

# Ellon Academy Parent Council Meeting Minutes

**29<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

All participants again took part virtually due to current Government guidance on social distancing. Attendance was opened up to all parents or guardians who have children at the school. Parents were asked to contact in attendance to note interest so that invitations could be sent through emails.

**Attendees:** N Topping (Chair), D McCulloch (Vice Chair), K Gray (Previous Chair), H Wilson (Acting Secretary), A Blanchard (Treasurer), P Buchan (Rector), Fraser McLachlan (DHT), Graeme Cowie (DHT), R MacGregor, M Park, L Gill, K Finlayson, J Murdoch

N Topping welcomed Mr G Cowie (DHT) to the school on behalf of the Parent Council. Mr Cowie mentioned that he was very keen on developing a good working relationship with parents. He told us he has settled in well and is busy looking at the curriculum and visiting classes. He knows the local community quite well and has enjoyed his first term.

## **1. Minutes of the previous meeting**

These were posted on the Parent Council Facebook Page, School website and emailed to parents 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**

We are still awaiting resolution of complaint to bank relating to failure to update signatory details for over three years. A further form from the Bank has now been completed with new signatory details. On a positive note, we are now able to see our balance and make payments from the account.

The Parent Council have contributed £393.21 towards the new snow clearing equipment for the school. This money has been added to money raised specifically for the snow clearing equipment through a GoFundMe page. This should assist the Janitorial team in keeping the campus clear and safer for all campus users in times of ice and snow.

The Parent Council have also contributed £318.98 to the school to purchase maths books for our National 5 and Higher pupils to use when studying these courses.

PB thanked the Parent Council for both of these contributions.

Simon Ruddy is also thanked for his hard work in raising funds and organising the purchase of the snow clearing equipment.

## **3. Support for Learning (SfL)/ Additional Support Needs (ASN)**

Fraser McLachlan (DHT) is the link DHT for the Support for Learning team. He spoke to us about how this department has been supporting pupils who use their services.

ASN pupils have generally adapted very well and the team have been impressed with their work and attitudes. New pupils to the school have been working hard and have done well, particularly given that many have missed out on transition activities due to COVID19.

The impacts of new arrangements on pupils are being monitored by both Support For Learning and Guidance who are working closely together.

An advert for two additional members of staff for the ASN team has been posted.

Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) are recognised as a very valuable resource for the school and the 15 minute rule is under ongoing review.

Questions from parents on the night:

Will the 15 minute rule for PSAs be reviewed?

- Yes – all COVID19 related guidance is under regular review.

The Ellon Academy approach appears to be at odds with national guidance, the approach of other Academies in Aberdeenshire and Council guidance or policy. Specifically in that there is not a time limit for one to one work with pupils in other schools – only PPE mask wearing and the last 15 minutes of a period is not the right time as by that time most learners will have given up or drifted off so input to check understanding is a waste of time.

- Reference made to school risk assessment which indicates that the PSA guidance does come direct from national guidance.
- PSAs can spend more than 15 minutes with individual pupils but must be wearing appropriate PPE.

Also now, first years will not be used to having PSAs support in classroom. So it would now seem an imposition.

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A parent wished to thank Mrs Wilson, the SFL team, Mr McLachlan and Mrs Buchan for handling a challenging situation well.

Meeting our learners' needs is a key priority for the school and our approach is planned around this.

Multi-agency action planning meetings are continuing to take place to ensure the best results for our pupils.

If any parents have specific concerns about their children, they are encouraged to contact Mr F McLauchlan or Mrs M Wilson directly to discuss these concerns.

#### **4. Rector's Update**

##### Recruitment

The school continues to be fully staffed.

##### Other Staffing Information

Miss Ferguson (Biology) is moving to a new school in Aberdeen after the October holidays. Six candidates have applied and interviews are scheduled for next week.

Mrs Wyllie is due to go on maternity leave in October and Mrs Wilson has agreed to a 12 month contract in Modern Languages to cover the maternity leave.

Mr Winterbottom is off until the October holidays but we have Mr Fyfe covering as a supply teacher of history.

Two additional staff are being recruited into the Support for Learning faculty.

1 FTE post is being created - PT of Digital Learning (using the John Swinney announced Government funding) to support online learning across the school. This will cover Google Classroom, Google Meet, Google Guardian, Google Profile etc. The successful candidate will be line managed by Ms T Booth.

1 FTE post being created – PT of Pupil Development. This individual will be linked to Support for Learning and Additional Support Needs and will be line managed by Mr F McLauchlan.

There is a 0.6 FTE English Faculty vacancy – this has been advertised.

The school is also recruiting an additional supply teacher to cover for department teachers who are working on developing online learning on a bidding basis.

#### School Finances

The school is waiting to hear from Aberdeenshire Council Accountants how much the school can “Carry Forward” from last year’s budget. This is usually finalised before now but many of these activities have been delayed due to COVID19.

The School thanked the Parent Council again for the recent financial support relating to snow cleaning equipment and textbooks for the maths faculty.

The school’s biggest fundraiser of the year is the “Evening of Entertainment” and unfortunately this year, due to COVID19, this could not go ahead. This means that the school is short of £7,000 in the “School Fund”. The school fund is usually used for supporting pupil learning – paying for subscriptions to online packages, Accelerated Reader etc. The school is therefore reviewing finances to attempt to keep these valuable resources for our children.

#### Classroom Toolkits

The Classroom Toolkits are currently being recycled. These were boxes kept in individual classrooms for use in class to help pupils and teachers to communicate and learn more effectively. These are being dismantled due to issues with cleaning the resources between classes. Instead, the intention is that all learners will be provided with their own “Learner Pack” which they will be responsible for bringing to every class so that they can use the resources. This includes “show me boards”, answer cards etc. the school is awaiting delivery of plastic wallets to keep the resources together for pupils. The packs will be put aside for 72 hours before they are distributed after the October break.

