of the tight timescales and the complexities of arrangements.
- Taxis will be going ahead but individual discussions will be happening regarding individual circumstances.
- All pupils are required to wash their hands or use hand sanitiser before boarding the school buses or other transport. The alcohol gel will not be provided by the transport providers or Aberdeenshire Council, therefore parents should provide this for their own children and ensure they have it with them in advance of all journeys.
- At the time of this meeting, it was understood that all out of zone pupils would be receiving school transport as normal, however the most recent guidance seems to indicate this may not be the case due to capacity issues caused by the need for pupils to socially distance from the school transport drivers. Please contact the school directly for individual information regarding your child.

School Return Plan

- Although all pupils are expected to return to school on 12th August, it is expected that NOT everything will be back to normal (pre pandemic normal). The guidance from the Scottish Government makes it clear that changes need to be considered. The clear advice received from Aberdeenshire Council is that any arrangements put in place must not affect capacity. This means that the priority is to ensure that all pupils and teachers will return to school full time.
- There is clear from the Scottish Government Guidance that the schools must not have large gatherings of pupils. It is important that all staff remain at least 2 metres apart at all times when they are in the school building and this must be factored in to arrangements.
- Aberdeenshire Council have advised the school that social distancing between all pupils is NOT necessary if this prevents all pupils returning to normal hours. They have specified that it would be impossible to provide a meaningful educational experience if there was a need for pupils to socially distance from one another.
- Parents raised concerns about this advice as it was made clear in the Science Guidance to the Scottish Government that the research around older pupils is "less clear" than the studies into younger (primary) pupils.
- The school have advised us that there are many questions outstanding of this nature.

- The school have reconfigured the ventilation system so that no recycled air is used. Only fresh air from the outside and this includes spaces with no windows eg Theatre, Library, Staff Centre, Social areas, Canteen and internal office spaces and teaching areas.
- Pupils will NOT be required to use face coverings but any pupil who chooses to will be supported in their decision.
- The school will not provide face masks for pupils. If pupils wish to use these, they should bring their own.
- Stocks of PPE have arrived at the school to assist with the return to school. This includes hand sanitiser which will be available at every entrance and in every classroom.
- A number of teachers have made the Rector aware that they intend to wear face coverings and parents may wish to make their child aware of this before the school returns.
- Classrooms will be set up with all desks individually placed facing forward.
- All rooms will have tape marking the two metre social distancing rule for teachers.
- The janitors are reconfiguring classroom desks which are currently organised in groups rather than rows.
- PE have been advised that their classes should be outside as far as possible.
- Drama have been advised that indoor voices should be encouraged and no voice projection.
- There will be issues with PSAs. At this time, PB expects that PSAs will be socially distancing from the pupils they are supporting. This means that they will complete their work and then take it to the PSA at the front of the classroom for it to be checked.

Cleaning

- There will be a mid-day clean every day, before and after lunch. Focus areas will be door handles, banisters, railings, toilets, and all touch points. The current school cleaning team will do this work.
- Teachers have been advised to keep all the windows and doors in the school open to provide ventilation and to reduce the touch points used by individuals.
- Teachers have been provided with some subject specific guidance to help them to prepare for the new term.
- Pupils will be expected to clean their chair and table and equipment such as computers before they leave the class to ensure the workstations are clean for the next pupil.
- Parents asked if training would be provided to pupils and if thought had been given to hypoallergenic materials / gloves for this activity. It was highlighted that some pupils are already having issues with exzema / dermatitis and other skin conditions due to frequent washing / use of alcohol gels.
- PB confirmed that there would have to be training provided and that she would look into the materials to be used.
- Bins will be provided in every room for the disposal of the wipes used.
- Cleaning services have now been remobilised and it is hoped that cleaning will take place in the morning, the afternoon and during the school day but there are no details of who will be doing the additional cleaning.

Lunches and Break times

- Staggering of these was considered but discounted due to problems with the knock on effect of delivering the timetable.
- Lunch and Breaks will be as usual with all pupils allowed to congregate on all floors and the school would encourage pupils to go outside if the weather is fair.

