

Ellon Academy Parent Council Minutes

3rd March 2021

All participants took part virtually due to current Government guidance on social distancing. Ellon Parent Council is now using Zoom as a platform and we are delighted to report that **42** people attended the most recent meeting. Thank you to all attendees. We hope that you found the meeting interesting. We will be constantly reviewing how these meetings run so if you have any specific suggestions which you think may encourage more attendance or participation, please do get in touch.

Attendance was open to **all** parents or guardians who have children at the school.

Attendees: N Topping (Chair), D McCulloch (Vice Chair), K Gray (Previous Chair), H Wilson (Acting Secretary), A Blanchard (Treasurer), P Buchan (Rector), F McLachlan DHT), G Cowie (DHT), N Corser (DHT), M Sturton, G Burgess, S Middleton, L Gill, K Finlayson, W Leaper, C Higgins, K &S Hales, U Witte, A Currie, S Duncan, L Lawrence, J Lorimer, D Sim, A Stott, A Smith, P Astley, N Nicholls, M Hislop, R McKeown, A Creighton, W Jones, S Madden, A Kloppert, A Keith, Catriona, D Smith, G Kahanov, H Buchan, J Connell, M McRae, Mark

Apologies: None

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

These were posted on the Parent Council Facebook Page and the School website and no alterations were suggested by attendees or received prior to the meeting.

2. Treasurer's Report

The complaint raised with the bank regarding change of signatories appears to have been resolved after a 5 year battle. We await a final confirmation email.

The bank has agreed to pay the Parent Council £225 as compensation.

Aberdeenshire Council has paid in £545 as their contribution to the Parent Council.

We have paid for the Zoom Licence to facilitate meetings which are open to the widest possible group of parents (£143.88).

The current balance stands at a healthy £3915.38.

3. Remote Learning

Pupil Engagement

N Topping asked P Buchan if there were figures available for the percentage uptake/ engagement for remote learning across year groups and subjects.

P Buchan responded that there is engagement tracker data and this information and this will be shared with the Parent Council.

Live Lessons

N Topping asked if there had been any increase in the attendance of pupils at "Live sessions" since the last Parent Council meeting.

P Buchan responded that there is little change – attendance is more or less the same. It continues to be not a huge amount of uptake for the live sessions which are offered.

There is currently less capacity to offer and deliver remote learning due to the increased numbers of pupils attending for in-school provision.

There were some live sessions where no pupils attended and there has been a slight increase in attendance for these.

Remote Learning Survey

Does the school still intend to create and circulate its own survey on Remote Learning?

Yes – Ms Booth and L Moir are working on the creation of the school questionnaires so that the school can gather information and feedback on experiences. There will be separate ones for BGE pupils, Senior pupils and parents.

4. Rector's Update

Staffing:

- Kevin (Tev) Warrander is joining us from Developing the Young Workforce North East as a DYW Worker. He will be broadening the DYW Agenda and ensuring the careers education agenda is woven through the school. He will be reporting to Niall Corsar (DHT)
- Mr Colin Bain is leaving Ellon Academy to take up the role of PT English at Northfield (we will be advertising for his English Vacancy)
- Mr G Cowie has been confirmed now as permanent DHT
- Mr M McColm, PT Modern Languages is retiring in May - Miss Emma Mathers appointed
- Dr M Cruickshank PT Science retiring in the summer. Interviews prior to Easter break
- Mr Coe - now permanent PT Pupil Development
- Mrs F Bennet and Mrs E Adamson ASL to retire this summer
- Probationer Teachers requested - Science (Chemistry/Biology), Maths
- Ms Lorene Pieters has withdrawn from the Probationer Induction Scheme
- Hoping to retain Mr Chris Price in Drama and Mr Glen Lawrie in Biology
- Mrs Lyndsey Donald (PT Sinclair 0.4 and PE teacher - Maternity Leave) Back fill
- Mrs Jo Kelly Modern Studies returns from maternity leave this week
- Mr S Aiken and Miss E Fraser - now permanent PE Teacher contracts
- Mrs D Dunton due to return from maternity leave term 4

Budget:

- Working on Year End projections currently
- Funds carried forward from last year's budget have been allocated to faculties who have bid for resources to support learning and teaching
- There has been a generous parental donation for the Sensory Support Room. There is a project set up to make the best of this room.
- Meeting with Head of Service, Accountant and HR in February went well

5. COVID 19 Update

- A further new Risk Assessment is in place
- Currently, there is a maximum of 90 pupils allowed in school for practical subjects.
- There are requirements for social distancing of 2m between all staff and all pupils and all are required to wear face masks unless medically exempt.
- Art and Graphic Communication will be added in next week and hospitality is dropping off.

