**Ellon Academy Parent Council Minutes**

**21st April 2021**

Introduction

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 30 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.

Meeting Minutes

All participants took part virtually due to current Government guidance on social distancing. Attendance was open to **all** parents or guardians who have children at the school. Parents were asked to contact in advance to note interest so that invitations could be sent through emails. All participants were informed the meeting would be recorded.

**Attendees**: N Topping (Chair), D McCulloch (Vice Chair), K Gray (Previous Chair), V Melvin (temporary Secretary), A Blanchard (Treasurer), P Buchan (Rector), F McLachlan (DHT), S Middleton, K Finlayson, H Wilson, S Duncan, R McKeown, A Scott, D Sim, N Nicholls

Apologies:

1. Secretary

Nick advised he had received interest in the Secretary post by Vicki Melvin. Enquiring if there were any other enquiries – there were none. Nick put forward Vicki Melvin as Temporary Secretary and asked for someone to second this and Dave McCulloch seconded. Vicki will be confirmed on at the next EGM or AGM.

Helen reminded everyone that the chat function will be being used throughout the meeting for any questions.

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.

1. Treasurer’s Report

This will be Dave’s second to last meeting. Not much has changed from the last time. Will make sure that prior to the next meeting a full list of what we have and haven’t got is available. On the back of the complaint being resolved the bank have sent out another form for Dave and Karen to sign. Karen has all the information for taking this forward.

1. Rectors update

4.1 Staffing

* Maths teacher who was appointed prior to Easter and starts after summer.
* English post is still pending.
* 2 new PSA’s started in January although they have not worked directly with pupils until the start of this week.
* Prior to the Easter break very competitive interviews for PT of Science as Dr Cruickshank is retiring. Dr J McPhee, internal science teacher within the school has been doing the role part time, was successful and takes the position up in August. Very strong candidates for this position.
* Biology teacher interviews this week.
* Aberdeenshire have had a reshuffle for quality improvement officers. We had Danica Smith and since the reshuffle we have Fiona Cruickshanks. Fiona was with us before so she knows the Ellon Cluster well and has13 years’ experience.

4.2 Budget

* Just had year-end had a carry forward of money last year which they didn’t expect to get up until middle of March we were spending this money.
* 10 new Seco tables for Sunken Social area, better quality have fixed seats for 8 and can be folded and wheeled out of the way if needed. Will look to replace tables in the canteen and The Street with similar.
* Installing additional CCTV inside and outside the school. Inside in The Street and Sunken Social Area and outside by the bike racks and behind the games hall, key areas felt need more coverage.
* Install Maglocks for first aid corridor external door. A lot of young people have been using it to enter and exit the building, it is like a fire door at the moment. Maglocks to be installed so that we have more control over security in that area.
* Additional laptops have been bought for ASL Faculty and bought additional laptops and chrome books for the whole school stock of ICT. Given all staff VPN laptops, most of the desktops have been moved to the new school 5-6 years ago and now needed upgrading. This upgrade was done prior to lockdown so staff could have that facility at home to help enhance working during lockdown learning.
* Replaced all of devices in Business Education this has been a rolling programme they are now up to date.
* There has been an uptake in different courses in English courses so English open learning area has been turned in to a classroom which Mrs Warne uses daily.
* Big uptake in literacy and English in terms of literature and journalism and more students taking media and have had to increase the staffing capacity in English and the space. Put a bid in for Phase 3 in the Scottish Governments Connecting Scotland scheme in terms of devices for the school. Still waiting for devises ordered from Phase 2. Have to bid for more if we want them.

Questions from Parents

Q. When are we expecting Phase 2 deliveries?

A. Not sure we will have a date as of yet it is pending with the pandemic.

5. Management of potential/future of COVID-19 outbreaks

What is the school policy on this - is it status quo as was before? – This was the answer on the Q&A that was shared and was confirmed that it is still the status quo.