- The Canteen will be open for purchasing of food.
- Some Aberdeenshire schools had arranged their dining halls with all pupils facing the same way (like in the classrooms) but they have been advised that this is not necessary due to capacity issues this causes.
- Parents raised concerns that the Scottish Government Guidance states that large gatherings of pupils should be avoided (e.g. assemblies and choirs). Concerns also raised that some pupils and families will be concerned about the return to school and will worry about having no option but to sit in a crowded and unpredictable environment.
- Advice from Aberdeenshire Council is very clear that social distancing is not necessary if it causes capacity issues.

Start of the School Day

- In light of the Scottish Government advice on avoiding large groupings of children, the Parent Council asked what the arrangements were for pupils going into school as this is a time when large numbers of pupils congregate in social areas throughout the school as they are not able to enter the locked classrooms until the bell at 8.25am. Under the blended learning plans, pupils were required to line up (socially distanced) outside in the front playground.
- S1 pupils will be asked to line up outside the pupils entrance (class signs will be visible) with duty SLT and their guides and they will be brought into the school systematically after the first bell, when the other pupils are in registration.
- All S2 – S6 pupils will be encouraged to go directly to their register classes.
- Pupils arrive in the school building from 7.30am as parents drop them off on their way to work in Aberdeen and beyond. Some of these pupils and others make use of the breakfast club.
- Pupils will be required to use alcohol gel or wash their hands as soon as they enter the school.

Management of COVID19 Outbreaks

- A parent asked “Given Mr McCabe and Mr Swinney have noted that outbreaks of COVID19 will be inevitable in schools, what arrangements are there for the management of these outbreaks in Aberdeenshire schools?”
- The school has limited information about this at this time.
- A quarantine room has been set up (conference room next to PB’s office- G4) and a nurse will wait (dressed in full PPE) with any pupil who displays symptoms of COVID 19 while at school until parents arrive to collect them. The school has made the decision that as with the usual sickness procedure, pupils may not return home without a responsible adult collecting them to ensure their safety on the journey home.
- If there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID19 amongst pupils or staff, every parent will be notified to allow individual families to make their own decisions around attendance.
- The school will inform Aberdeenshire Council (who will inform Public Health Scotland) if there is a confirmed case of COVID19.
- Parents will be required to notify the school by email, letter or phone (not in person) if a pupil (or a household member) tests positive for COVID19.
- Pupils will be required to self-isolate for 14 days if a household member tests positive. The school will arrange for work to be provided for your child to work through at home.

- If there are two or more confirmed cases of COVID19 in the school (pupils or adults), it is thought at this time that the whole school will be asked to self-isolate at home for 14 days as there will be insufficient social distancing to prevent community transmission.
- Aberdeenshire Council will be monitoring the background rate of absence to look for possible cases which have not been identified and tested, including general cold symptoms.
- There is no further information about who will be required to self-isolate (class / friends / identified contact or whole school), but self-isolation will need to be for 14 days and this may happen on multiple occasions over the next year.

Decisions by Families to keep children at home

- It is understood that parents may decide to keep their child at home at this time due to family circumstances.
- Families are encouraged to contact the school (through Guidance Teachers) to discuss arrangements so that home-schooling materials can be provided so that your child does not fall behind in their education. Materials will be shared through Google Classrooms.
- A specific code will be used by the school which indicates that the absence is related to the current COVID-19 pandemic. This is to ensure you and your child are not disadvantaged by this decision.

Risk Assessment

- The new risk assessment for Term 1 is in draft form and has to be ratified by school teaching unions and professional representatives prior to full implementation. Staff are still on holiday so this will take place on Monday 10th August.
- The Parent Council are currently reviewing this document and will provide comments back to the school.
- The School return plan is based on the risk assessment and it is a legal requirement for this to be in place before the school can open.

Timetables

- These will be provided on Wednesday 12th during an extended registration
- Registration teachers will facilitate all pupils in watching an all school live skype assembly on whiteboards in their registration room.
- The new expectations of behaviour will be explained to all pupils at this registration class. Focus will be on personal responsibility, responsibility for the welfare of others and social distancing.

Bring Your Own Device

- Aberdeenshire Council has been pushing this forward during lockdown and Ellon Academy is much closer to being able to allow pupils to bring their own devices to school. Graham Cowie (new DHT) is already involved in the Aberdeenshire Digital Strategy Group and has been helping the school to expedite the BYOD process.
- The school will now encourage pupils to bring their own devices to school if these will assist pupils with their school work.
- Parents are responsible for any insurance requirements.
- No access to WiFi is possible for pupils at this time, but it is hoped that when the BYOD policy is finalised, this will be possible.

