

## **Portobello High School Parent Council / Parent Forum Meeting – 12 March 2024**

### **Attendees in person**

**Teachers** - Kate Fraser, Acting Head Teacher

Andrew McCulloch, Curriculum Lead, Modern Languages

**Parent Council members** - Sharon Fairweather (SF - Chair), Nancy Riach (Vice Chair), Lindsay Drybrough, Alison Adams, Joanne Macaulay

**Parent Forum** - Esther Wilson, Lesley Lawrie, Claire Jordan, Kate Orton-Johnson, Alan Henderson, Nikki Isles

**Other** - Tim Jones, Councillor

**Attendees online** (22 names recorded of a maximum of 26 online attendees during the meeting)

**Parent Council members** Andy McFadyen (Treasurer), Claire Braidwood, Claire Haggett, David Atkinson, Anne Steinberg (minutes)

**Parent Forum** Alison Payne, Bridget Campbell, Claire A, Heather, Houda Marouf, Dylan Guilfoyle, Evonne Tweed, Jacqueline Gordon, Jenny Hunt, Jenny Hagger, Joanna Wishart, Lucy, Lynsey, Carys Macdonald, Michelle Welsh, Petra Eisenhardt, Shirley, .

**Apologies** Kate Campbell, Councillor

### **Agenda**

#### **1. Welcome and Apologies (SF)**

#### **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting - Tuesday 16 January (SF)**

No amendments were made. The minutes were approved - proposed Lesley Lawrie, seconded Nancy Riach.

#### **3. Parent Council Updates (PC Members)**

##### **3.1 PC Activities**

PC offering refreshments at Parents' Evenings had been successful and it had been a good opportunity for PC members to connect with other parents / carers.

The PC had been represented on the interview panel for the Head Teacher post. They had been invited to devise one of the questions, and asked 'What would your approach be to increasing parental engagement in a diverse school community?'

PC have also been involved in discussions around cuts to the Education budget, via the PC Chair liaising with a network of Chairs of Parent Councils across Edinburgh. A number of depositions had been put to the Council by other schools which Portobello PC supported in writing. Thankfully the final proposals actually resulted in an increase in budgets to schools. There will no doubt be continuous engagement on this in future years, but we are pleased with the result this time.

### **3.2 PC Financial Position**

£4,139.58 is the current balance further to income of £181.38 raised since the last PC meeting?

SF noted that we are close to the target for the final item on the agreed list of purchases for this year, this being the littleBits STEAM student class pack - plug and play components. It is hoped that this will be reached after the Spring Concert refreshments and raffle stall. SF therefore sought approval from those present to donate funds to this final piece of kit and this was agreed.

### **3.3 Fundraising update.**

The Spring Concert will have a Parent Council stall with wine and beer, soft drinks, coffees and teas. There will also be a raffle and raffle donations would be appreciated. Most of all appreciated would be some more volunteers, needed from 6.30 – 9.00pm from set up to the end, but even volunteers for a shorter time period would be great. Contact PC via the Facebook group or email [portyhighparents@gmail.com](mailto:portyhighparents@gmail.com)

Volunteers will then be wanted for the Sports Personality Awards on Wednesday 17 April and other events next term.

### **3.4 Communications sub-group update**

There is an exploratory project going on looking at a parent app for the school. This has been narrowed down to a single frontrunner. The app has three sections:

- a) Key dates
- b) Messages from school to all home - can be sent to either whole school, year groups or relating to a particular project
- c) News section.

There are various pieces of work to be done around this, e.g. will the weekly update continue as is or be replaced by the news section?

A test will be done with a group of parents / carers who do not have English as a first language to check accessibility of the app.

Timeline for introduction of the app can be fairly swift once staff have been trained.

## **4. Head Teachers update**

Acting Head Teacher, Kate Fraser (KF), noted how positive it was to have a hybrid model for the meeting.

KF is aware it's a period of transition with a new, permanent HT starting in May. KF is already in contact with the new HT to make sure he's aware of developments moving forward. She will make sure that all is communicated clearly for the new HT to take on. Some particular areas to report on:

#### **4.1 Prize-giving.**

School is keen to consult with parents/carers about this. Traditionally this has taken place before the holidays, meaning academic prizes are based on predictions rather than actual results. However, prize-giving based on SQA exam results in August may be less convenient as S6s will have left.

School are aware from feedback that prize-giving information isn't circulated within the full school community. Those not involved don't know about it. School want to ensure prize-giving is as inclusive as possible in recognising the skills and successes of pupils and the values of the school. Looking at including new prizes.

Question from KF to parents / carers is – would we prefer in June, or August? There are pros and cons to each and KF is keen to involve parents in this decision.

One possible model is to have two evenings – wider achievement-based prize giving prior to the summer and more formal academic achievements recognised after the summer.

Parents/carers attending meeting noted:

Sports personality and prize-giving happening close together sees the same young people awarded at two different sessions. Could criteria for sports at prize-giving be rethought to be more equitable?

Non-specific award – recipients don't know why they are getting prizes which can actually be a source of anxiety for some young people.

Advertising the list of prizes awarded would certainly be an improvement. Students can then see where their skills are valued - and highlight where they feel there isn't a prize for something they value highly.

KF summarised that prizes should encapsulate and capture all the skills and talents which are reflected in the school. Maybe with a completely separate prize-giving based on academic performance.

#### **4.2 School Building**

£12.5K worth of work has been done on the windows which weren't functioning properly. Has been a huge improvement. A major challenge had been that window fittings were difficult to source and as part of this process extra fittings have been ordered. KF thanked the PC for feeding into the process.

