

Ellon Academy Parent Council Meeting Minutes

17th August 2020

All participants again took part virtually due to current Government guidance on social distancing. The attendees were restricted to Rector and Committee members from the Parent Council.

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

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

These were posted on the Parent Council Facebook Page and no concerns have been 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. A letter from the Bank has now been received by the school for the Parent Council and this will be passed onto the Parent Council.

3. Rector's Update

Recruitment

The PE teacher vacancy has now been filled and we are now fully staffed.

Other Staffing Information

Graeme Cowie (new DHT) has been absent due to ill health but will be attending this week and will be introducing himself to staff and pupils. He has transferred from Fraserburgh Academy to fill the remaining 8 months of Paul Cruikshank's DHT position while he is on secondment as a Quality Insurance Officer in Aberdeenshire Council.

Mrs Wyllie is due to go on maternity leave in September. PB is reviewing options for covering her classes.

Return, Restore and Reset / Return to School Processes

- Pupils have been remarkable in adjusting to the various new routines and changing procedures. The school continues to review and improve the practical steps taken to reducing risk for all in school.
- Feedback from teaching staff is that the one way system looks safer and is encouraging a more controlled flow of pupils and staff around the school.
- Parents fed back that there were perhaps some unintended consequences to the system where senior pupils now have more contact with BGE pupils on entry to the school and at lunch time due to positioning and new restriction on the use of stairways. The school will review this and take relevant action.
- A professional representatives meeting (Senior Leadership Team, union representatives etc) has been held to review the first few days of school and decisions were made to change the following: new one way system, changes to break and lunch times to allow more time for toilet breaks at break time, changes to the automatic water flow throughout the school to ensure a full 20 seconds of flow is set.

- The six bells in the morning have been reduced to two bells – one for BGE (s1-3) and one for Seniors (s4-6).
- Unfortunately, there has already been a need to invite parents into school to discuss the breach of new procedures. These procedures are required to protect us all as a school community and we ask that every parent speaks to their children to encourage them to understand and follow these school rules.
- Please contact your child's guidance teacher if you require clarification of any of these rules.
- Hand hygiene and wiping down of surfaces (touch points) is now being done by pupils in every classroom for every lesson.
- The school is now opening at 8am instead of 8.10am and feedback is that this has made a significant and positive impact on ensuring pupils can enter in a more controlled way.

4. Parent Questions

- Has the school considered a marquee or other temporary structure outside to encourage pupils to move outside at break and lunch?
 - The school will investigate the practicalities and funding options of this and feedback to the Parent Council.
- Has the school received any further guidance regarding changing rooms and PE?
 - No. The guidance was issued by Education Scotland the week before school started and it states that their advice reflects the latest scientific evidence and advice. It is unequivocal that physical education should take place outdoors. A review of the safety of indoor facilities and swimming pools will take place in due course.
 - Point 11 of the guidance says: "Encourage learners to come to school in clothing that is appropriate for physical education and the weather conditions to eliminate the use of changing rooms".
 - The school has confirmed that it is following this advice. Parents will be advised when the advice changes.
- Do S4s have sufficient indoor space at lunch and break times?
 - So far, teacher feedback is that pupils are managing in their set areas. By assigning separate areas, pupils now have more space than they used to and they are adjusting well. Most days, a number of pupils are opting to spend this time outside or walking to one of the shops in town. This is the busiest time in the school but the new app is encouraging pupils to pre-order their grab bag which is certainly reducing the time for queuing for food.
- Has there been discussion with TESCO regarding pupils travelling there for lunch?
 - Yes – the school has a very good relationship with TESCO and there have been phone conversations directly with management there. The shop is keen to encourage pupils to shop at lunch times and they have now put in place additional control measures to ensure that pupils and the local community can continue to shop in a safe manner. TESCO have advised that all pupils are required to wear face coverings when they enter the shop and parents are requested to make sure their children have these with them if the intention is to shop at lunch time.
- Has there been an increase in pupils demanding school food with the "Eat Out to Help Out" scheme on Monday to Wednesday?
 - Yes. But the catering team is managing to deliver the food in good time given the separation of separate year groups and the pre-ordering.

