

Ellon Academy Parent Council Meeting Minutes

16th June 2020

All participants again took part virtually due to current Government guidance on social distancing. The attendees were restricted to Senior Leadership Team from the school, the current Committee members and on this occasion, three of our local Councillors.

Attendees: N Topping (Chair), D McCulloch (Vice Chair), K Gray (Previous Chair), H Wilson (Acting Secretary), P Buchan (Rector), T Booth (Depute Head Teacher), F McLachlan (Depute Head Teacher), P McCabe (Depute Head Teacher), S McGill (Business Manager), Cllr G Owen, Cllr I Davidson, Cllr A Kloppert.

Apologies: A Blanchard (Treasurer)

(Cllr's Owen, Davidson and Kloppert were able to attend as they were in a position to provide specific additional information relevant to this meeting which was considered important. Cllr Owen is the Chair of Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children Service's Committee)

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

These were posted on the Parent Council Facebook Page on Monday 8th and Tuesday 9th June 2020 (due to an immediate correction being required). We have received notification of a further requirement for correction. Mr R Lees in our Maths department is moving to a new job at another school (he is not retiring as previously noted). All present were content with the accuracy of the rest of the minutes.

2. Treasurer's Report

No update is provided at this time.

3. Rector's Update

Recruitment

In the last update, we were informed that we had been allocated six probationer teachers through the usual process. The school can now inform us that four of these teachers have chosen to join us to cover the following subjects:

- Biology
- Drama
- French
- Modern Studies

The school have been proactive and managed to fill the other two vacancies to ensure that we approach the new term with as full a teaching team as we can:

- Chemistry – [Science](#) supply teacher has been secured
- Physical Education- a candidate who was previously interviewed for one of the PE teaching jobs has agreed to join the team.

Previous Questions

The school is continuing to follow up on questions asked at the previous Parent Council Meetings.

Timetabling Challenges for August

PM provided an illuminating and comprehensive presentation (complete with slides) to explain some of the challenges involved in creating a new timetable for the school which will ensure that as many pupils and staff can return to the school building in August.

We started by looking at a sample timetable and it was explained that many aspects will require to be altered before it will work in our “new normal”.

Laurence Findlay has used the analogy of attempting to put together a complicated 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle with some of the pieces missing and no picture to follow as schools throughout Scotland attempt to create a helpful plan which makes sense now, can take into account all the changes which may happen between now and August and can be altered at short notice. This is a huge ask for each team who is trying to produce these plans.

The aim for Ellon Academy is to prioritise safety for all, while also maximising the amount of face to face in-school teaching each child can be provided with.

Planning for August has the following considerations:

- Minimising infection risk
- Allowing for advice on social distancing
- Providing a meaningful experience for the pupils
- It must be sustainable in terms of teacher workload (with groups of pupils simultaneously undertaking in- school and online learning, there is a danger of doubling the workload)
- Follows all Government advice – both at National and Local level.
- Allows for time for teachers to source and manage online learning
- Retains a pupil’s previously decided personalisation and choice.

All of this (particularly the rules on social distancing) means that most classes will need to be split into much smaller groups and this in turn requires the school to consider a “Rota of Learning”, meaning:

- This may involve an adaptation to the school week (but not changing start times or end times)
- It may involve pupils having more double periods of subjects (to reduce the contact with multiple adults and maximise learning opportunities in each subject)
- A blended approach is likely to involve pupils having some time in school and then some time at home.

The Challenge:

PM provided a really helpful practical explanation of the challenge faced when adapting the timetable by providing an example:

Within a year group, 56 pupils opt for German.

From this, two classes of 28 pupils can be formed (or 1x 26 and 1x 30) etc. depending on requirements in previous years.

These same 56 pupils still all want to study German, but this year, due to social distancing, the school can only fit 8 pupils in a classroom.

This means at best, the school now needs at least 7 classrooms to facilitate the teaching of German for these same 56 pupils and it does not have any more teachers to assist in this task. Multiply this by the number of subjects offered by the school, add in the specific difficulties faced in some subjects regarding hygiene / practical experiments, various year group differences, the number and location of pupils who need to be transported by school transport, further adaptations which may be required for pupils with Additional Support Needs and the understanding that at any time, both pupils and teachers may be missing due to track and trace notifications and you start to understand the complexities of the plan.

Questions asked:

Q: Has the Council given any specific guidance to schools?

A: Many of those with responsibility for timetabling in each school have been in contact with one another and this is providing some support, but we are all in slightly different situations depending on the style of school buildings, numbers of pupils, number of subjects on offer and number of teachers who may be available for face to face teaching in August.