## Risk Assessments

The latest edition of the School Risk Assessment (version 005) has been uploaded to the school website. It now includes information related to NESCOL(College) and Skills Development Scotland (formerly Careers Advice).

Every Faculty has now completed their own risk assessment covering the activities which are specific to their subjects using the ever changing advice from Education Scotland.

Questions from Parents arising from Update:

### What is happening with World Challenge?

- Nobody has made a decision about whether this will go ahead or not.
- If the school pulls out on behalf of pupils and parents, all pupils will lose all the money they have paid so far.
- If World Challenge makes the decision, there are expected to be refunds made.
- The school is concerned about the additional risks and dangers posed by COVID19 to this trip but due to the timescales, this is very difficult to plan for at this time.
- Mrs S McGill has overall responsibility for excursions in the school and is in communication with World Challenge trying to find out more.
- A parent mentioned that Ms F Tomlinson (Trip Leader) has been very helpful in trying to assist parents to find out more).

### Is the school Considering other forms of Fundraising (to replace Evening of Entertainment funds)?

- The school has a Charities Committee comprising staff and pupils.
- They have agreed a dress down day where everyone is invited to wear something Yellow and bring a donation for the charity "Young Minds" scheduled for the last day of term in October.
- Further ideas are being considered, but there are many constrictions due to COVID19.
- Any ideas from parents would be gratefully received.

## **5. Coronavirus Update**

- No specific changes other than those already communicated to parents.
- Focus is on all keeping safe and mitigating risks and pupils are being encouraged to follow rules.
- Pupils are doing really well in supporting the control measures.
- Anxiety levels amongst staff in school are high with the increasing levels of COVID19 within the community and the SLT are working hard to support individuals – some of whom have underlying health conditions which make them higher risk.
- Good practices are in place and all are getting more used to routines.
- New Guidelines have been issued regarding Creative Arts teaching and as a result it will be possible to introduce more classroom instruments back into classes after the October holidays. Videos are being produced by the department to help pupils to assist in the cleaning process for these instruments (Ukelele, guitars, keyboards etc).

- The guidance still advises that there should be no singing or playing of wind instruments in the school building.
- S1s will not be offered lockers at this time. This is partly to reduce risks around touchpoints and the decision will be reviewed after the October break.
- Lost Property – there have been delays in progressing plans for dealing with lost property due to other school priorities - particularly around risk assessments etc. Mrs K Gray from the Parent Council will be contacted after the October holidays to discuss the issues.
- The school is considering possibilities for providing a safe space for pupils to store cycle helmets while they are in school. Mrs P Buchan is going to investigate whether lockers in the PE department could be used for this purpose.

Questions from parents on the night:

A concern was raised in relation to possible Disability Discrimination relating to challenging pupils who are not wearing facemasks due to exemptions. It was further explained that some of these pupils will have communication difficulties.

- Mrs Buchan explained that the school have received letters from a small number of parents confirming that their children have exemptions – these pupils have been issued with small cards which they are able to show. Furthermore, many staff members are aware of the pupils who have communications difficulties and will ask the question in an appropriate way.

What are the guidelines regarding pupil to pupil distancing in PE?

- There is no requirement for pupils to distance.

When will lunchtime clubs resume? (this may assist in providing positive focus for pupils)

- Unfortunately, due to the need for adults to socially distance, it is not yet possible to resume these activities.

## 6. Parent Questions

-These were submitted in advance to the school and the Parent Council is very grateful to the school for providing answers.

- Answers from the school in red.

### 1. Face masks/ coverings introduction

- Can we have an update on how it has gone?

- This has gone relatively well. There are approximately 15-20 pupils who have brought exemption letters from home. Exemption reasons include additional support needs, anxiety and medical conditions.
- Pupils are greeted as they arrive and are reminded to put on their face coverings as they enter the school.
- Janitors are inside the doors taking names of pupils who may have forgotten their face covering. Pupils are monitored at break and lunchtimes to check they reapply their face covering after eating/drinking. However, there is a decrease in the amount of staff on duty due to their own personal anxieties and a desire to remind in their faculty bubble. All SLT are out and about and there are some additional staff who have given up their time to support the supervision.

Security concerns/ potential for intruders- has this been considered?

- Yes, we are always on alert and we know our pupils well. Any potential intruder would be spotted and dealt with. We already have procedures in place for school lockdown in the event of an emergency. Not lockdown in the Covid sense, but lockdown as the opposite from evacuation.

Can associated risks be added to school risk assessment?

- To be considered as part of our RA reviews.

2. Temperature of Classrooms/ open windows

Some pupils are reporting classrooms being very cold- is this being monitored?

Yes, leaving windows open is only one of many potential mitigations.

What is the plan for winter?

Pupils can't learn effectively if they are too hot or too cold, so we will use common sense to regulate the temperature in classes and around the school. Classroom doors can be kept open and the air ventilation system has been reconfigured to intake fresh air from outside.

Have associated hazards been added to the risk assessment?

To be considered as part of our RA reviews.

3. S5 Supervised study

Why do pupils have Supervised study?

S5 pupils have 2 periods of supervised study each Wednesday afternoon with their Depute Head of House. DHTs encourage pupils how to use their study time well and to engage in learner conversations with S5 pupils. S6 pupils are unsupervised for their study time to promote independence in learning and time management which will support them in further and higher education.

Has the overcrowding of classrooms been resolved?

We are unaware that this has been an issue.

Are pupils able to access online teaching materials during study?

We are working towards Bring Your Own Device, but it is a lengthy process. The stumbling block is that many parents haven't given permissions so far.

One parent asked if pupils could be released at lunch time to allow them to go home to study.

This has now been resolved.

Can pupils' book to use the library computers during double study?

Yes if they have not been booked out for classes.

4. S6 Supervised study

Use of sunken social area - is it cleaned first after lunches?

Yes and after breaks.

What areas are available for s6 study?

S6 social area and the sunken social area.

Rooms S54 and S55 have been left in a mess and there has been some damage to chairs, so these rooms are currently unavailable to S6 learners.