First Minister's Announcement Regarding Blended Learning Return of all pupils w/c 15th March

Update: All parents have now been sent the school's detailed return to school plans which include an explanation of the rationale, challenges and guidance which has been followed.

- The Ellon initial plan is currently being discussed - SLT are starting to share ideas and the initial bones of a proposed plan are starting to take shape.
- Principal Teachers are being kept up to speed
- Mr Cowie has formed a short term working group to discuss the plans.
- Priority will be given to senior stage pupils who have National Assessments to prepare for.
- All the years will have an experience over the three weeks.
- The school is waiting to hear what the timeline relating to what needs to be done for assessments from the SQA.
- Quality Assurance needs to be completed before grades can be submitted to the SQA.
- The school will need to inform pupils what their provisional grades will be before they are submitted to the SQA (this means that pupils will know what the school has assessed their grades are before the summer holidays start).
- The school is considering letting parents and pupils know what pupil current working grades are and will have learning conversations so that all pupils know what they need to concentrate on as they enter the return to physical school phase.
- There will be two additional in-service days in term 4 to assist teachers in preparing assessments/ quality assurance but the dates are still to be confirmed by the Scottish Government / Aberdeenshire Council.

Plans for Sixth Year Leavers

Staff and The current Executive Team (Pupils) are organising:

Leavers' video

Talent show

Hosting an outdoor party in the school grounds with food and entertainment

Leavers Hoodies

Year Books

Virtual Prize giving

Administration for prefects for next session and the new Executive team is happening.

A Questionnaire has been organised regarding health and wellbeing and the Executive Team are producing a series of self-help videos on topics such as sleep, keeping in touch with friends with a focus on happiness.

P Buchan has engaged the services of an external company (Tree of Knowledge) to help with this.

Some individual faculties have been issuing questionnaires in Google Classrooms for pupils to evaluate learning

The school will be recognising young people who have been working well as they are aware that many are getting weary and fed up with remote learning.

6. SQA Assessments

UPDATE – please note that these minutes have now been adapted as the school has received more guidance from the SQA which alters timescales and therefore the plans for next term. Some of the

answers given on the night have now been removed or slightly altered to avoid confusion.

Parents of senior pupils will receive a further update from the school next week (w/c 15th March)

- The school has been working on a timeline for SQA Assessments
- A parent asked if there would be any assessments before the Easter Holidays – there will be no assessments before the Easter holidays as the focus at this time will be solely on teaching and consolidation of learning.
- There will be an Assessment Block similar to the one planned for January (which was cancelled).
- Some Faculties want 2 assessments and some think 1 is enough (although the school still awaits confirmation on this point from the SQA).
- No one should have more than 2 assessments in the one day.
- The assessments have to take place within two week blocks to allow for marking and quality assurance.
- Provisional grades must be with the SQA by Friday 25th June 2021.
- There is a raft of Quality Assurance within the school
- Ellon is in a trio of schools for Quality Assurance purposes with Meldrum Academy and Turriff Academy. This is a new layer of checking which has been introduced this year due to the new estimate procedures.

EXAM Leave

- A parent asked if study leave was being considered as beneficial.
- A further parent pointed out that most pupils will be looking at these assessments as exams.
- P Buchan pointed out that these assessments will be taken in normal class time and that exam leave is being considered.
- The school is thinking about the preparation for these important assessments and are aware that pupils will need notice of when they will be taking place.