Q: Do you know how many pupils can be in the Ellon Academy building at one time?

A: This will depend on many factors as discussed earlier. One of the problems we have is with the numbers of teachers we may have available – we want to have pupils receiving a meaningful experience when they are in school so we are trying to make sure we have a subject specialist available for each small class.

The government guidance does not tell you how to do this - we usually have the timetabling principle of maximise the number of pupils with the least number of pupils, but obviously the social distancing rules takes over. At the moment, we cannot increase staffing levels.

Q: Is the suggestion by Politicians that pupils should be in school for a minimum of 50% of the time realistic?

A: What we can assure parents of is that we have considered many different models and we have tested them to ensure that we are going to provide the best model we can for Ellon Academy. At various stages, we have thought that we had found a version that would work, but through the extension testing found that we needed to make alterations. The

final plan has to withstand continuing changes to guidance which we often receive on a daily basis and must be able to change overnight if necessary as local conditions alter. Our plans are in line with what we are hearing other schools are offering and have been approved by Head of Service and Director of Education.

Q: Some schools are looking at a day and a half a week – six days a month – this is a lot less than 50%.

A: We are still finalising our plans and have still to share the most recent one with key staff in the school as part of the collaborative process. Once this communication and feedback is complete, we will be in a better position to share plans.

Q: When will there be a definitive plan provided to parents?

A: We expect to provide this information to parents during the week beginning 22nd June. This timescale has been approved by Laurence Findlay Director of Education.

Q: Is the SQA / Education Scotland providing any guidance on changes to the National Curriculum?

A: We are awaiting guidance

Q: Are there any plans for pre-recorded classes or other resources to be provided at a National level (by Education Scotland)?

A: A parent mentioned that John Swinney had mentioned rolling out the Western Isles Platform across Scotland following some trials in the Northern Alliance in the Education and Skills Meeting from Friday 12th June (available online).

The SLT advised caution when considering this planned sharing of materials as there are many complications involved in this. There are 32 Local Authorities in Scotland and each one teaches the courses differently. This is one of the key features of Curriculum for Excellence. Also, due to different Local Authorities negotiating their own complex licencing agreement, there may be further challenges (as has been seen with the processes involved in attempting to change permissions to allow Google Meet).

The school understands that this is very frustrating for parents to hear sound bites from politicians and spokespeople (often gained from briefing papers recently released). The school has to deal with the realities of the situation – the legal position. What may sound like a good idea to politicians or parents may have obstacles which are difficult to overcome for teaching staff.

Aberdeenshire Council Update

- Councillor Gillian Owen informed the group that in these strange times, the Aberdeenshire Council Education and Children's Team is doing lots of work to try to make things fall into place.

- She mentioned that she is receiving feedback from parents who are hearing about the provision from Private schools and comparing this unfavourably with the state school offering regarding online learning – access to Zoom classes and personalised classes. She is delighted to confirm that Education Scotland has now authorised Aberdeenshire Council to use Google Meet to bridge the gap for the Local Authority’s schools. At the moment, the Council is completing Risk Assessments.
- A parent asked Cllr Owen how the Google Meet going live chimes with the restart of schools in August; who will be conducting the Google Meet sessions with pupils at home if the majority of teachers are being used to teach pupils face to face in the classrooms?
- Cllr Owen indicated that this is an operational question about how the schools would manage the process.
- Staff at schools in Aberdeenshire can access Google Meet now and trial it so that they can become familiar with it with a view to using it going forward to produce more interactive lessons – it will make explanations easier for pupils to understand.
- Staff in Aberdeenshire are trying many innovative approaches, using PowerPoints, using Loom (video with explanation) and the enhancement of using Google Meet and Teams will help too.
- The Local Recovery group (Aberdeenshire Council) is looking into Flipped Learning and is sourcing resources based on the Oak National Academy idea in England.
- One of the SLT suggested that providing resources suitable for more than one local authority may be challenging due to different approaches to teaching across the country and different Curricula.
- Cllr Owen asked if Ellon Academy has sufficient devices to loan out to pupils and if we there is suitable access to the internet for all pupils.
- TB confirmed that the school has completed the Aberdeenshire Council survey in relation to all the families they were aware of who required these.
- TB also confirmed that they have managed to support all requests for devices so far and have a small number of devices still available to lend out if there are more requests. The school is continuing to receive requests for support with devices at this stage – but not in the same numbers as at the start of lockdown. These are the situations we know about. If we receive many more requests, we will run out.
- The school has been in contact with Paul Cruickshank for some support with providing dongles for internet access, but he has advised that the Council is prioritising vulnerable pupils at this stage. This means that TB has contacted the Guidance staff to identify whether any of our pupils who are struggling with access to the internet would be classed as vulnerable.
- Some pupils are still not engaging with home-schooling. The school is aware that some families have been struggling with connectivity due to rurality, but it is believed that there are very few families without internet.