Is there access to computers if required?

Yes, if they have not been booked out for class use.

5. BYOD update

- Can pupils BYOD yet?
- Timescales for this?

We are hopeful that we will be in a better position after October holidays. We are advertising for a Principal Teacher Digital Learning to take this forward.

Is there access to devices for pupils who do not have their own (we note that those who borrowed devices during lockdown have been asked to return them).

Yes, we have taken delivery of 105 Chromebooks for pupils. Each Chromebook has a serial number corresponding to each identified pupil. We are currently working through the spreadsheet and matching the numbers to pupils. When received, pupils will have to log on in school before taking their CB home.

Has Aberdeenshire Council been able to access the thousands of extra devices supplied by the Scottish Government for pupils who didn't have suitable devices at home or is that just or other Council pupils?

Yes, we have taken delivery of 105 Chromebooks for pupils. Each Chromebook has a serial number corresponding to each identified pupil. We are currently working through the spreadsheet and matching the numbers to pupils. When received, pupils will have to log on in school before taking their CB home.

6. PE

- Any expansion on options for PE?

No

- What happens if weather is really bad?

We will use indoor spaces as appropriate.

- Changing rooms- any changes?

No

7. Home Economics

- Some Aberdeenshire schools are requiring pupils to wear face masks in home economics. Will this be introduced in Ellon?

Home Economics staff have completed a full risk assessment for their subject and for working in school kitchens. It has not been suggested by official bodies that wearing of face coverings whilst cooking is necessary at the moment.

8. Creative Arts

- What restrictions are there on how these subjects can be taught?

There are restrictions in place which we are duty bound to follow.

- Will SQA courses be able to be taught?

We are awaiting further guidance from the SQA. In the meantime, we are delivering courses as normal.

9. Technical subjects

- Concerns raised about whether the whole courses can be covered- what is the school view?
- Can the practical elements of the courses be completed?

We are awaiting further guidance from the SQA. In the meantime, we are delivering courses as normal.

10. Science

- Are there any alterations to the courses and how classes are taught?

We are awaiting further guidance from the SQA. In the meantime, we are delivering courses as normal

#### 11. Maths

- Some Higher maths classes do not have text books yet.

The Parent Council have now donated Maths text books and the school is exceptionally grateful..

- How are pupils managing if they did not manage to engage online?

Pupils are being assessed formatively to ascertain how they are coping with courses and staff are tailoring their lessons to support all pupils.

- Will there be catch up classes?

Yes, Maths are already running lunchtime sessions for pupils. (Maths have their own Facebook page, Ellon Maths)

#### 12. Lockers for s1s

- any update on when s1s can request/ pay for lockers?

Current decision is that s1s are not yet going to be offered lockers to reduce touch points in the school.

#### 13. Lost Property

- What is the current process?

- Where do pupils go to report/ look for lost property?

- What can parents / pupils do to help?

Mrs McGill School Support Co-ordinator is looking into this.

#### 14. Google Classroom

- Teachers are still using this differently- is there going to be standardisation of practice?

Yes, staff are engaged in further development and part of this involves looking at standardising practices of how it is done.

- Some use due dates and some don't. Due dates help pupils to organise.

Yes, this is to be actioned.

- How is work marked? Some teachers only supply marks - difficult to learn if don't know what is right and what is not.

- Is individual feedback going to be provided?

Google classroom is not being used to replace face to face teaching at this time therefore feedback is still provided in a number of different ways. Sometimes this is provided verbally to an individual or a whole class.

-Are teachers confident in using Google classroom going forward if we need to switch to blended or online learning again?

Yes, we are in a much better position going forward than we were in March. We now have a better set up, teachers have received training and pupils have been provided with refresher sessions on how to use Google Classrooms.

- How will the experience for pupils differ from the one in March to June if we need to switch again?

We are much better set up if we need to switch again. Staff have been trained and are much more confident with GC and all pupils are currently getting refresher sessions via Humanities Classes and study time/S6 PSE.

- Can the SQA courses be realistically delivered if we need to switch to blended learning?

We await guidance from the SQA, but we continue to deliver as much as we can through face-to-face delivery in school.

- What additional support and training have teachers had in developing skills for using Google Meet if we need to switch to home or blended learning, or if many pupils are off due to self-isolating if there are cases of COVID 19 in the school?

The Working Time Agreement for teachers has been amended to build in additional time for teachers to continue to develop their skills in using GC. Staff have had training sessions from in-house experts.

Ms Booth and Mr McLachlan DHTs are working on a framework for home learning for those who are self-isolating due to Covid-19. All classes are now using GC and work will be posted on a weekly basis for absent pupils to access.

15. The BBC have reported that all schools have a plan in place for if there is an outbreak in the school. We know that previously the school had simply been advised to call Public Health Scotland. What is the current Ellon Academy plan?

Ellon has plans based on partial and full lockdown – for both scenarios. Currently, we are looking at S1/2/3 in school one week and S4/5/6 in school the next week on rotation. We hope it doesn't come to that though.

16. Are there sufficient resource to cover staff absences due to COVID 19/ self-isolation/ absences due to symptoms this winter?

Yes, we are very fortunate to be fully staffed and we have a bank of good and reliable supply staff. The supply staff budget has not been cut, so this will help over the winter.

17. What is being done to support pupils who did not engage with online learning?

Staff are aware of who these pupils are and are working with them, guidance and home to readdress this balance.

18. What provision / support is there for pupils who are self-isolating?

As above – No.14

19. Does Ellon Academy have sufficient books and text books to support pupil learning this year? If not, can the Parent Council assist?

The Math text books issue has been resolved.

20. Has cover been secured for maternity leave in the French department?

Yes, Ms R Wilson is a Modern Languages teacher will be cover the full maternity leave.

21. Senior ties- availability update.

S4 ties have been issued this week beginning 21/9/20 in PSE.

22. Water fountains

- is there sufficient availability of fresh water in school?