6. SQA Assessments – update and where the school currently are

* In terms of appeals we are still waiting to see what that process will look like. It was discussed today between PB and Miss Booth that the likely first port of call for parents and young people will be Miss Booth herself. We expect that to be part of the guidance round about appeals that they contact the school’s SQA co-ordinator in the first instance but don’t know that for sure but it is anticipated that that is what might happen. Hopefully what they come up with will be on the back of the consultation.
* SQA still very, very tight in terms of the deadlines. The deadline has been extended for any change of levels. We would be in communication with the young people and parents if there was anything in terms of change of levels. SQA are going by the mantra of “no surprises” Young people should really be aware of what to really expect in terms of predicted/proposed grades.
* Training offered by SQA and qualifications group for staff. It’s not training they need but it is good to do it it’s a refresher on the process of how it is done. Benefits new staff as well as existing.

NT – It was a real credit to yourself (PB) and the staff for getting information out before the Easter break and also the rationale that was used for the model and plan you’re taking forward. A lot of the dates that were given out for assessments was really appreciated.

Q. Heard that maybe there has been some change to the assessments dates that were published before since school has restarted not sure if it the case or rumour?

A. Not sure about that if there are changes it will just be staff offering additional opportunities. Trying to gather the best information and evidence that we possibly can. Assessment block is not the only source of assessment gathering. There will be on-going assessments in classrooms as well as if teachers feel individuals need an extra opportunity to showcase a piece of work they will be doing that in classrooms. Based on teacher judgement and professional knowledge of the young people and what they can achieve based on what they see them doing in classes as well.

* *Comment regarding predicted grades* – we can’t really give them predicted grades yet as young people haven’t had this lot of assessments – that will follow after that. It will give them every opportunity we can to showcase their best work.
* *Modern Languages that are being moved* – this is nothing new in modern languages the way they assess is ongoing. They are doing different things that they would normally do in normal times in terms of ongoing assessment. Pupils know what to expect there is nothing new, no new material. The only thing they need to be up on is their vocabulary.
* Learner conversations that teachers were to be having with the young people re target grades. Decided as a school to go with generic phrases like on track to do really well, or on tract to pass, or not quite getting there but with our support will get you over the line. Wary at this point in time as we haven’t had official assessments we don’t want to mislead young people. Teachers have asked for the dates of the different assessments within the block as that is when they will anticipate the young people will be ready. Young people will have completed all the work in class prior to the assessment to give them the best chance on the day.
* Is there supposed to have been the learners conversations been had with all pupils now or still ongoing has this been done for all pupils – We did ask for that to be done prior to Easter break but if you’re aware of certain faculties that have not done that then please advise. – there are some parents have come back and said their children have not had that conversation think that is what is raising some of the queries as some parents are still unaware of where their children sit in relation to performance as we lead up in to predicted and estimated grades.
* A discussion has been had with guidance team and if young people were concerned about the content of the learner conversation or perceived lack or if it has not happened then of course they can speak to class teacher and PT of guidance for overall wellbeing point of view they are encouraged to do so.
* A lot of questions from parents in understanding how professional grades are going to be arrived at – does it vary from subject to subject what is going to be used as evidence – Yes it has to there is no one size fits all just to the very nature of different subject and different content and methods vary. Would be exactly the same on a normal SQA exam diet.

6. P7 Transition

* Not much change to the last minutes trying to work around a day when we can try and have the young people in the building and indeed the P7 parents in the building. There will be a letter going out P7 parents in the first week of May and then another one in the first week of June updating them. Enhanced transition for those with additional support learning requirements that is ongoing at the moment and those young people will be visiting the school. Overall transition probably still looking at virtual things and still, at the moment leaning towards the Monday and Tuesday of the first week of the summer holidays for a very similar input to what we saw and what Dave and others were part of last year.
* It’s difficult because the in service days were an option to get young people in to the building but some are quite nervous of going in to one building from another building at this point in time. A firm decision will be made on that in the next 2 to 3 weeks.