4. Co-vid 19 Update

Again, many questions have been received by the Parent Council from parents via the Facebook page, by email and through conversations. This week, we shared most of these questions with the school in advance of the meeting were provided with specific answers. These are shared below, followed by further information provided by the school in relation to questions asked during the meeting:

Home-schooling

1. Are teachers considering different learning styles when setting distance learning?

Teachers are working hard and doing their best to learn about the functions of Google Classroom and try as far as possible to vary tasks to suit different learning styles.

2. In some subjects, my child is getting work from multiple teachers, it is being marked by others. She doesn't really know who to ask for help when she needs it. In other classes, everything is done by one teachers and this is working much better.

Many faculties have part-time staff so the work load is shared amongst all teachers within that faculty.

3. My child does not yet know who all her teachers are yet. Can they be told?

The teachers who have sent the Google Classroom invites will almost always be their teacher but in some cases, the Principal Teacher may have sent the initial invites. The timetable will be very different in August and we do not know for certain yet which teachers will have the capacity to be in school on specific days.

4. What support is available if my child is having problems with technology?

A dedicated email address for ICT issues is currently being set up but in the meantime, please ask your child to contact their teacher via Google Classroom or call the PT Guidance.

5. All online presentation/teaching by law will need subtitles/signing next term....not sure when and what law but Colleges are now working on this. How will this be done by the school?

Aberdeenshire Council is looking into Google Meet for this purpose.

6. The answer to all parents calls for online teaching, using various platforms available, was always that the authorities in Aberdeenshire are not allowing it due to child protection issues. I get that even if some schools must be breaking the guidelines then? But could some lessons be pre-recorded by teachers, now they can access the school, and be viewed by pupils later? This would really help with explaining some more challenging math/science concepts to support home schooling. Are there any regulations stopping the academy of doing so? Perhaps it can be done at the faculty level rather than individual teachers?

Aberdeenshire Council is looking into Google Meet for this purpose.

Q: What proportion of pupils are engaging in online/ home schooling across Aberdeenshire?

Approximately 60% of pupils are engaging with their home schooling as far as we can tell. Ellon Academy is now trying to contact families where there has been non-engagement since the beginning of Lockdown. The school is already aware of some circumstances for individual pupils are families which have impacted on their ability to engage (illness, family bereavement, lack of devices or internet connection etc.) and our PT Guidance teachers have been providing support to many of these families.

Q: What is the school doing regarding pupils who may not be engaging with school work?

If pupils are not engaging with certain subjects, letters are now being sent to both offer support and to make individuals aware of possible consequences of continuing to fail to engage, including the school reviewing subject choices. If the pupils are now in fifth or sixth year, there is a possibility that the pupil may have decided to leave school but has omitted to tell the school. It is vital that all pupils communicate any such decision to the school in early course so that the school can prevent further letters or action.

Return of Pupils in August

1. What will happen to pupils who do not do social distancing?

They will be spoken to by a member of staff and if they continue they will be isolated and potentially sent home.

2. Will the school be notified officially if a pupil tests positive for Coronavirus?

Yes, via Track and Trace.

3. Will staff who visit other schools be moving around or will they have to be based in one school? (music instructors, ASN support).

We are awaiting Aberdeenshire Council guidance.

4. In the last minutes, it sounded like pupils would not be allowed outside during the day- is this right?

Pupils will require parental permission to go home for lunch. Pupils will not be allowed out to go to Tesco for example.

5. Denmark has lots of outside lessons now- Will there be outside lessons at Ellon?

We cannot guarantee the weather in this country.

6. Will there be PE lessons? Will my child need to come to school in his PE kit on those days?

There will be some PE. More guidance about school dress is to follow.

7. Will there be any after school sports clubs / teams?

Not initially

8. It sounds like the school is thinking of doing some subjects all online. Which ones are these?

Pupils will be able to experience most subjects in the school building with back-up on-line learning.

9. My child gets the school bus - will I be asked to drive her to school?

Aberdeenshire Council currently surveying parents about transport needs.

10. How will the fire drill be affected by social distancing and everything?

New Fire Evac procedures in place and will be tested at Fire Drills on the first 2 weeks back at school.