Yes

- are these being cleaned regularly?

Yes

- are pupils being Supervised? (Reports of pupils drinking direct from fountains)

As much as we can.

23. SQA consultation (23,000 responses).

Has there been any update as to this from the schools perspective?

UPDATE – post meeting – Mr Swinney has now announced that National 5 courses will be assessed through a combination of teacher judgement and a small number of evidential pieces of work and Higher and Advanced Higher exams will go ahead in some form starting 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Further details have been shared through links on the Parent Council Facebook page.

All parents are strongly encouraged to join the Ellon Academy Parent Council Facebook page as it is the easiest and quickest way for us to share information as we receive it.

It is hoped that further information will be provided to schools by the next Parent Council Meeting.

24. What will the Prelims look like this year?

Currently planned for in classrooms.

25. What is the plan B if there are lots of self-isolation / shut downs this year?

We will be guided by the local authority and the Health Protection Team

26. What happens to exams if we have disruption due to COVID19 in April/ May 2021?

Awaiting guidance from the SQA

27. What support is available for senior pupils who miss lessons this year?

Google Classroom/study time

28. Will support/ revision sessions be running after school this year?

Faculty lunchtime sessions

29. When will pupils / parents be receiving tracking reports this year? Is it possible for seniors to receive one at the end of term one? These are really helpful early on so that parents can be true partners in the education of their children so that we can encourage our children to focus on particular subjects, or facilitate additional help where required.

TMR calendar added to the last parental newsletter

30. Is Google Guardian up and running yet? If not, what are the timescales for this? What information will be available through this?

In process

31. Risk Assessment

- what has been identified during the weekly reviews and monitoring of the issues in the risk assessment?

- any additions to this?

- will pupils wearing face masks cause trip hazards / issues on stair cases due to possible impact on eyesight (steamed up glasses)? (From a glasses wearer!)

An updated risk assessment has been uploaded to the School website.

32. Has the one-way system been monitored? How is it working?

Yes, working well.

Was a resolution found to the pinch points on the stairs and corridors at lunch time?

All stairs are now downward stairs at busy times.

33. Is there an update on the consideration of a marquee for outside?

Yes, decided that this will not be pursued.

#### 34. Cleaning

- How are pupils managing with the classroom procedures?

Facilities have good procedures in place and pupils are adhering.

- Is there still an issue with litter?

Not so much as previously, however lots of litter outside.

- Are cleaners able to clean all touch points in the time assigned?

Yes

#### 35. Comfort Closet -

- Can donations be made?

Not currently

- What is needed?

- How can donations be made?

More information will be available after the October break. Mrs Jaffrey is working on this now.

#### 36. Cycling to school

- Parents are observing lack of cycle helmets. Is there anymore that the school or we can ?

We are doing all we can.

- Pupils are cycling at speed and doing wheelies in Plaza making other pupils feel vulnerable. Can pupils be reminded again that they should not be cycling within the campus?

We do this on a daily basis.

- Is there any update on a safe place for pupils to store helmets?

Not yet.

#### 37. Has there been a review of break and lunch time arrangements?

- Have the pupils been asked if they think there are any issues?

We have been consulting with the S6 exec team.

- S1 parents are seeking a way they can identify what hot options are available each day due to picky children. App only has basic options available- see later suggestion about using daily bulletin.

- Have s4 pupils enough space at break and lunch time?

The space is sufficient – most S4 pupils leave the campus.

- We have received feedback that this group feel particularly squashed at lunch times.

- Reports that they cannot really use reception area - the seats have been removed and reception staff tell them they cannot talk as the staff are on the phones; just the street available with approx 8 tables for the whole year group (or outside if weather is ok).

Space is at a premium. S4 pupils have always had the Street in the past.

#### 38. Opening up the Campus to the Public

- Are there plans to open swimming pool / other facilities to the public?

This is under the jurisdiction of Live Life Aberdeenshire.

- Will this affect arrangements for pupils?

- How will this be managed?

#### 39. Mental Health / wellbeing

- What specific support is available?

- Has our new counsellor started yet?

Counsellors have not yet been appointed in Aberdeenshire. Recruitment is happening centrally – out with the control of schools.

Update: interviews are scheduled for Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> October.

A parent asked if the successful candidate would be trained and in place for the end of October (the date specified by the Scottish Government). Also, how many schools would be covered by each Counsellor?

Mrs P Buchan stated that starting date will depend on the individual who is successful and their background. It is likely the successful candidate will cover at least one secondary school and all associated primaries and therefore may be very busy.

- What are arrangements for pupils seeing them?

n/a

- Some pupils are really struggling with the personal impact of lockdown on them and their families, the new school processes and the number of unknowns for this year. Is the local Council offering the school any local programmes or resources to share?

No. We are working with individuals via Guidance, Pupil Support Workers and NHS mental health services.

40. New teachers

- How many of the 1400 new teachers recruited by John Swinney are starting in Ellon?

2.6

- Does Ellon have access to supply teachers?

Yes

- There was a suggestion that there would be no budget for supply teachers- has this been resolved?

Yes

41. ASN

- Some concerns have been raised regarding individual pupils and access to support.

- Are impacts of the new arrangements being monitored?

Yes

- Is there a specific review happening regarding the impact on the new control measures on pupils with ASNs?

We have advertised for another 2 ASN teachers.

42. Communication

Parent Portal

- parents have been reporting varying issues with the registration process.

- if the wrong parent signs up, they do not have access to review information such as the annual data check.

Please call the school office and ask to speak with Alison Ross.

Lunch app

- parents are still reporting problems with accessing the app.

This has been reported to Aberdeenshire Council.

## Google Meet

- Can parents who have not yet signed consent forms be re- sent the forms to ensure that all pupils can access Google meet if we need to shut down at short notice again?

**This has already been done.**

- Can first year parents be sent the consent forms so that they can participate in Google meet if there is another lockdown?