- Lost Property – what is the current update?
 - The Parent Council had been working closely with the school and had drafted a new lost property policy whereby parents were going to be involved in sorting and photographing the mountains of lost property which is managed every year by the school. This was going to then allow the Parent Council to help parents to find their child's lost property.
 - Given current restrictions on parents visiting schools, it will not be possible to proceed with this at this time.
 - The school will gather all lost property in one central area and pupils will be able to attend at certain times to look for any items they have lost.
 - Pupils are in the meantime encouraged to look after their personal belongings.
 - Pupils should keep their bags with them in school and should check when leaving classrooms that they have taken all their belongings with them. Please talk to your children about personal responsibility at this challenging time for us all.
 - Individual pupils who need specific help with finding lost items should contact their guidance teacher for support. (parents can do this too).
 - Please be aware that the Ellon Academy Campus is a huge building and it is therefore not always easy to locate lost items.
 - Attaching names and classes to all clothing which may be removed (jackets and jumpers in particular) and encouraging your child to mark jotters and folders with names will help staff to reunite lost property.
- Lunches and the new App – various issues reported – is there an update?
 - The school have fed back concerns relating to the last minute nature of information relating to the new app being released to parents.
 - Some parents are still having difficulties with finding the app on the app store for certain phones.
 - Particular issues with older phones
 - Some parents are still having difficulties signing up to the new system.
 - This is an Aberdeenshire wide system and the issues have been raised at director level.
 - The system is out-with the control of the school.
 - The Catering team at school are working very hard to make the new system work from their end, despite no training being provided.
 - Pupils are asked to order on the app before 9.30am each day to ensure the team have sufficient time to complete all the orders in time for lunch.
 - Pupils can still queue up and order as they did previously – a hot option and a vegetarian option is still available every day.
 - Any pupils who have difficulties are encouraged to approach a member of staff or a prefect (these are senior pupils who wear high visibility jackets when on duty).
- Is there Toilet Allocation at break and lunch time?
 - Pupils are expected to remain on the same floor at break and lunch time to visit the toilet to prevent mixing with other year groups.
- Was there a reason for stopping senior pupils from getting out 10 minutes early?
 - Yes. A higher proportion of fifth and sixth years are now going out for their lunch (TESCOS etc) and so there wasn't the same need for the extra time as we expected to manage the queues and various spaces. The school is reviewing all of these situations on an ongoing basis. Teaching staff have indicated that 10 mins of lost teaching time every day is too much for seniors who most likely will have exams to sit next year.

5. Additional Support Needs

- How will ASL/PSA be supporting in class and within Supported Studies/HUB?
 - PSA's are able to be in class at any time as long as they are 2m away from pupils. They are allowed to work side by side with a pupil for a maximum of 15 mins with a mask on. At the moment we are working closely with the class teacher to ascertain the best 15 mins to work side by side, which seems to be towards the end of a lesson to check understanding and the work undertaken and support to finish up.
- Will it be socially distanced as information to parents suggest from the front of the class?
 - Please see above
- Will close, side by side, support be possible/for how long and how frequently e.g 15 minutes without PPE or longer with PPE/ as many times as required within a day/period or restricted?
 - No PPE 2m away.
 - PPE worn 15 mins per class.
 - At the moment we are working per period with the same PSA working with the same child/class where possible (this is not always possible due to staffing constraints)
- What differences will be made to accommodate 1 to 1 support and teaching?
 - Please see above the same applies for our teaching staff.
- Will group sizes within Supported Studies/HUB be smaller or directed to a limited number of classes/year groups?
 - All our group sizes are small enough to be safe and have appropriate number of adults in the room therefore we have no limitation required.
- How will life skills lessons be modified as a result of safety concerns with COVID19?
 - We follow the same restrictions as whole school with regards to Home Economics type life skills and so follow the same guidelines. If there is something more specific that requires clarification please let me know.
- What alternative supports can school offer students who may receive less support due to COVID19 restrictions?

We are unsure of what this question is asking – can the question be more specific?
- How are ASL staff supporting class teachers to ensure that learners needs are being met during COVID19 restrictions?
 - ASL staff are still able to work with mainstream staff for advice and support as they always have. Each department has an allocated member of staff for their faculty to support this.
 - Pupils with specific difficulties have an allocated member of ASL staff that staff can contact for support or guidance. This can be done in person keeping the 2m distance or over skype.