11. Will there be any social time at school when my child can talk to her friends who are not in her class?

No

12. Will there be a video of what the school will look like when they go back to help my child understand some of the differences- he finds change hard.

This is something which we can consider.

13. How will the new timetables be made up? Will my child be in classrooms with his friends?

We cannot guarantee that friends will be together. For example, pupils in 1C1/1.1 will be split into 2 groups. 1.1 (a) and 1.1 (b), so they will be in smaller groups of their register class 1C1.

14. How is teaching going to take place with the new blended experience? Will teachers be simultaneously teaching classes in school and online using available tools?

Teachers will be timetabled to deliver lessons in school and when they are not delivering in-school lessons they require additional time for preparation, marking, feedback and delivering on-line learning.

PB emphasised that the school has researched and developed many different models when considering the best approach for Ellon Academy. This has been very difficult to ensure that it provides the best opportunities for all.

PB is working on preparing a paper for parents to cover everything that we need to know for the return to the school building in August. This will include a number of areas such as catering, school transport and how pupils will move around the school building. She hopes to have this completed by the end of this term.

A parent mentioned the recent letter from Laurence Findlay and the introduction of the Flipped Learning approach to teaching. They described their understanding of Flipped Learning as being a very specific approach and that it can have some very positive effects for certain children, but equally, can make learning more challenging for others. The basics of Flipped Learning is that the pupils receive their teaching of concepts through written word and videos at home and then do consolidation and exciting group work in the school classroom to extend their understanding. They then asked if Ellon Academy is going to fully embrace this type of learning

for all pupils at this time. PB stated that Ellon Academy will not be doing this [across the board](#) as it would not benefit all the pupils.

National Strategies / Resources

It is useful for parents to have access to these two documents which the school is using to plan the return of pupils in August. They continue to receive daily updates:

- The link to the Scottish Government National Guidance is here:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-re-opening-schools-guide/>
- There is also advice published by the Scottish Government relating to the Scientific basis for the advice to schools:
<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2020/05/coronavirus-covid-19-schools-early-learning-and-childcare-settings---scientific-evidence/documents/coronavirus-covid-19-scientific-evidence-on-schools-early-learning-and-childcare-settings-26-may-2020/coronavirus-covid-19-scientific-evidence-on-schools-early-learning-and-childcare-settings-26-may-2020/govscot%3Adocument/Scientific%2BEvidence%2BSchools%2Band%2BELC.pdf>
- The Senior Leadership Team has continued to plan using the many aspects covered and will engage with parents when it is appropriate to do so.

Please see earlier part of minutes regarding discussion on National Resources. The school have not been provided with any firm information on whether any National resources may be available, and whether these will assist our teachers in delivering either the SQA courses or the three BGE curricula due to variations across the Local Authorities.

Broad General Education Pupils (S1 – S3)

1. **Will there be some kind of report for the pupils who received no report in 2020/21?**

The new calendar of reporting will start in the new term. We feel it would be unfair to report in retrospect considering the challenges that many families have experienced.

2. **Will there be PSE lessons to help my child understand all the changes and new rules in school?**

There will be induction school days at the start of the term for all year groups

3. **Will there be Parents evenings next year?**

We will await Local and National guidance

Last week, there was a document produced by Education Scotland on BGE. The school is currently reviewing this information.

Progress of all BGE pupils is being tracked by teachers as part of the usual school procedures and this information will be used in the reporting process later in the year.

Senior Pupils

1. Will there be Prelims this year?

We are waiting information from the SQA on courses and awards for next session. Also, this will depend on the relaxation of current restrictions

2. Will there be a Prom this year?

This will depend on the relaxation of current restrictions

3. What will prefects be expected to do when the school goes back? Will they be given PPE if they want it if they are required to supervise others?

Prefects will not be expected to supervise others until will are fully back to everyone in school at the same time

4. Some of the work being set seems really hard. My child is just avoiding the hard stuff and doing the stuff he can do. Is this ok? Will he get help to catch up when the schools are back?

Staff will support all learners to catch-up on return.

5. The SQA talked about asking for evidence of achievement this year. Are Teachers being asked for more than previous years? Will children be told what is and isn't being used? Will there be support for it? Will that have to be done in school, taking away valuable teaching time?

Teachers have been asked for estimates this year, as they have done every other year in the past. This SQA cycle has not been completed and we await the results in August. We won't use valuable teaching time to go over this. Some pupils will have many different subjects in their timetables now.

6. What support will be in place for senior pupils who are planning their next steps- apprenticeships, jobs, college, university? Will this be online rather than in person support? Careers Fair? UCAS applications?