**This has already been done and the link has been in the school weekly newsletter.**

## Emails to parents

- Could the subject title bar be filled in with something relevant for each email from the school?

- We are receiving large numbers of emails and it is difficult to identify where specific information is when going back over the last month or two worth of emails.

**We will ask the office to action this.**

Update: Further discussion and investigation has been happening on the subject titles for emails. Due to the "Groupcall" system, there are challenges for the office staff in providing an alternative subject title to "Ellon Acad". This has now been raised with the providers of the Groupcall system and an update will be provided when a response is received.

## Emails / phone calls from parents

- some parents are not receiving replies to emails or phone calls (details taken and not phoned back).

**Staff are exceptionally busy and will call back in due course.**

- Calendar -is there one this year to assist parts and teachers to plan?

**In progress – this has to wait for the staff Working Time Agreement – the authority deadline for this is end of Sept this year (usually June). Calendar will be finalised after this has been agreed.**

**The school will also issue a term by term guide for parents of important dates.**

- Are there dates for tracking reports and full reports for all years?

**Yes, published in last week's newsletter**

- What should parents do when they have questions regarding specific subjects?

**Call Guidance**

43. Is there an update on Pitches?

**Initial remedial work is due to take place during Oct holidays**

44. Do senior pupils have to line up with BGE pupils if they want a hot lunch option? Is social distancing encouraged in this queue?

**Pupils do not have to social distance from each other.**

45. Could hot lunch options for the week be added to the daily bulletin to assist with planning for parents and pupils given there are limited options?

**We do not get this info from catering.**

Various supplemental questions were asked by parents on the night:

- Why are some pupils going home on a Wednesday afternoon or leaving half way through study periods. College pupils have been told to stay at home and not come to campus. Surely fewer pupils in school would be beneficial to everyone. Pupils who go home could check in on line.

Mrs P Buchan responded that sixth year pupils are allowed to sign out of school but fifth years have their double study period supervised by their link deputy head. This means that there will be "Learner Conversations" going on and this is seen as a vital part of fifth year study in supporting pupils through this important stage in their education.

- S5 pupils who have college courses have been given permission to be home on a Wednesday in order for them to access online classes. Why then have other fifth year pupils been told they are not permitted to be at home on a Wednesday afternoon during private study to access online learning / tasks set of Google Classroom?

Mrs P Buchan explained that due to the technology requirements of NESCOL students, they need to be at home so that their needs can be met throughout a Wednesday (this would be very difficult to meet their needs in school). There are a number of tasks which other fifth year pupils will be doing which do not require technology to the same extent.

Mr G Cowie explained that NEScol upload their virtual work on a Wednesday. Most college pupils are working at home as they have connectivity and their own devices. In school, we couldn't provide for all, all day and clean machines.

- S6 Pupils are allowed to leave school for their study periods?

Yes – this is to help them to start to prepare for their next stages in life/ learning and is included as part of their sixth year contracts which they sign with the school.

- Why can't S5 go home during study to access the work posted on GC? Lots of higher work is now on GC so study time needs online access. Online access is needed. Some pupils who do college also access their higher subjects on a Wednesday afternoon. Double standards?

Wednesday afternoon for S5 pupils who do not attend NEScol is supervised study. This means that it will be used for Learner conversations to help to support them through the year.

- Can 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Years go home during study?

No – 5<sup>th</sup> years are not allowed to leave school during their study periods as all of these are supervised study period.

- There are differences between S5 Study in school and S5 home study for College?

Home study is really a privilege for S6. This will be monitored and reviewed. It is accepted that some pupils may study more productively at home.

- Some subjects have been great at using Google Classrooms. English and Science for example. Science even has videos. Other subjects seem to have nothing unfortunately.

Hopefully the new digital teacher will help with this. It would help if tasks were linked to assignments as it makes it easier to hand work in.

Mrs P Buchan stated that many teachers are still developing their skills with Google Classroom and there is differential availability of suitable electronic resources depending on subject. Availability also varies between year group. Some subjects are still covered predominantly in the classroom. The new PT Digital Learning will certainly help to support all faculties in making good use of the platform.

- Staff still continue to be inconsistent with their use of Google Classroom. Non use of clear headings, lack of deadline times which triggers the standard midnight ping from google classroom (no one likes a midnight ping), tasks not in google format (missing Microsoft/adobe/google platforms) Is this to be rectified?

Fair observations around staff confidence with Google Classroom – notes have been taken to share with Mrs T Booth who will be line managing the new PT Digital Learning. The PT should have minimal teaching commitment to allow them to work with the faculties who need it most.

- Prelims – will there be a timetable and exam leave or will it just be normal school days?

Mrs P Buchan confirmed that the school does have draft plans but these need to be shared and discussed with all staff before they can be shared further. This information should be available to parents and pupils soon.

- How are pupils being encouraged to socially distance at break times outdoors?

Pupils don't need to socially distance.

- In relation to supply teachers, are there high levels of absences due to the current situation and are there ever difficulties in covering classes as a result?

We have been very lucky so far. We have a great team of very committed and experienced supply teachers who are able to help us.

- What is the earth moving work at the far end of the car park (near the turning circle)?

Mrs P Buchan will look into this and revert to the Parent Council. –

Update – this is work on a neighbouring farm.

- Will teachers be able to use Google Meet to teach a class if all pupils in that class do not have consent in place from parents?

It is unclear at this stage if the teacher could go ahead and use Google Meet if all pupils do not have consent in place. It is therefore imperative that all parents immediately ensure that they have responded to the request to consider consent for Google Meet. It is possible that if parents do not do this, the teachers will not be able to use the

system which facilitates online teaching. This would be to the detriment of all our pupils.