Parent council would be keen to get involved 1 to assist and 2 to give a quick input but keep us updated.

* This year the exec team have pulled together they are going to do along with Sam Murdoch, History teacher, were going to do a day based on the school values for the P7’s who are coming up which is meant to, be maybe, in the next couple of weeks – obviously that isn’t happening but they have put together a video on the school values this will be shared with the primary’s in due course.

Questions

Q. There was a question whether the parent council will be providing some sort of question and answer opportunity for parents would this be helpful as a separate event on Zoom to give them an opportunity to speak to other parents all the normal questions like uniform, how do they go in to school, what happens at lunch would this be well received?

A. Absolutely, key thing would be what is the purpose and will it be a Zoom event open to all P7 parents. What was found last year with the virtual transition was the more control you have over it the better i.e. one platform to work on and that seemed to work reasonably well – Helen and Fraser to look in to this further

7. Subject choice updates and time line for new timetable

* Ideally 1st week in June for new timetable - any further update or just as per the answer that you gave already?
* Difficult to say when we will start the new timetable as we will still be in the process of getting pupils assessments. There is an issue with SEEMiS, this is being looked in to on an Aberdeenshire level, when you change the timetable that’s when all of the leavers are taken off the system by that time all the SQA entries are in and away and everything you have to do on SQA connect has already been done by that stage bit this year it won’t be. We can potentially lose our leavers so if we change the timetable those pupils that have left school are not on the new timetable on our system so potentially we could lose the levers and their SQA record. That’s a real sticking point we will have to wait for some guidance from the authority. There is an Aberdeenshire Secondary Heads meeting on Friday and this was a question we posed at the last meeting before the holidays hoping to get some resolution.
* We have a working draft of the new timetable. More seniors returning than normal so have had to create additional classes. With the additional pupils in S4, S5 and S6 have had to reconstruct S1 to free staff up. Added to S1 is a period of digital learning in light of the ways we have been learning this course will be designed to enhance digital learning skills.
* Mr Cowie is confident with the draft as its stands. The senior phase is looking more like a senior phase now. This year for the first time we could have a class with S4, S5 and S6 doing the same course.

Q. Is there still a chance that some pupils may have to be spoken to because they won’t get their first choice or has Mr Cowie been able to work that aspect out?

A. That is what he has been doing for those pupils that we haven’t been able to fulfil their first choice, he has been working with guidance and parents, all conversations have been had. Very positive that the discussions have been ongoing.

Q. When can leavers stop attending daily classes?

A. If they are 6th year they can leave anytime they want, obviously once assessments are done and there is nothing else to do in the class because they are over the leaving age they can leave anytime they want to. When we have an event for 6th years hopefully they can come back for that even though they have maybe left school.

4th year once 31st May comes technically they can leave school but if there is anything outstanding and we still need them to be around for we would be asking them to come back for that. If they wanted to go and get jobs and things that is fine they would be invited back on the occasion that we had an event or they had something to finish off.

Q. What is the likelihood of there being computer studies on the Ellon timetable in the future or is there still work to be done on that?

A. We don’t have a computing teacher and/or staffing budget doesn’t allow for us to increase the staffing in the Business Education faculty at the moment.

Q. How will 6th year leavers hear about their provisional grades?

A. We are awaiting guidance from the local authority.

Q. The question paper that was out talked about going over the question papers after the grades were out for the senior pupils – how does that work with the leavers? They might want some feedback on that can they come back to school and will they in fact know when those conversations will be happening so they can come back?

A. We would absolutely make them aware of when that was happening. It will be tricky to give feedback immediately after an assessment once it has been marked as there might be another group doing the assessment a bit later on. We are trying to maintain the integrity of the process as well. We will have some sort of plan to accommodate that.

8. 2021 Leavers

* S6 leavers event planned for 1st week of June are there any more details or still a work in progress?