Assessments

- The school will publish the timetable as soon it is ready.
- Timescales are tight to fit everything in.
- The school is thinking about notifying parents and pupils of current working grades.
- When considering this, the school needs to work out how this process will work, whether this is achievable to provide etc.
- The school wants to give pupils an opportunity to improve and guidance regarding how they can do this.
- The school will look to see when they can do this.
- There will be a consultation with teachers regarding the next steps.
- The school has been informed that if it uses at least 70% of an SQA prepared paper for this year, only one piece of evidence will be required.

Partial Return of Pupils

P Buchan reported that the pupils who have returned to school have been working really well.

Pupils have taken it very seriously.

Teachers are full of praise.

The school is really encouraged by what has been going on.

The school still has key worker, vulnerable and SfL pupils attending.

The school has been using health and wellbeing activities to support these pupils.

The pupils attending have been having contact with lots of different teachers which has been good for them.

The maximum numbers in has been 90

7. First Minister Announcement for more Pupils to return

- The maximum number of pupils is 1/3 of the school.
- This works out at around 300 pupils per day but the keyworker pupils, vulnerable pupils and SfL pupils have to be included in the daily numbers.
- G Cowie (DHT) has a plan and is trying to facilitate all senior pupils to experience all of their subjects.
- BGE pupils will concentrate on Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing for this period.
- N Topping asked when the school hopes to have a plan for the blended timetable.
- P Buchan responded that it is expected that the timetable will be shared by the end of next week (12th March).
- Hopefully it will be out mid-week - if everything goes according to plan.
- The school will put out a letter to explain what is happening.
- For practical's, individual texts have been sent out but this is not practical for the larger numbers of pupils involved in this return.
- Fifth years may be told the days they are due to come in, but not told what they will be doing in advance.

8. Covid Tests

- It does not make sense that test kits are collected on 15th March so it is likely that families will be able to collect kits prior to that date from the school. The details will be included in the letter next week.

Questions from Parents

Clarification was requested regarding tests/ exams in class time – what happens if the papers cannot be finished in class time?

- P Buchan explained that a class may need to do a paper over three separate sessions due to the timing restrictions of periods in school. The school have now received confirmation that for some subjects, only one piece of evidence is required.

If assessments are going to be in class time, how does that work for ASN pupils who may need special arrangements or extra time?

- This is all in hand

N Topping mentioned that communication of all of these points is really important for pupils and parents.

9. Subject Choices Update

- G Cowie reported that he was pleased with the work of the PTGs – a superb effort by all.
- All subject choices forms have now been submitted and work has started to try to equalise numbers in classes.

- Due to capacity issues in classrooms, there may be some pupils who will have their subjects changed to different columns. This won't mean a change of choices for most learners but any particular challenges can be followed up more sensitively when seniors return to school.
- The school has appreciated the support of parents.
- The school has gathered feedback regarding how satisfied pupils have been with the choices process and only a very small number of pupils have been unhappy.
- The process went as smoothly as it could have gone.
- PTGs will now wait until pupils are back in school before there is any more dialogue about the process.
- The school used the electronic forms for the first time and G Cowie now has all the information he needs to move the process forward.
- The school reported that parents have been satisfied with the information provided.

Questions from Parents

Has a date been confirmed when sixth years can leave?

P Buchan noted that there is no specific date yet.

The school has until the last day of term (25th June) to send data to the SQA.

Before the school confirms a date, they would like to confirm dates for the celebrations which are planned.

Sixth years usually finish after their final assessments but we do not yet have the timetable for these confirmed.

There is no point in sixth year leavers being in school after their assessments as there is nothing for them to do.

Is it possible for s1-3 pupils to continue to work from home if family circumstances make this preferable?

- G Cowie responded that the school is much quieter at the moment and 2m distancing is in place. Fewer members of staff and pupils it promotes social distancing. The school does have a SEEMIS code which would reflect this choice. Parents should contact the school via their child's Guidance teacher (PTG) and alert them to your situation.

Is there a change to Moving Up dates?

P Buchan explained that no decision has yet been made on the dates pupils move to their next year group. This usually happens at the start of June but this year a lot has changed. This is one of the things the school is awaiting an Aberdeenshire Council steer on.