## 7. Lunchtime Issues

- The school have been dealing with some issues amongst first year pupils who were using the grassy verges around the Plaza area to play some “rough and tumble” type games. This is the reason why pupils have been banned from using these areas during school time. Teachers were concerned for the safety of the pupils.
- More pupils are now going home for lunch or off campus – particularly senior pupils.
- Tweaks have been made to the queueing system to make it work better and it is now operating more efficiently.
- The Grab and Go bags are successful
- The Sunken Social area is generally very calm at lunch times.
- The litter problem inside the school has improved but there is a significant problem with litter around the pupil entrance.
- The fourth years are allocated “The Street” area and this is challenging. Initially, the school was allowing pupils to use the Reception area too but due to behaviour of some, the office staff have requested that they do not congregate there. The noise and behaviours were making it very difficult for them to work / hear callers on the phones.
- More pupils are eating their lunches and walking outside at lunch and break times.
- Space has always been tight inside the school to accommodate break and lunch times.
- The theatre is a teaching space and therefore cannot be used and using the gym halls would make it difficult for staff to provide adequate supervision. There is also concern that using the gym halls would encourage mixing of year groups.
- The Senior Leadership Team are supervising the various areas every day and a small number of other staff have volunteered to help (alongside our Prefect team). No further areas can be reasonably supervised at this time due to restrictions.

Additional questions / observations from parents during the meeting:

- A lot of kids are going home at lunchtime.
- In respect of fourth years, my understanding is that the reason many are going out or off campus is BECAUSE there isn't enough room inside – so it is a chicken and egg question and surely will only be worse in the winter.
- There is therefore a need for lunchtime clubs to resume – if adults can go to clubs surely kids can go to clubs?

## 8. CarPark

- The car park appears to mostly be operating well at this time.
- The majority of drivers are following the rules.
- A very small number of drivers still choose to reverse park. The car park can cope with this but it would become very challenging if many more drivers choose to do this.

## 9. SQA Technical Consultations

- Mr N Topping (PC Chair) attended a Connect Meeting for Aberdeenshire on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September. Connect is the Association of Parent Councils in Scotland.
- The Presley Report (detailing the Exam situation for 2020) is due out on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September.

UPDATE: The Presley Report has now been published. A link has been provided on the Parent Council Facebook page.

- Connect will be sending a letter to the Scottish Government if the report is not published by Friday detailing concerns relating to the impact of delays on pupils, parents and teachers knowing what courses and assessments will look like this year. Parents deem that it is essential that pupils and teachers should know what the expectations are as soon as possible so that expectations can be managed.
- The planned 2021 exam timetable is due to start on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021 and finish on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2021. The SQA has previously advised that as there may be disruption due to the coronavirus and they have developed a number of contingency models for the timetable. John Swinney and the SQA are expected to provide further statements relating to this on 2<sup>nd</sup> October).

UPDATE: The 2021 exam timetable will now start on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021 for Higher and Advanced Higher candidates only.

- It has been suggested in the media that the SQA is considering not having a National 5 exam diet this year. They would still receive grades but this would be based on teacher assessment / continuous assessment.

UPDATE: This has now been confirmed.

UPDATE: The National Parent Forum of Scotland requested opinions relating to National exams for 2020/21 be collated by Parent Councils. There was an electronic survey available on the Parent Council Facebook Page for parents to share their views. The results of this survey for Ellon Academy parents is attached in Appendix 1 at the end of these minutes.

John Swinney announced on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October that National 5 courses will be assessed by way of continual assessment and teacher judgement. There will therefore be no National 5 examinations this year. Higher and Advanced Higher courses will have a planned exam diet starting on 13<sup>th</sup> May, but there will be checkpoints over the next few points to assess whether this will go forward, giving the option for these to be assessed in a similar way to National 5 courses if necessary.

**More information to follow from the Scottish Government, the SQA and the school.**

## 10. 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.

### **11. Uploading Funds to pupil accounts**

- Mrs A Ross has been made aware of the issues parents are experiencing in uploading money to accounts.
- This is causing parents a lot of stress and appears to be worse on a Monday morning. Some parents have been advised to try using laptops rather than phones to upload money to cards – reports vary regarding whether this works better.
- Aberdeenshire Council will be contacted by the school for a response as this appears to be an ongoing and widespread issue and being able to process payments is an essential feature of this system.

### **12. Lost and Found Process**

- No further progress made on this yet due to other priorities.
- Mrs S McGill will be in contact with Mrs K Gray in October to discuss furthering this.

### **13. Communication**

- PB was again 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.
- Access to view the weekly assemblies also allows parents to be aware when there are specific issues being dealt with by the school. This means that parents can support the school with the messaging.
- 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.

### **14. Next Parent Council Meeting**

- It was agreed that the next Parent Council meeting will be on **27<sup>th</sup> October**.
- If there is a need for a meeting before then due to the result of the SQA consultation announcement, this may be brought forward.
- The meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> October will be our AGM.
- We are looking for a volunteer to take on the Secretary post – support will be offered.
- Parent Council Meetings will continue to be online at present due to COVID19 restrictions.
- We plan to use Business Skype again for the next meeting.
- All parents have the option to attend our Parent Council. You will be invited to register your interest in attending the next one approximately a week before the meeting.
- You should then receive a meeting invite. If you do not receive an invite by 3pm on the 26<sup>th</sup> October, please contact the Parent Council or the school to let us know so that we can make sure you receive the details in good time for the meeting..
- Parent Council committee members will again be 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.

## 15. AOCB

- The Parent Council would like to thank the Senior Leadership Team and the many teachers and support staff who have worked so hard to make sure that our children can receive face to face education in these challenging times.

### Computing Science

– a question had been raised regarding why Computing Science is not currently offered by the school as a subject.

The business faculty do not have a suitably qualified member of teaching staff. There is a national shortage of these teachers. The Ellon Academy staffing budget does not allow for additional staff at this time.

In the past, some pupils have opted to study Computing Science at National level through NEScol, but there has been a variation of experiences of studying the subject in this way.

As a result, it is planned that the school will request a probationer teacher next year (2021/22) with a view to looking at if we can introduce this subject back into the curriculum at Ellon.