Pupils will receive support with all of the above based on what we can do in light of current restrictions.

We are uncertain about a Careers Fair at this point because of social distancing measures.

SQA Update for Senior Pupils

Rob Fraser (North East SQA Liaison Officer) has stated that [it is unlikely](#) there [will be information](#) forthcoming this side of the holidays to provide any answers pupils, parents, teachers and SLT have.

This has left teachers across Scotland very frustrated. Locally, the school has encouraged teachers to highlight and raise concerns through the appropriate professional channels as it is difficult to plan effectively when teachers do not know what they are planning for.

Q: What is being taught this year?

As far as we are aware, all SQA subjects will be taught this year (subject to Government guidance on social distancing etc.)

Q: What are the timescales?

We have no information at this time – but we are pushing for information as quickly as possible.

Q: What is the exam format going to be and will they be at the same time?

It has been mooted that the exam diet may be a bit later in 2021, but there are very definite restrictions at this time on how far they may move (possibly by 2-4 weeks). However, nothing has been confirmed.

Q: What is the content of the courses?

Alison Robertson (Curriculum for Excellence Officer for Aberdeenshire) has [collated concerns and issues raised through subject Professional Support Groups \(PSGs\) regarding courses/course content and has shared this with the SQA](#). It is not yet known if the schools will be required to teach 100%, 80% or 50% of the courses – or whether this will be the same percentage for each subject. This is being pushed by teachers as it is key they understand how much of the courses need to be covered (and which bits).

Q: Will the prelims be the same – at the same time?

We have to assume at this stage that we will run some form of Prelims this year, but we don't know what they will look like or when they will be at this stage. We await information from the SQA on when the final diet of exams are planned for and for guidance on the content of these exams. We will then decide a suitable timing for Ellon Academy for Prelims (these may be later if the final diet of exams are pushed back). We also have to wait to find out what the Government guidance is on social distancing as this could have a big impact on being able to run prelims in the usual way.

We also await guidance on assignments for next year.

Q: Is the work being done by pupils at the moment and submitted online possibly going to form part of evidence for final grades?

Teachers are currently tracking progress of all pupils and we have every confidence in our teachers [to do this, despite the challenges posed by online learning](#). The SQA have stated that they will be realistic about the limited time pupils may be spending in schools over the next academic year. Teachers have been advised to gather evidence throughout the year regarding progress and attainment in case there is a change to the resulting process as there was this year.

Primary 7 Transition Pupils

- Open Days are being planned for all transition pupils. Many of the primary 7 pupils are both excited and apprehensive.
- Regular meetings are continuing with cluster Head teachers and p7 class teachers
- The Transition Facebook page is still being used to facilitate communication with primary 7 parents.
- Enhanced transition meetings started today (Tuesday 16th June). More of these meetings will take place week beginning 22nd June. These meetings are for pupils who have been identified by their primary schools as requiring this support. These meetings will include – parent, pupil, P7 teacher, Principal Teacher of Guidance, Teacher and when appropriate, Graham Wilson (Pupil Support Worker) or Tom Richardson (Support for Learning Teacher). The meeting will be chaired by either Fraser McLachlan (Deputy Head Teacher) or Mel Wilson (Principal Teacher of Additional Support Needs). Due to the current restrictions these meetings are planned to be virtual.
- Principal Teachers of Guidance have now phoned all primary 7 parents
- Permission has been granted to go ahead with our Open Days plans. These have been arranged for over the summer period (17th, 29th & 31st July) and all p7 pupils have been invited to one of these with one parent / guardian allowed to attend with them. These have been organised to provide our new young people an opportunity to meet their registration class. Each child has been invited in to the school in their class group for 1 hour for a presentation and tour of the school. Some of our marvellous departing senior pupils have kindly volunteered to assist. The school have also provided a “mop up” session which will allow pupils to attend on an alternative slot (31st July 1-2pm) if they cannot make their allocated time slot.
- If pupils are unable to attend these, virtual support will be available for them.
- The Open Days include information for new pupils about what their new school experience will be like.

The school would like to note the outstanding contribution of primary colleagues and to thank them for all their support during this challenging time.

A parent asked if out of zone primary 7 pupils have been included in all the transition work this year.

FM confirmed that all letters and communication has been sent to out of zone head-teachers and primary 7 teachers who have pupils transferring to Ellon Academy. Previously, this group has not been included in all transition work, but given the exceptional circumstances this year, it was decided that it is particularly important to include everyone.

The School Office has sent these letters out and the school has not heard of any problems with this process.