- How will access to other professionals (SALT, OT, Educational Psychologists, ASPECTS etc.) be maintained during restrictions?
 - At this point we are working remotely with different professionals. E.g. Physio can do secure video calls and give advice. Until there is guidance for these professionals to come into schools we are contacting via phone/skype and trying to hold meetings in the format rather than face to face. When we receive more info we will let you know.
- Will support documentation reflect current restrictions (IEPs- Individualised Education Programmes- etc.)?
 - IEP's this session will be very dependent on the pupils return to school and their requirements alongside a section on their mental health and supporting this.
 - IEP's are there to assess the barriers to the child's learning and ensure that staff and pupils have the strategies they require to remove the barriers to learning – this will not change over restrictions but may need to be modified to ensure that they fit with restriction guidelines.
- What support will be available to pupils who are not in school due to isolation or other reasons? Specifically, what will this look like for pupils who have additional support needs?
 - The school will work with parents and pupils in this situation regarding online learning at home

6. Additional Cleaning

- Four cleaners are now attending the school before and after the lunch break (an additional 15 hours per day in total). Focus areas are door handles, banisters, railings, toilets, and all touch points. Current school cleaning team members have been employed to cover these additional hours and they are working while pupils are in class.
- Pupils are to be reminded that they must clear their own litter at lunch times as it is not the job of the cleaners to do this for them. The cleaners have an essential and very important role in reducing the likelihood of spread of virus in our school. Please talk to your child about their responsibilities.
- 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.
- Pupils are expected to clean their chair and table and equipment such as computers. It was noted by parents that there is variation between faculties and individual teachers. Parents advised that sufficient spray should be used to ensure that pupils can satisfactorily clean the tables and chairs. PB to review and revert.
- Each classroom has a "COVID tray" which has all the cleaning equipment pupils and teachers need. These are replenished by the janitorial team each day.
- Additional disinfectant and hand sanitiser has been ordered.
- Canteen employees are cleaning the tables and chairs in the canteen and sunken social areas.

7. Parents and Access to the School Building

- Parents are asked not to visit the school building unless they have a prior appointment.
- Following a further review of the School Risk Assessment, it has been agreed that parents should not leave their car when they are dropping off or picking up in the school car park.
- Following an incident in the school reception area, parents are reminded that the verbal abuse of school staff is not acceptable under any circumstances. This is a difficult period of time for all

of us and we understand you may become frustrated with these new rules but they are being implemented for the welfare and safety of our entire school community. Thank you for your understanding.

- Parents should not be bringing forgotten items into school at this time. If your child has forgotten something considered essential such as a packed lunch and you need to get it to them, please telephone the office in advance and they will provide instructions for you to leave it outside the school. It will then be retrieved by a member of staff and passed on to your child.

8. Risk Assessment

Parent Council and other stakeholders such as Union representatives and all teaching staff have been working closely with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to discuss, review and develop a new whole school risk assessment which is considering the specific risks associated with COVID19. Aberdeenshire Council provided specific guidance and a template (at the start of August) and there has been extensive discussion relating to this evolving document which has been used as a basis for the return to school plan.

This document will be made available to all parents through the school website in the near future and it will be reviewed on a weekly basis at this time.

Parent Council thank the SLT for their willingness to engage with all stakeholders in the risk assessment at this fast paced time of ever changing guidance.

Parent Council have acknowledged that the critical requirements when implementing a new risk assessment are the ongoing monitoring and recording of information. Going forward, communication and monitoring of the risk assessment and ongoing changes will be vital for the successful mitigation of the risks caused by COVID19.

The following seven points have been made to the school in our most recent communication:

1. Lack of information on possible outbreak management from HPS and Aberdeenshire Council is frustrating for parents and the school (but this is not the fault of the school).
2. More documentation of specific control measures would be helpful.
3. We requested that the lunch areas are monitored for possible crowding or year group mixing issues and that if required, suitable alterations to the current arrangements are considered.
Senior leaders and other staff are on duty every morning prior to registration, when classes are moving period to period, at break, at lunchtime and after school as pupils leave
4. The recent change to open the school earlier at 8am instead of 8.10am has been really helpful and resulted in a more controlled entry for pupils.
5. The new one way system should result in better management of the movement of pupils around school (it critically reduces the number of individuals approaching face to face). Initial feedback includes specific issues with senior pupils and BGE pupils meeting near the “up” staircase near the BGE pupil entrance and again minor issues at lunch time. Again, careful monitoring is required to ensure these mitigations are working.
6. Classroom management – request for review of current procedures to encourage consistency and best practice throughout the school.

A Covid Classroom Health and Safety Guide for each class is in progress and should be ready for display in each classroom/teaching area next week.

7. We reiterated the Parent Council view that the resultant risk in the school related to possible spread of infection is likely to be medium rather than “low-medium” simply due to the possible severity of outcomes – particularly for staff.