### Cycling Concerns

– a number of parents have contacted the Parent Council to raise concerns relating to pupils cycling in a dangerous way on roads and pavements in Ellon both before and after school. This has been raised a number of times by parents and members of the public. There is concern for the welfare of the pupils as many of them are still not wearing cycle helmets and they are weaving in and out of traffic and performing tricks such as wheelies and bunny hops. Also, drivers are worried that they may be involved in an accident with these young people.

Mrs Buchan explained that the school is working very hard to regularly raise these issues with individual pupils who have been identified as cycling in this way. Some parents have also already been involved in these discussions and have been supportive of the school's efforts. It is helpful when parents provide dash cam footage as this assists in identifying the relevant pupils.

The school is considering using safe drive /stay alive type of footage to assist in the messaging – particularly relating to older pupils. Virtual Assemblies will be used and there may be a “Cycling-safe” course. A parent suggested contacting the local Police for assistance. We have been allocated a new Police liaison officer and he may be involved in the process.

## Appendix 1

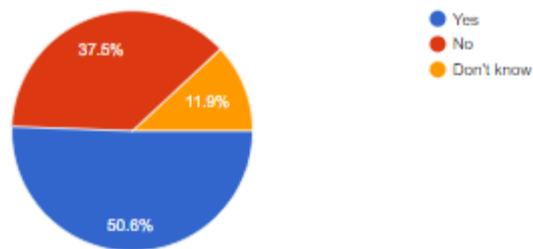
### Results of Parent Survey on SQA Exam Options for 2021

Thank you to all parents who took part in the survey to provide the National Parent Forum of Scotland with the views of parents from our school. This information was requested at very short notice by our National group. We received 177 responses and have now passed these on to the National Parent Forum of Scotland.

The individual comments provided by parents demonstrate to us that there is a wide range of opinions on this issue within our school.

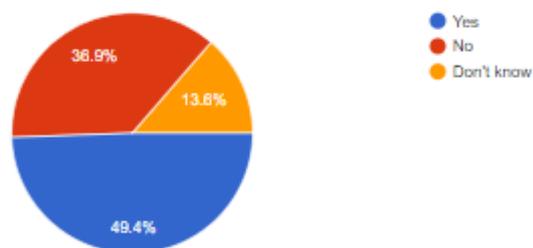
I would wish to see a full exam diet for all pupils in 2021 irrespective of the public health situation at that time.

176 responses



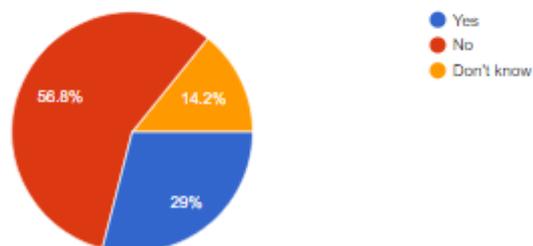
I would seek to have Higher and Advanced Higher exams prioritised for the 2021 exam diet

176 responses



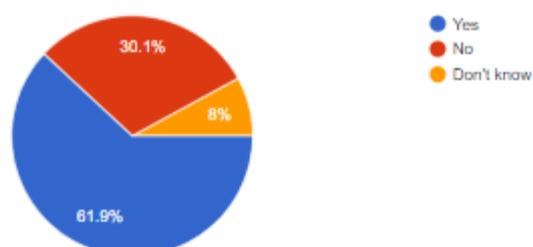
I believe that all exams for all senior phase pupils should be cancelled NOW for 2021 and that teacher assessment of predicted grades should be used to measure academic attainment for this school year

176 responses



I am content for pupils to work towards all exams taking place in 2021 and will accept that should the public health situation worsen, included the reintroduction of blended learning, that exams may be cancelled LATER in this academic year

176 responses



Comments provided:

I am noticing the amount of class tests seems very high with pupils feeling under constant pressure as they are told this may be evidence substituting exams. Feels like teaching time is being compromised for testing which will impact completion of the curriculum if the exam diet does go ahead, especially as they are already behind.

Too early to commit to no exams, the priority should be to sit exams in some shape or form whether it be in person or online as universities did

Everyone involved in Scottish Education should work to deliver H/A-H exams under all circumstances... This is vital.

I would like to see more planning for exams during the covid era happening now, additional venues and invigilators etc. The last statement is confusing (it's multiple statements and you could agree with one part and not the other).

I think due to my responses above the school should still actively formally assessing students work as the year progresses, through course work, assessments and exams

I see no reason why a full diet of exams can't be offered. There is more than enough time to make arrangements so that the pupils can be spaced out in halls or classrooms. The pupils are in school together all day so there is no reason why they can't be together for exams.

We are doing a disservice to our young people by not allowing them to sit their exams. I feel a decision must be made now so that pupils, parents and teachers can move forward with a definitive plan

Exams should go ahead regardless.

I feel the kids have enough going on at the moment that they should know one way or the other as to what's happening for exams. Think class work and teachers thoughts are best under the circumstances.

It would be the preferred option that exams take place in some shape or form even if the dates had to be moved or the locations being utilised had to be increased to allow social distancing. All exams are important not just higher.

I strongly feel that all exams for senior pupils should go ahead in 2021 unless we can be made confident that teachers assessments properly reflecting pupils achievement. This process was not transparent in 2020 and it is concerning going forward. It was not clear which material teachers used for assessment and how comparable and fair the process was between private and state schools (also between affluent and less affluent areas).

The ideal would be for all pupils to be given the opportunity to sit their exams. However, I feel that the schools need to be able to have adequate advice and support now to be able to put together assessment for each pupil from now should they not be able to sit exams.

I see absolutely no reason for the exams at all levels not to go ahead, they are entitled to sit these and are being penalised if they do not take place

There is no reason for the pupils to not sit exams , they are with their peers at school . There is plenty time to organise this.