Sixth Years

1. Some parents are very disappointed that there was no acknowledgement from the school for the end of the S6 year and feel that S6 have just been left 'to get on with it', What are the plans, if any, to celebrate the sixth years and if there are when will we know about these and when will they be ?
 - We have some plans in mind.
 - We are also creating another Celebration of Learning which should involve some of We are also creating another Celebration of Learning which should involve some of We are also creating another Celebration of Learning which should involve some of
 - Jane Smith (one of our parents) has very kindly agreed to do the admin related to offering all of our leavers this year. The school is continuing to vet the nicknames and slogans for the back.
 - PB expressed **disappointment** relating to how terrible it is that this year, the leavers have missed all the events which usually mark the end of the school year – and that this has particularly been hard for our Leavers.
 - The school is considering other ways to mark the end of school for our leavers and are really hopeful this will be possible, the school will be in touch directly with pupils when these are finalised.

Additional Support Needs/ Shielding

1. If a parent decides not to send their children to school due to the children, parents or other relatives shielding, will their children be well supported by the school to continue full time distance learning- or will they be disadvantaged by this?

Yes, a specific code will be used to demonstrate these circumstances and no child will be disadvantaged.

Guidance / Mental Health support

1. Are Guidance teachers in contact with all the pupils? My child hasn't heard much from Guidance yet.
 - If you want to contact your child's PTG, please do.
 - Principal Teachers of Guidance are communicating with many of our young people.
 - Aberdeenshire Council provided a process at the start of lockdown which required schools to identify our most vulnerable pupils and there are some very specific criteria for this process.
 - Strategies were put in place for these individuals which have included weekly or bi-weekly check-ins.
 - The Guidance team continue to work very hard.

- They are also checking in on an ad hoc basis with pupils who would usually have more contact with Guidance.
- As in more normal times, the Guidance Team are spending a large proportion of their time with a relatively small number of pupils who need this type of support and have good relationships with these individuals.
- Each Principal Teacher of Guidance has up to 225 pupils under their care.
- They have to prioritise their workload.
- Parents are encouraged to contact Guidance directly if they have any concerns about their young people.
- On the return to school, wellbeing and mental health of all will be very important – pupils, parents and staff.
- Many families may be feeling isolated or worried at this time. Parents are very much encouraged to contact their child's Guidance teacher if you think that the school should know specific issues your family is dealing with or if you think there is anything the school could do to support your child at this time.

Transport

Q: Have there been any timescales provided to the school from Aberdeenshire Council regarding information about transport arrangements?

A survey is being sent by Aberdeenshire Council to all parents of pupils who have transport to school provided by the school. This is the start of the process and includes looking at how support can be provided for pupils with Additional Support Needs who currently receive transport to school.

Following the Parent Council Meeting on Tuesday, parents were provided (via email) with an information sheet entitled "School Transport (Covid-19)". The Parent Council received some questions in relation to this and passed these onto the school and received a very swift response. We have included the answers from the school here for ease of reference:

Q: Will my child be in the same day (s) every week so that I can arrange to work from home those days or negotiate with my employer to start later/ finish earlier and therefore provide transport? I cannot arrange to work from home every day.

Yes, pupils will have a rota based return to school but it will be the same day(s) every week.

Q: Will there be the same start and end times (so that I can arrange my work around this)?

Yes, because we feel that this is helpful for parents / carers / families.

Q: Will there be any part days? - Picking up at lunch time may be particularly awkward.

No. We made this decision to support families and young people.

Q: My employer is willing to be flexible but needs to know when I can commit to working so that he can make plans for us all returning to the workplace.

We have kept this in mind when designing our plan so that it caused the minimal inconvenience for families.

Q: I don't want to give up my child's space on the bus for an entire year if I then have difficulty in taking them to school and this may affect their senior exams.

All pupils (apart from those who are out of zone) will have school transport. I have questioned the “no transport for OoZ pupils”, but have been told that this decision stands.

Communication

- Communication continues to be vitally important.
- PB is providing weekly updates every Friday to ensure parents are aware of changes. Parents are continuing to find the content of these helpful, and also the fact that we know to expect these on the same day each week.

AOCB

Picking up Property from school and Returning Property to school.

As the school was closed at short notice and in difficult circumstances, there is some personal property belonging to pupils left in the school and the school is keen to provide families with an opportunity to collect this before the end of term.