It is a work in progress but we know what we want to do. We want to have some sort of marquee outside with a BBQ part for them during the day and make it a really special event for them. Obviously we can’t have a prom for them. We want to do all the things that they would usually do like speeches etc. It is starting to be all pulled together. They have been ordering their hoodies and the year book is almost finished. We can’t have an official leaver’s assembly but we can have a social event outside.

9. Broad General

* Information has gone out to staff regarding being aware of the impact of lockdown on young people. Having an awareness of S1, S2 and S3 who have had less time in school than seniors and how hard it must be for them to settle back in to a school routine and have those boundaries. This has been circulated around staff as well as mental health awareness across the school and young people. We were prepared for some showing instances of challenging behaviour and there have been some instances of it.

Q. Are there any plans to catch up with lost learning for the seniors particularly those that are moving on to the next level up i.e. moving up to higher or advanced higher?

A. The staff will be trying to cover as much as they possibly can with the time limitations – once they have covered all the course work and they will be in to revision is there any extension materials that young people could be working on particularly if they are going on to study that subject an university – will discuss this with SDLT and PT’s

The month of June is really about consolidating skills that have been learned in order to prepare for the jump from Nat5 to Higher

Q. Does that mean the pupils will stay doing the same?

A. What happened last year as we were in lockdown up until the summer they stayed in the same classes? The timetable didn’t change we worked with them to do the next progress in terms of their next level up.

Sally Middleton – the expectations of university to reassure everyone there are some national level working groups that have been set up to look specifically at the changes in the qualifications. Those working groups will be setting out a group of recommendations which will go to all universities and colleges really highlighting what the difference in qualifications are encouraging universities around transition materials themselves for students coming in. Really taking account of the situation that schools find themselves in this year and looking at what we can do to support. It could be extra summer schools which are optional

* There is additional ICT.
* In terms of additional arrangements for the assessments - all in hand – Miss Booth has been meeting with Mrs Wilson. One of the questions was around special rooms and different provision. Each young person will get the provision they specifically require i.e. if they need a reader and/or a scribe they will be in a different room so the other candidates or pupils will not be disturbed by that reader and/or scribe. If they need 50% more extra time, again which would need a separate room – all in hand. There is a AA timetable all staff will have and they will be aware of all young people and their different needs and requirements for the assessment block – it’s the normal what they would have for any class assessment they will get exactly what they need.
* For staffing for ASL there is a post in the hub and also an ASL teacher post - Mrs Wilson quite encouraged by applications
* All transitions will be catered for

Q. Will the assessment block affect the BGA pupils? – It won’t it will be business as normal for them no change at all

11. Mental Health and Wellbeing

Most points have already been covered.

* It is on the SLT agenda for tomorrow – brainstorm for anything else that can be done whilst assessment block is running whether it is providing drop ins or down time.

Q. In relation to pupils undertaking assessments will that be in proper exam conditions where there will be a clock on the wall and invigilators which we know will ben teachers and not being disturbed – will it be formal exam conditions for the assessments?

A. Miss Booth is putting together a letter for parents there has been a letter that has come through the National Qualifications Group it is in draft format just now bet have been told we will get it this week so it will go out to parents this week also due a virtual assembly for S4,5 and 6. Tracey has passed on the information they feel young people need to know what to expect when there first assessments begin next week, things like that having a clock and who is going to be in the room – things like we can’t have PE classes out in the plaza if there are assessments in all the English classrooms and the windows are open – S4 and S5 don’t really know what an exam condition is.

Q. There will be some classrooms that pupils sit along the wall that won’t be able to see the clock. In normal exam times we have the luxury of being able to move people around so that everyone can see a clock

A. We can put a digital clock on the black board

Q. Pupil access to the school at lunch time – there are a few comments because of the weather being poor is there a formal process or procedure in place for this?