- Further information (including permission slips) will be provided in due course (no definite date yet).

Car Park

- Parent Council asked if there was any new advice relating to pupils travelling to school.
- Pupils are encouraged to walk or cycle to school where possible.
- It is acknowledged that some parents may opt to drive their children to school as they may not wish to use school transport at this time.
- Further information will be provided on Friday in relation to the use of the school car park.
- Parents are advised that they will not be allowed in the school building without prior permission.

Study Periods for S6

- Guidance on this will be provided on Friday following a Senior Leadership Team meeting on Wednesday.

Will any part of the Curriculum not be going ahead?

- All extra-curricular activities need to wait for just now – we need to prioritise returning all pupils to school safely.
- Extra-curricular activities will be reviewed in October.
- No swimming at this time
- PE will be going ahead – outside where possible.
- At this time, changing rooms can be used.
- Music Tuition is likely to be online only. More information to follow.

Parental Involvement in Schools

- Parents will not be allowed in the school building unless prior permission is granted.
- There will be no Parents Evenings for the foreseeable future. The school is aware that this is not ideal as a number of Parents evenings were cancelled towards the end of last academic year.
- It is not possible to run the Prizegiving due to current restrictions. This will be reviewed once restrictions are relaxed.
- No Concerts until further notice.
- School Pitches – PB was asked if there is an update on progress as work was due to start at Easter. There has been no progress and we await a further update from Aberdeenshire Council.
- A parent asked if communication with parents regarding progress could be looked at – especially in the senior school regarding progress updates. If parents are to work as partners in the education of their children, we need to know when there are any issues so that we can support our children and the school.
- The area around the school has not had any grass cutting since lockdown. Aberdeenshire Council have informed the school that they do not have the appropriate equipment to cut the grass at this length and therefore it will not be cut before the pupils return to school. There is no date yet for the expected cutting of the grass.
- Pupils will be encouraged to use the area outside the school at break and lunch times but should be discouraged from playing in the long grass.
- A Parent has reported that gutterings in the school are clogged with weeds and concerns were raised that there could be subsequent leaks in the school. PB will report this directly to Aberdeenshire Council.

New S1s

- Any new S1 who hasn't had their Young Scot card photo taken will have this done when school starts.
- S2 Guides will be available on the first day of school to help new S1s to find their way around. They will also take classes to their next class to assist in the first 10 days.

Uniform

- Full Uniform is expected but discretion will be applied if there are specific circumstances explained by families.
- The Comfort Closet will be available to assist where required
- Families are encouraged to make sure they are in receipt of the uniform allowance if they are entitled to it.
- Additional ties are available if your one falls apart in the wash.
- Families are advised to wash school uniform as they usually would. No additional measures are recommended at this time.
- Blazers can be ordered for sixth years when school returns.
- There will be an option to purchase a plain black Ellon Academy hoodie with the school logo. This will be considered part of school uniform and therefore pupils will be allowed to wear these in class. There will be no writing on the back but they will be available from the same suppliers as the Leavers hoodies (parents are happy with the quality of these). These are not essential and it is acknowledged that the timing of this is not perfect as many parents will already have purchased school uniform. Details to follow.

4. Communication

- Communication continues to be vitally important at this time.
- Parent Council Meetings will continue to be online at present. We will be investigating the possibility of opening these up to more participants using Skype or Microsoft Teams, but in the meantime, all parents are encouraged to contact members of the committee or the generic Parent Council email or to comment on Parent Council Facebook posts.
- PB will provide extensive guidance on Friday regarding what to expect next week with the return of school for all pupils on Wednesday 12th August at 8.25am.

5. AOCB

The National Autistic Society has recommended individual transition plans for pupils on the Autistic Spectrum. Will Ellon be using these?

Mrs Wilson (PT ASN) has this in hand and has been in close communication with the families involved.

Next Parent Council Meeting

- Next meeting date: 17th August 2020

The Parent Council would like to thank the Senior Leadership Team in the school who are working very hard at the moment to plan for our young people returning to school next week. We acknowledge that this is very complex, guidance is still changing or being developed and the timescales are very tight.