Items include:

- locker contents (from current guidance, it is likely that pupils will not be able to use lockers during the next academic year)
- musical instruments
- medication
- photography equipment
- clothing
- Yearbooks for sixth years.
- Money refunds due

When pupils leave school (in 4th, 5th or 6th year), there is usually a “Leavers Form” which is completed to remind us of all the items which need to be returned to school. Furthermore, pupils across the school may have school property at home which will be required by other pupils next academic year such as text books or department leaflets. Hopefully these haven’t been disposed of during all the Lockdown clear outs which have been happening!

Library Book Amnesty

The School library is very aware that pupils may have books borrowed from the library and that when they log onto their accounts, there are mounting fines being displayed. The books borrowed are very valuable resources for us all and the library are looking at having a book amnesty whereby books are returned and fines are wiped from the record without payment being required. All families are encouraged to find as many library books as they can so that the librarians can be kept busy refilling our bookshelves in the school ready for the new academic year. The library is currently looking into providing various new ways of borrowing books going forward including an exciting click and collect service where you order your books like you order your supermarket shopping.

- The school is acutely aware that it must carefully manage any process which requires large numbers of families to attend the school. They are also aware that some families may not be able to engage with this process at this time due to a variety of reasons.

- SM explained a very detailed and incredibly well thought out plan of how this may be managed, paying strict attention to the current (and any expected changes to) social distancing and hygiene guidance. This included providing each household with a time slot (one to one and a half hours) in house groups – with an option that if your family has more than one house, they can choose which session to attend. The school has many plastic trays and plans to make good use of these in the process. Larger items will be dropped off and collected in plastic (or other) bags (named and marked with class details) and smaller items will be passed over in envelopes (again marked with name and class).
- A one way system has been proposed where families or pupils will enter on one side of the building and will exit on the other side for the comfort and safety of all. There will be queueing arranged with 2m markings outside to facilitate social distancing, and the inside of the school is already marked out with 2m spots and one way systems - although if pupils arrive at their given time slot, there should be minimal queueing.
- At busy times, it is hoped that we will be able to keep doors to the outside fully open, but the school has previously had problems with birds flying through open doors and therefore this will be monitored.
- All property to be picked up will have been in isolation in the sunken social area for at least 72 hours before pick up and gloves will be used by staff (who will also regularly use alcohol hand gel). Tables will be set up where staff can place relevant trays or items and then stand back to ensure social distancing at all times.
- Items to be dropped off will be put into empty trays and stored safely for 72 hours before they are touched again – as per current hygiene guidance.
- Full details and instructions will be provided by the school through the Xpressions / email system. It is expected that all families will follow the instructions to the best of their abilities. We must all care for one another at these difficult times and be aware that some families are facing more challenges than others.
- The school will not be requiring pupils to sign for items at this time – this process will be done on trust. It is considered that the signing process would add another layer of risk to this activity.
- Alcohol hand gel will be provided on entrance and exit of the building.
- This will not be a social activity – congregating on school property will be strongly discouraged due to social distancing guidance

SM asked parents present if they thought this was acceptable to attempt prior to the end of school, or whether it should be left until August.

- All present discussed the relative merits of each timeframe. Leavers will generally want their property back and to be able to return items as soon as possible to facilitate their move on to their future adventures. Some items would be of benefit to pupils over the holidays. If we wait until August, there will be many other issues being focussed upon and this may mean that some items are forgotten or lost.
- One of our parents pointed out that some parents are still working normal office hours and may find it difficult to make it to the school for a specific time slot.
- The school will take this into consideration before further information is released – an evening slot will be considered (although this is dependent on our magnificent staff at Ellon Academy volunteering to work during these extra hours at a time when we are already asking a lot of them). There may simply be the option to change your time slot.

- Another parent suggested using a simple electronic survey to consult with parents to find out if they would attend the school for this purpose – if only 50 parents are willing to do this at this time, it is not worth tasking several staff with facilitating this for an entire week. We need to be as efficient as possible given the number of tasks the schools are being expected to undertake at this time given the constant changes of guidance they are receiving from a number of sources.

Up-date

A survey has been set and will be available for parents this week.