A. Pupils get their lunch from the canteen if they are getting an in school lunch and take it out with them but the doors are open staff are there and pupils can come back in and out and get in to the canteen if they want something else . We close the doors beside the theatre and beside the art rooms so they cannot go any further. If there was really poor weather we would have then inside we can’t have them outside in the wind and rain and getting soaked they would go to their zones. Being outside at lunch time gives pupils a chance to take off their masks and get fresh air

Q. Few questions asking what the reasoning is and do they get a choice i.e. do they get a choice to stay in or go out – presuming the reasoning is if it’s nice they got outside?

A. Yes that is correct

Q. The new tables that we have got are they able to be wheeled outside?

A. They could but it results in additional janitor time and they will only seat 80 pupils. System seems to be working okay at the moment but it is always under review.

Few parents have said their children are not eating because they are outside in the wind etc.

Q. Are there any exceptions?

A. The Hub pupils are inside

Q. Can parents contact guidance if there is any particular issue?

A. Yes that is always the default

12. AOCB

Q. Is the comfort cabinet is still in use and if there is anything required for them? Are the school allowed to accept donations at the moment?

A. Not sure if we can accept donations at the moment with the 72 hour quarantine. It is such a positive thing the comfort cabinet but cannot accept donations. The people that have been using the cabinet regularly have been identified and are being supported. Have had lots of offers of donations for the comfort cabinet over lockdown, most we have ever had. It will be operational again when allowed.

Q. Could there be an Amazon wish list so goods came straight to the school for the comfort cabinet?

A. Fantastic idea but not sure of the ins and outs of how that would work. To have discussions about it as it would come direct so no middle man so to speak.

Q. Question from Parent Council Facebook Page – Fusion App problems – we understand it is an Aberdeenshire Council wide issue at the moment – any update as to how long that is to be out of action for?

A. Email communication from canteen supervisor it will be out of commission this week and next week hopes it should be back on line after that. Think it is because the menus and ingredients in terms of more healthy options – it would seem that the previous items that were on the lists are still on the app

Q. Parents are still having problems adding money to cards

A. Will feed back to Aberdeenshire Council parents are still having problems

Q. Clarification for PE rules – what happens if a child is unable to do PE do they need a note for every time? Particularly for the parents of the younger children in the school who are unsure of how the PE department works

A. PE is going back in doors as of 26th May still no changing rooms and pupils to come in their kit. If a young person is injured or ill or not fit to take part all they need to do is correspond with their class teacher

Q. is there an official system where parents are required to write in to wither the guidance teacher or PE teacher or is it totally down to the child communicating?

A. Will check that as it wasn’t previously - even if you were injured or you weren’t well you would still bring your kit to help referee or to help in some way to participate. Will check with Mark Lawson and get back.

It was just to let parents know and therefore encourage their children to do the right thing.

On the chat it was suggested by Vicki that we put this into the P7 transition information which was thought a good idea

Q. What are your thoughts about only 35% choosing to test?

A. Surprised the uptake was so low it was expected to be higher. This is a pupil/parental choice we can only encourage. Highest uptake is in S4 and lowest uptake is in S1. Thought the highest uptake would have been in S5 and 6.

Q Is there a possibility of afterschool clubs like football starting up once there are fewer restrictions?

A. On the agenda for meeting tomorrow. We have said yet to things like homework clubs and drop in sessions for different subjects, study support sessions. Said yes because we feel that it’s really important if young people want to benefit from those but need to decide if we go ahead with extra-curricular. As an SLT we need to decide if it can be some and not others because some teachers will be quite confident and others not so regarding the risk of infection. Will feed back

Q. Do you know if the music groups are likely to start up again next term?

A. Mr Birse would really like to do that. One question wasn’t answered in the list and that was about creative arts awards. Mr Birse advises that the criteria for the creative arts awards is all based on participation and extra-curricular and they haven’t been able to do that in or out of school with the very nature of music and singing. He feels it’s not appropriate to go ahead with creative arts awards this year. The criteria for the sports colours is different so that’s why they were able to go ahead last year

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

1. Next Meeting

9th June Agreed for next meeting