G Cowie (DHT) creates the school timetable, however, he has now been taken away from this work to concentrate on the new timetable for pupils returning on a blended learning basis on 15th March.

The school awaits advice from Mr L Findlay (Director of Education for Aberdeenshire Council) regarding timing of changes of timetables across schools in Aberdeenshire.

How will support for ASN pupils work for the return to school on a blended basis?

The SLT does not have the details of this yet but M Wilson has been working hard to ensure that appropriate support is in place for these pupils. Further discussion will take place as whole school plans develop. F McLachlan has stressed that the work that M Wilson and her team have done since January supporting SFL pupils has been outstanding.

10. Transition Work

- The primary 7 transition is now starting to take more shape.
- Last year was completely virtual.
- The school is continuing with enhanced transition for those who need more support.
- F McLachlan is meeting regularly with p7 staff across the cluster.
- He is writing to parents of p7 pupils prior to Easter and at least on two occasions thereafter.
- Feedback is that the pupils and parents want to be in the school building if possible to see it.
- It may be possible to offer this but the school has to wait and see what is in the guidance.
- If it is not possible to have pupils and parents in during term time, the plan is to invite them in during the holidays like last year to do a socially distanced welcome meeting, tour and photographs for Young Scot cards.
- Last year, 197 of the 204 new pupils attended the induction day during their holidays.
- Class lists are being worked on.
- Primary colleagues have been brilliant.
- F McLachlan commented that the collegiate working has been superb.
- He is finalising a social media page for this year's new parents to go live after the Easter holidays.

N Topping offered support from the Parent Council Committee if this is required.

11. Mental Health and Wellbeing

N Topping asked if there have been any trends in wellbeing identified through the weekly wellbeing survey?

- F McLachlan responded that the wellbeing survey is a powerful tool in gathering data.
- The school have noticed a small drop off in participation rates and Mr Coe is looking into this.
- They are monitoring the results on a weekly basis and this dictates interventions for individual pupils or groups of pupils.
- The school has not noted any significant patterns in the wellbeing of the school population as a whole.
- F McLachlan continued that there is an update – there is ongoing discussion about the possibility of continuing the wellbeing tracker when pupils return fully to school.
- The school is finding the wellbeing tracker a very effective tracking and monitoring strategy.
- The trainee counsellor has started at the school and works Monday, Tuesday and Friday but she needs to complete her training before she can start seeing pupils for counselling input but will be working with pupils on their wellbeing in the interim period of time. She is due to start counselling pupils in September.
- The school is finalising the referral process.
- G Wilson has moved on and S Smith will pick up his workload at Ellon Academy 4 days a week. She will also pick up the primary caseload within her working week. She will be picking up new referrals.
- This role really helps to support PTGs who have a significant caseload of pupils to support.

- Various members of staff are maintaining contact with pupils who have been identified as requiring additional wellbeing support (165) through phone calls or emails or CLD contact (Community Learning and Development Youth Workers).
- If pupils submit two sad emojis in the wellbeing survey, this is picked up in the tracking process and appropriate action is taken by key staff.

Has the school has engaged with the young men who have been identified as needing more support?

- The school understands that everyone is struggling a bit at the moment and they are still discussing how best to support the young men as this group have been highlighted through various tracking and monitoring and professional discussion.

Is there any clarity of what is happening with uniforms or changing rooms?

- The school is awaiting guidance from Aberdeenshire Council or the Scottish Government on this – it may be in the guidance which is due very soon.
- Changing rooms remain unused – PE is only allowed outside.
- The school's view is that it has worked really well not using the changing rooms – the pupils seem to prefer it and they are able to spend more time being physically active.

A parent mentioned that as all non-essential shops are closed, purchasing of new school clothes is particularly difficult at the moment.

- P Buchan responded that uniform is not top of priorities at the moment – certainly, there is not a requirement to wear school uniform at the moment.
- This may be reconsidered after the holidays in preparation for August, but the main focus is on welcoming pupils back into the school environment.

Is there an update regarding the Performance Element for SQA qualifications for pupils who have an indoor PE sport?