9. CarPark

- The car park was monitored between 12th and 14th August.
- The weather on the first day was extreme and the resultant pressure on the car park at drop off was obvious but our established systems certainly helped the car park to cope amazingly well with the sheer volume of traffic.
- Overall, most drivers are following our recognised car park rules, but there are always a few who do not. Given we will have many new parents, it is worthwhile to communicate directly with parents; both by email and the Parent Council Facebook page to ensure everyone understands the expectations as these may be different from other local car parks.
- Due to the current situation with COVID19, parents are requested not to exit their cars while on campus and no adult should enter the campus on foot unless they are expected at the school.
- A draft email was forwarded to the school and they have now sent this to all parents.
- The information was shared on the Parent Council Facebook page on Tuesday 18th August – subsequent to this meeting.

10. SQA Consultations

- The Parent Council have shared one of the consultation documents on the Parent Council Facebook Page. These documents (a technical consultation and a survey) are also available through the SQA website.
- There are proposals to change the exams and assignments for a large number of courses.
- The consultations last 10 days from 14th August
- Teachers at the school have been encouraged to take part in the consultation for their subjects.
- Parents and pupils can have their say.
- Many of the alterations appear to reduce the amount of evidence being produced by way of assignments and work which can be assessed throughout the year which initially appears to be counter-intuitive if there are concerns about possible interruptions to the exam diet next year. The rationale appears to be that these assignments take up a significant amount of class time and this time is likely to be required for face to face teaching; particularly if there is disruption to individual learner education due to self-isolation / school closures.
- Teachers are keen to find out what they are expected to cover this year.
- The planned 2021 exam timetable is due to start on Monday 26th April 2021 and finish on Thursday 3rd June 2021. The SQA says that as there may be disruption due to the coronavirus, they have developed a number of contingency models for the timetable.
- The timetables will be published on the SQA website during the week beginning 31st August.

11. Pitches

There is no update on the school pitches as the work was due to start in March/April and this has been delayed due to COVID19.

12. Communication

- PB was thanked for the continuation of the Friday updates. It is really helpful for parents to know that there will be a weekly communication from the school (in addition to other time critical updates during the week).
- It continues to be helpful for parents to be able to access the daily updates the pupils receive in school.
- Parents are reminded that there are Facebook pages for the Maths, English and Modern languages faculties in the school. Also, the Ellon Academy Sports Association has a page.
- Pupils will be expected to submit homework online this term through Google Classrooms. We await further information on the setting up of Google Guardian.
- There will be no Parents Evenings until further notice and guidance from the local authority and the Scottish Government.. Consideration is being made relating to written reports and the timing of these so that they can be useful for pupils and parents in supporting the child's education.
- Parents who are requesting to join the Parent Council Facebook page are asked to ensure that they complete the two questions when applying. If you do not answer these questions, we cannot accept your request as we have a small number of admins attempting to manage this very active page.
- Karen Gray was thanked for her ongoing exceptional management of the many parent questions on the Parent Council page. This is a really challenging job and she is helping parents to understand the every changing environment of school in 2020.
- Please get in touch with the Parent Council if you would like to help Karen and the rest of the admin team to manage these queries. We are always in need of more admins and you will not be expected to answer the questions by yourself. We have a team approach.

13. Next Parent Council Meeting

- Parent Council Meetings will continue to be online at present due to COVID19 restrictions.
- We plan to use Business Skype for the next meeting (which is what we have been using since Parent Council meeting changed to online).
- All parents will be contacted in advance of the next Parent Council meeting and given the opportunity to attend the meeting. An email address will be created at the school where parents will be able to request access to the meeting. We have to do this through a school email address due to GDPR restrictions on the Parent Council holding parent email addresses.
- You will receive a meeting invite, will have to ensure that your device can access Business Skype (the committee have had issues with I-pads) and will be asked to sign in just before the meeting starts.
- Parents will not be able to speak at the meeting unless invited to do so by the chair due to practical difficulties in managing this if we have a large uptake, however we encourage you to submit agenda items and questions in advance to the Parent Council email address or through the Parent Council Facebook page. We hope to involve as many parents as possible in this process.

- We plan to have a number of the Parent Council committee members monitoring the side bar where parents can submit questions which relate to items on the agenda during the meeting.
- There will be an opportunity for additional questions at the end too (through the sidebar).
- This is new to all of us so please be patient as we work out the best way to ensure as many parents as possible can be involved.
- All parents are again encouraged to contact members of the committee or the generic Parent Council email or to comment on Parent Council Facebook posts if there are specific questions or topics you wish to be raised. This can be done at any time.

14. AOCB

The Parent Council would like to thank the Senior Leadership Team in the school who are working very hard to review the new school routines to ensure they are operating as intended. We would also like to thank the many teachers and support staff who have welcomed our children back into a slightly different environment with new expectations and routines.