Uniform

- The Senior Leadership Team has been discussing the school's approach to school uniform next term.
- There is guidance available regarding the importance of pupils wearing clean clothes which are easily washed as part of the increased focus on hygiene, but the school is also aware of the positive impact wearing a uniform can have on pupils and on behaviour in the school.
- The school asked for parental views on uniform.
- One parent referred to John Swinney's comments at the Education and Skills Committee on Friday 12th June where he highlighted that despite him being very much in favour of uniform usually, he was supportive of his own child's primary school who had relaxed the usual uniform rules due to the current Pandemic. As we are all encouraged to stay at home as much as possible, and not to go out to buy anything other than essential supplies, he stated that parents should not be required to go out of the house to buy school uniform as this is not essential at this time. Schools should be sensitive to this.
- Current guidance is that all clothes should be washed at 60 degrees if this is possible (to kill the virus if it is present) and this is certainly not recommended for blazers or ties.
- Parents are encouraged to take a part in helping pupils to choose appropriate clothing for school. Anything with slogans which may offend or would be considered not practical for participating in school activities should be avoided.
- Parents are encouraged to ensure clothing worn to school can be washed at the appropriate temperature if at all possible as a contribution to keeping us all safe.
- Further guidance will be provided by the school before the end of term.

School Uniform up-date

Ellon Academy is very proud of it's tradition of school uniform which reflects the high standards and expectations we have of our pupils.

However, in light of the challenging times we currently face, school uniform will not be compulsory during Term 1.

Pupils will not be attending school full time initially, and we have been given advice from Aberdeenshire Council to relax our uniform/dress code expectations.

This is a statement from Laurence Findlay, Director of Education and Childrens' Services, Aberdeenshire Council:

It is important that after such a significant period away from school pupils are supported back into their new routines as swiftly as possible with their health and wellbeing firmly at the centre of everyone's attention. Whilst the school dress code is an important part of that routine in many schools, it should also be acknowledged that the priority focus should be on ensuring young people are safe and well and ready to re-integrate back into schools. Young people should be asked to dress appropriately for school but given the pressures many families may be under at present; no undue pressure should be placed on young people to wear school uniform. It is appreciated that some young people may stretch the definition of "appropriate" and individual schools should work with young people and their families on what is acceptable and what is not.

For Ellon Academy, this means that pupils can come to school in more casual clothes, but the following types of clothing are unacceptable for school:

Unacceptable:

- Vest, low cut or crop tops with tummies on display
- Strappy tops. Shoulders and upper arms should be covered
- Shorts. Long length trousers/joggers/leggings etc are acceptable

For PE:

T-shirts and joggers/tracksuit bottoms should be worn on PE days.

We hope to be in a position to revert to full school uniform after the October break.

Face Masks

Q: will pupils and teachers be required to wear facemasks?

- Current Aberdeenshire Council guidance is that this is optional.
- Pupils and teachers can choose to wear facemasks if they wish.
- Health and Safety is of paramount importance.

- Pupil behaviour around this issue will be monitored.

Cleaning of School

Q: Will there be deep cleaning of the school and will specific chemicals or products be used?

- Aberdeenshire Council policy is for there to be no change in the chemicals or products used for cleaning.

There will be no increase in the amount of cleaning that is done by cleaners at this time.

However, the school will pay for additional cleaning if it is required. Focus will be on door handles, all work surfaces, banisters, toilets and floors

Further Changes due to Covid-19

- A Covid-19 Induction will be provided to each child on their first day back at school.
- Exactly the same information will be provided to all to help each pupil adjust to the “new normal”.
- If a pupil refuses to follow the new arrangements (which are in place for the health and safety of all) they will be dealt with quickly. If necessary, parents will be contacted to collect children from school.
- Ellon Academy is doing their own review every three weeks to ensure that all measures are appropriate and working.
- The Fire evacuation plan is now different – involving a number of alterations to what pupils are used to. Every pupil will take part in a Fire drill in the first two weeks back at school to ensure everyone has the opportunity to practice the new arrangements.

Q: What additional support is available for families who may be struggling financially at this time? We recognise that increasing numbers of families will be impacted by the economic downturn which is a result of the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Families who are required to shield (those who have received letters from the Government) are being provided with Government food parcels.
- Vulnerable pupils will continue to be provided with free school meals throughout the summer – these will be available at a pick up point.
- Emergency grants are available from Aberdeenshire Council.
- There is a local Foodbank in Ellon.
- Ellon Parish Church is also providing support for families who need it.
- Assistance is available with clothing – school uniform grants are available for families who are entitled to free school meals.
- Advice is available on Council Tax breaks, rent breaks, assistance with mortgage cost and electricity and gas costs.
- The Comfort Closet will be operating again from the school building after the summer (there may be new rules regarding hygiene and social distancing).

Finally, the Parent Council wishes to thank the Senior Leadership Team, Principal Teachers, Teachers and all other school staff for all the hard work they have continued to put into providing our children with an education. We very much appreciate the volume of work, the complexities of the many challenges and the difficulties of having guidance change on a daily basis.

Thank you!

Next Parent Council Meeting

- Next meeting date: 30th June 2020