- Whatever happens, pupils will not be disadvantaged for their qualifications.
- Only one performance is required now for certificated subject assessment.
- Evidence on practical performance has already been gathered.
- Again, nothing will happen which is detrimental to the young people.
- There may be an opportunity to demonstrate transferable skills in another sport.
- Anything demonstrating a good standard of work can be used – it is important that pupils continue to engage with ongoing work.

A parent suggested that the assessments now sound like a high stakes exam again – with grades appearing to depend on one final assessment – will pupils who do worse than expected in these assessments have another opportunity to prove themselves?

P Buchan replied that she wanted to reassure parents that everyone is trying to do their very best. Pupils will be given a further opportunity to demonstrate their skills – teachers will be working closely with pupils to support them through this process.

Our young people have had this time stolen from them and it is very sad.
The school is aware that a number of pupils are feeling very under pressure and not getting through the workload.

A parent enquired that if study time was offered for preparing for assessments, would there be space in school for them to work there rather than at home as some do not find their home environment easy to study in?

- Yes. Space will be found. Supervision may not be possible as they will need every minute of their time to manage the assessments, marking and quality assurance, but there will be space available for pupils.

12. Next Meeting

21st April agreed for next meeting

13. AOCB

The school staff and senior leadership team were thanked for their ongoing hard work in challenging and ever changing circumstances.

Questions from Chat:

These questions and comments are noted from the Chat function on the Zoom call. It is expected that further clarification of these issues will be forthcoming from the school as they receive further guidance from a national and local authority level .

S1 pupil noted to parent that they felt there were too many assignments

- Parents are advised to discuss these specific types of issues directly with their child's Guidance teacher

Pupil in S5 has not received any live sessions yet – only 2 question sessions.

Parent commented that maths live session had been helpful for their child and well attended. But still no other live sessions offered.

Will there be senior phase assessments before Easter?

- No

Will pupils have notice of assessments to enable preparation?

- Yes

Will all subject assessments take place on the same day? E.g. all Nat 5 maths assessments?

A second parent asked this question too.

One parent commented that last year some pupils felt assessments were sprung on them.

A parent commented that there are only 5 school weeks before the start of May – so there would be little time to do 4 weeks intense (learning) and study leave before a 4 week block (of exams)

A parent commented that they didn't feel study leave would be effective use of time for their child.

Another parent prefers for any study leave to be in school as home study leave would not work for them.

Other parents felt their children would prefer to study and prepare for assessments at home.

A parent questioned whether it is realistic to expect 4 weeks back in school will provide pupils with sufficient time to undertake the assessments given the compromises made with remote learning.

Is there a plan on how/ when home testing kits are to be supplied to s4-6 pupils?

(Update: letters have been sent out to parents by email (dated 11/03/21) explaining the home testing process, providing consent forms and providing the Privacy Notice information. Test kits can be picked up by senior pupils at the school and they are provided with a booklet of information and instructions to accompany this.)

A parent asked if it would be possible to schedule assessments so that pupils would not have two assessments in one morning – allowing more time between them if a pupil has two on the one day (the proposed January schedule did not allow for this).

Will s1-3 have the option of home test kits too?

- No plans to give s1-3 test kits.

(Update – the Deputy First Minister has now announced that the Scottish Government now plans to extend testing to the s1-s3 pupils too after Easter)

Will it be possible for s4 to do Drama and German?

- The school will look at individual preferences for choices and do their best to accommodate choices.

Could there be a delay in moving up due to S6 staying on longer?

Will there be consideration to s1-3 pupils or their parents electing for them to continue to work from home given focus on seniors?

- The school understands that some families will have relatives shielding – there is a code for this. Many teachers will be in school and won't have the same time to feedback on remote learning. Very few seniors have not taken up the offer of practical learning so far. This may change as numbers change.

One s1 parents noted that feedback from teachers has been excellent – hugely encouraging - very grateful.

Is there scope for an appeal if pupils don't get the grade they have worked towards – some of these pupils have not yet had the opportunity to sit an exam in exam conditions?

(Update – the SQA has published a consultation on possible Appeal models on 12/03/21)

Lots of positive feedback was received on the new Zoom format for the Parent Council meeting.