

Portobello High School Parent Council Meeting 03 October 2023

Attendees

Teachers: Ruth McKay (Head Teacher)

Local Councillors: Tim Jones

Parent Council: Sharon Fairweather (Chair), Nancy Riach (Deputy Chair), Alison Adams, Anandan Tanabalan, Martin Corley, Lorraine Inglis, Kirsten Donaldson Wheal, David Atkinson, Joanne Macaulay, Claire Braidwood

Parent Forum: Ciara Gedik, Deidre Henderson, Jo Wishart, Esther Wilson, James Lewis, Fiona Heath, Neil Hargraves, Lesley Lawrie, Claire Jordan, Natalia Ng, Ola Bakowicz, Xanthe O'Brien, Stephan Eisenhardt, Petra Eisenhardt,

Apologies

Teachers: Andrew McCullough

Local Councillors: Kate Campbell, Joan Griffiths, Danny Aston, Alys Mumford

Parent Council: Lindsay Drybrough, Claire Haggett, Andrew McFadyen, Anne Steinberg

Previous Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 06/06/2023, were approved without amendment, proposed by Nancy Riach and seconded by Lorraine Inglis.

Parent Council Activity Update

Sharon Fairweather outlined the key aims of the Parent Council and the work it is currently doing, including the fundraising sub-group and the Communications sub-group, which is working with the school to develop a communications policy. The current Parent council is a very small group (14) given the size of the school (>1500), which limits the amount of work that it can undertake. It is always looking to encourage parents / carers to join.

Finance Update

Anandan Tanabalan has stood down as Treasurer to be replaced by Andrew McFadyen. The Parent Council bank balance as of August 2023 was £2,685.49. There is £1,300 due to be paid by Edinburgh City Council as the annual contribution for 2023-24. Easy Fundraising raises about £250 per year but is an easy method to raise funds and could potentially raise much more. Action for the Parent Council to promote further. There is now an event stock system in place so net profits raised from events can now be calculated.

Consultation

Attendees were asked to consider three areas:

- What are the key areas or topics that you would like to hear about during the school year?
- What do you think should be the key areas of focus for the Parent Council this school year?
- What is your preferred method of communication with the Parent Council? Do you use the Parent Council Facebook page? Do you use other social media channels and what would you prefer?

The outcome of the discussions is set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

Head Teacher's Update

Fundraising - Ruth provided an outline of three bigger ticket items as options for fundraising in response to a request from the Parent Council. These are:

- 50 JCL universal wireless keyboards for Support for Learning at £1,111, which would enable pupils who have ICT with learning functions as an assessment arrangement to practice touch typing and using a full-sized keyboard in advance of assessments;

- 8 sets of Genius Square XL and 9 sets of Prime Climb games for maths at £504.83, which support the development of strong numeracy skills; and
- a class set of littleBits STEAM Student Packs at £3,766. These kits of plug and play allow hands-on teaching of STEAM skills (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths) particularly in S1/S2, and would also be used by the S6 Science Ambassadors who are setting up a lunchtime group for S1 and S2 interested in STEM. There is a coding upgrade of around £2,000 which can be an additional add on funded by the school.

Attainment – Ruth reported that the school has achieved some of its best ever results in the latest SQA assessments, both for individuals and as a school, especially in the upper levels (S5/S6). This is evidence of a better depth of knowledge of the subjects being achieved by pupils since the school moved to a maximum of 7 courses at S4 level. Better depth of learning in S4 has translated to improved results in S5/S6.

New vocational courses – the school has a growing number of vocational courses on offer and has just introduced barista training which also includes modules around bakery, events management and business.

Changes to Exams - SQA has brought back all the pre-Covid requirements e.g. assignment in some subjects, two sports for PE etc.

Information Evenings – there was a really high turn-out for the two information evenings run earlier in the year for S4 and S5/S6 parents with good feedback on the events. The information provided has been translated into a booklet which has been distributed to families.

Assessment – Ruth confirmed that the Nat 5 prelims will take place before the Christmas break and the Higher and Advanced Higher prelims will be post the Christmas break. In future all assessments may take place before the Christmas break to allow pupils to see what exams are like and to give more time to put interventions in place for those not achieving the levels they are aiming for.

School Improvement Plan – the main focus areas in the improvement plan are communications, curriculum for inclusion, attendance levels (in common with schools across Scotland these still fall far short of pre-covid levels due to a range of factors including: mental health, parents working from home, holidays during term time etc. 20% of pupils attendance is currently considered concerning), positive relationships - including bullying and equalities.