Whatever decision is made now needs to be followed through. Working in a school myself I strongly feel the pupils would and could have been organised to do the exams last year. It should have been priority - even with blended learning the schools could have accommodated the exam diet

A reduced syllabus for the exam should be considered to reflect the disruption of lockdown learning March-July 2020 (which was not a patch on learning face to face from experts and professionals, in academy, in a class of peers, with regular doses of accountability and communication to keep continuity of learning going).

Fairest way to deal with this is to have ongoing work assessed through term by class teachers - lots of kids struggle with exams at best of time but Covid putting everyone under more pressure.

Difficult situation. Important to maintain motivation and momentum with the learning process, especially for those that have already been through the challenges and roller coaster of exams being cancelled in 2020.

As so much time was wasted in May and June without actual teaching, the best option in my humble opinion would be a reduction in the subject matter For exams, which would allow teachers adequate time to teach the reduced curriculum and would allow exams to go ahead.

Criteria will need to be set out in writing for exams and also as a contingency plan should the current public health situation be ongoing nearer to exam time to reduce to stress and workload of pupils and teachers.

I think the syllabus should be cut down to give enough teaching time  
In fairness to the children decision should be made now. Not interested in politics or sq  
let's help the children and teachers.

No year group should be prioritised over another year group .Exams are an essential part of the Scottish education system to ensure that children across the country are marked and judged fairly under the same set of conditions.Once there is confidence that all teachers across the country are assessing fairly under a set of publicised national guidelines there should be a move to teacher assessment of predicted grades and not until then.

Daughter in S6 has enough qualifications for uni but she Wants to sit exams  
Cancel exams now and at least there will be some clarity.

Teachers should work with the condition that course work could count more towards final grade if exams need to be cancelled.

There are lots of potential solutions for allowing our young people the opportunity to sit their exams. I have a senior and junior pupil in the school. I would prefer, if the PH situation has worsened, that the junior pupils have learning from home/blended learning to allow the senior pupils to safely sit their exams. We are in a situation where we have to learn to live with the virus in our population and the exam schedule should not suffer as a result.

Exams should be cancelled if cases within schools are on the rise but go ahead if it's at all possible.

Guidance should be issued very soon about the importance of a coursework evidence base, as a precaution against exam disruption. Even if exams go ahead, some pupils will have been affected by any quarantine periods either of themselves, or their teachers; pupils could also have been affected by covid illness across the year and during the exam period. We need to know in advance how this will be accounted for. Also how will bereavement be accounted for?

I think we at least have to try to give what is best for our children and as close to what they should have normally had. They might not manage to do exams on full syllabus but I think it is important to at least try.

They should just go and do the exams, as we don't want another year like this one. This is a poorly worded questionnaire. Please check grammar and spelling. It's an ever changing situation so a difficult call.

Delayed or deferred education can be rectified. Dead or bereaved children cannot.

I am unsure why exams would be cancelled at this early stage. There was little talk of Coronavirus 8 months ago and we are deliberating a period of 9 months in the future. We need to keep hoping that life will resume a sense of normality at some point. If at present, pupils can sit all day in a classroom together with appropriate measures in place, I fail to see the difference sitting in an exam hall(s). We need to teach children the art of sitting exams. By thinking creatively and with enough time to prepare, the exams should go ahead as normal.

If exams do go ahead I think it's important to make sure if a pupil is off sick with corona they don't lose out and teacher assessments and predicted grades are used instead so that no pupil suffers if this is not possible then I would change my view to teacher assessment instead of exams as no child should be affected by covid.

My son has said he would be very disappointed if he couldn't do his Nat 5 exams in a school setting, even if that means closing schools to S1 -S3 pupils for c 6 weeks. There is plenty time to train invigilators so that pupils could sit exams in classrooms rather big exam halls so they can stay within their bubbles/ groups. This would free teaching staff for home learning/ revision classes.

Start collecting evidence in school now and take away the uncertainty for the young people by using teacher predicted grades.

I would just like to see all senior pupils be given a fair chance to earn the correct grades for the amount of work they put in. The stress of exams and future careers are hard enough without not knowing if an exam will even take place!

I think that a decision should be made as soon as possible around the exams taking place or not. Pupils need to know what they are doing, the uncertainty is not helpful for any of us. I think exams should go ahead next year. The priority needs to be to keep the kids educated as it is at the present time. With social distancing and additional rooms and invigilators I believe this should happen

Nat 5s should be continual assessment

Exams would still need to be held in safe and secure conditions, regardless. Children are already not getting the full educational experience due to guidelines and cleaning. They are going to be at a disadvantage going into these exams and I find it extremely unfair if they are made to do them. Not getting away from the mental health a lot of them are suffering with right now.

I feel that fore warned is fore armed. Teachers and students should work as if the exams will go ahead - but have the work to evidence the grades awarded if needed. This past year was a disaster as everyone was caught off guard. I know that we are travelling through uncharted territory, and I tip my hat to the teachers that are doing an excellent job with our children at this time . There is no real quick fix for this and it will not be easy.

Give certainty to pupils and teachers now. Plan a course of assessment with known criteria for grade awards that can be delivered in person or online. There is a high risk of repeat of 2020 confusion and consequences for pupils teachers and universities if the course is taken now to pursue exam diet which cannot be delivered in the end.

The delay in the SQA providing this decision to teachers and parents and most importantly pupils is unacceptable and has resulted in a huge amount of anxiety and stress. This was always going to be a really hard year for pupils and the lack of clarity over what the courses should contain or what the assessments will look like has made it worse.

In my opinion effort should be made to ensure all exams go ahead in 2021. Students attend school therefore can sit exams. If some learning is missed, marks can be adjusted accordingly. With limited social interaction there is more time for students to concentrate on learning.

Go ahead with senior exams please.

I think the exams should be moved back nearer the summer holidays but that they should probably all work towards them happening.

I think the curricula needs to be reduced to fit with the amount of teaching time available or it is very unfair for the pupils. Account should also be made for reduction in school time due to isolation/illness etc. It's crucial that decisions are made now on how this is going to work going forward but I think all efforts should be made to hold exams for the children.