Building – the school had the cookers replaced over the Summer. Thanks to Councillor Tim Jones for all his support. The swimming pool is back in use for school curriculum, the issue around light levels has a temporary solution at the moment but there is work ongoing on a longer term fix. Ventilation is still an issue and is with the council to progress, a number of classrooms have no opening window which has caused issues on very hot days. There is also a wider issue with windows - approx. 70 windows either won't open or won't close – the school is awaiting confirmation from the council that these will be addressed over the October break.

Supporting Brunstane Primary School – Portobello High School has provided a touch down space / photocopying / classroom space for teachers from Brunstane Primary School while the primary school remains closed.

Staffing – the school was fully staffed at the start of term – due to temporary positions being made permanent there is a need for a curriculum leader for social subjects. A post has since become vacant in FTT - supply support has been secured until Xmas and the post is being advertised. A Support for Learning post is currently being recruited for specialist supply support has also been secured for Biology. Deputy Head Teacher Alison Fotheringham retires in November, but the school has recruited her replacement – Miss Bannan has already joined the team, enabling a good cross over period. The City of Edinburgh Council is undertaking a review of inclusion in the city (including classroom and pupil support officers and education welfare officers) which may result in changes to the service currently provided.

AOB

Volunteers – the Parent Council are looking for volunteers to help with the refreshment stall at the school Cabaret Show on Friday 10 November.

Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday 21 November 2023

Consultation Responses

What are the key areas or topics that you would like to hear about during the school year?

Pupil Communications

- Communicating what is covered in class (subject content) so that parents can support their young person in each subject. Visibility for each term.
- Can the school share the pupils' timetables directly with their parents?
- Communications direct to pupils often get missed (the pupil may not be at school a certain day or not pick up on an important message in their Teams) – is there a way to ensure parents can also access this information?

In discussion, Mrs McKay (Head Teacher) confirmed that the school fully supported pupils sharing their Teams login details with their parents / carers so that parents / carers could regularly access the Teams information for each subject and pupils' emails. (But pupils must not share their login details with each other.)

Topics for future sessions

- Information on support for learning and how to engage learning support.
- School Improvement plan – content and progress through the year.
- Community police officer re on-line / internet safety. Police and school policies re drugs in school, vaping etc.
- Ipad information session for parents. Can more controls be built into the iPads e.g., automatically turning them off at a set time so that pupils are not accessing them for inappropriate use in the evenings? (In discussion it was felt that this would not be possible, as what would work for one family may not work for another, so parents should try to adopt alternative approaches to managing iPad time at home.)
- Opportunities for children – e.g., sporting, musical, DofE.
- Help in interpreting documents such as tracking reports.
- Future of school trips. (ERASMUS scheme has now been replaced by the Turing Scheme).
- Challenges the school is facing.
- Who to contact at the school re any issues. (All initial contact should be through the school office – admin@portobello.edin.sch.uk / 0131 669 2324)
- Calendar of events (now available on the school website – <https://portobellohighschool.org.uk/news-events/calendar>).

A request was made that if the school is doing single topic events for parents / carers, could they provide more notice than they do at present and could they vary the times so that individuals don't feel they are missing out on them all.

What do you think should be the key areas of focus for the Parent Council this school year?

Communications

- Communication between school and parents
- How do we communicate students' achievements?

Community

- Widening participation in the Parent Council. Is there a way that the Parent Council could send out a questionnaire that could be completed anonymously, which could also ask about engagement with the PC?
- Creating community.
- Pupil / parent event.

Other

- Fundraising priorities.
- Educate kids on social media.

What is your preferred method of communication with the Parent Council? Do you use the Parent Council Facebook page? Do you use other social media channels and what would you prefer?

Channels used – School Weekly Update, Facebook, Email, Text message.

Weekly Update

- Would it be possible to have separate emails on Parent Council issues, not just items in the Weekly Update?
- Current newsletter (Weekly Update) contains too diverse a spread of information e.g., baking stars as well as more important information.
- Could the Weekly Update include a rolling article of upcoming key dates for the Parent Council including when volunteers are needed?
- Could we post information included in the Weekly Update on the Facebook page too, as many don't read the Update.

Facebook

- Many people not on Facebook.
- Could we include a note of the Parent Council members on Facebook so that others know who to speak to?

Other

Could we have a WhatsApp group?

School App? (In discussion Mrs McKay confirmed that the school were exploring the use of a School App and will be sharing thoughts with the Parent Council Communications Sub-Group in due course.)