There are still some ventilation issues particularly with internal classrooms. The ventilation system is showing CO2 sitting very high. This was not a concern for young people who were there for brief periods, but teachers based there all day were concerned and Unions were involved in discussions with the Council. Post Covid we are very aware of the importance of good ventilation.

KF was asked if the school would benefit from HEPA filters in these areas. KF had not heard of these and welcomed further information.

There was no update for the swimming pool which has been functioning fine until now, but as summer approaches, there may be issues with reflections on the pool with the temporary ceiling. HT will be chasing that up to see what progress has been made in resolving the situation.

#### **4.3 School comms**

Work is ongoing on improving the school website. Henry the School IT Technician is doing a great job. KF's hope is that the website functions as the school handbook, with policies on uniform, bullying, comms etc accessible there.

The app would sit alongside Twitter for providing live updates, with the website as a platform for key information

KF has been in touch with someone who has been working in the community looking at ensuring the values and branding of the school are clear when engaging with comms from the school. She'll be handing this on to the new Head Teacher.

KF has been working on a simple communications policy – looking at who to be in contact with about different matters, setting out expected timelines for reply, etc.

The draft has been shared with the PC for feedback.

#### **4.4 School Improvement Plan**

Work on the next Improvement Plan is underway, looking at how the school is doing and where the school is with teaching and learning – imperative that school has best practitioners working with them. The plan is rooted in quantitative data, e.g., looking at attainment and attendance data.

Questionnaires will go to all young people and all parents/carers to capture views: Looking to gather feedback on where school is, what's going well and what are the things to focus on for next year's improvement plan.

On April 26 there will be a two-hour staff session for them to reflect and add their voices to the plan. Aspiration is that when the plan is shared, everyone can see their voices reflected within it.

Once questionnaire data is in, KF proposes pulling together focus groups of pupils and parents. Will also look at whose voices are not being heard: Who do the school need to be in touch with separately to ensure the views expressed in the plan are fully representative.

The draft Improvement Plan would be shared with the Parent Council for their input. There will be emails coming out around all of this.

The Improvement Plan is also a great opportunity to celebrate what is going well as well as to really honestly look at how we're doing.

#### **4.5 School trips**

The Edinburgh Council line is that schools can now run trips. However, there are rigorous criteria that schools must adhere to for any trips to be approved by the Council. Risk assessments need to be completed for all trips, from theatre/museum days out to longer residential trips. Criteria are as follows:

- a) **Sustainability.** Have to show all options have been explored, e.g. public transport such as buses rather than coaches. e.g. S6 trip – have to look at local options first, e.g. look at Bonaly before going further afield.
- b) **Equity.** Need to ensure there are no obstacles for any young person to accessing any kind of trip. School have to evidence that. Schools have to have an overview of providing opportunities for everyone e.g. if a small modern languages trip is running, school encouraged to consider how they could provide similar opportunities for others.

KF understands importance of trips for young people. She thinks there needs to be a clear policy around trips right across the school, and further work is to be done, around cost, teacher workload etc.

Conscious that current S3 year group and some S4s missed out on residential trips in P7 due to Covid, and this should be accounted for in planning resumption of trips.

Regarding the cost of trips, KF agreed that a donation button for the Inclusion Fund could be set up on Parent Pay.

#### **4.6 Class Charts**

Further to updates in the Weekly Updates, KF confirmed that none of the schools in Edinburgh that were using Class Charts could use it anymore. This had been an unexpected overnight change, outwith school control and is related to security concerns with Class Charts. There had been a serious data leak, and in England Class Charts had been hacked into by young people. Edinburgh Council had entered into negotiations with Class Charts but the sense is that the company were reluctant to take on feedback from the Council to make changes. As a result, the Council had decided that Class Charts does not offer a secure site for the sensitive data it contains. Can't guarantee the safety of young people so can't be used by any school in Edinburgh.

Meanwhile, 'greens and reds' merits are still being captured through the school SEMIS online registration system (which is a core system used across education for pupil data that is already in use across schools). They are looking at how to share this information with families. Merits awarded can be fairly easily shared via mail merge, but there won't be any description. Therefore while 'green' merits can be shared quite soon, KF is reluctant to share 'red' de-merits, when no additional information / context can be shared. Meanwhile school are looking at alternative processes for this, e.g. a certain number of de-merits in a week would trigger a phone call home.

There are alternatives to Class Charts. Holyrood High School use an app that shows homework but has wider functionality called Satchel One and the Holyrood High School Head Teacher will be sharing info about this.

KF is fully understanding of everyone's frustration around this as it is a very useful and helpful system.

The question was raised about how the additional needs of children, previously recorded for teachers on Class Charts, will now be shared. KF confirmed that the reporting system (Edict) has functionality to share this information for use by teachers in class: Staff can go on and look at their class list and this will show which young people have protected characteristics and / or ASN needs. Every class teacher can currently see this information and then access the related plans for each young person on another platform. School is 60% of the way through getting these plans onto the Edict system so that all the information is in one place, including pathways and strategies for each young person. The plan is that this be completed by Easter.

It was raised that in some cases Class Charts was also used where there was a 'home-school contract' in place for pupils with specific needs, ensuring rapid communication between school and home around any issues that had arisen, or homework etc. If anyone has a concern about their child, they should liaise with their Key Contact in the first instance.

KF reported that information on homework should be accessible on Teams under the "Assignments" function and that parents are allowed to access their young person's Teams account. Assignments for all subjects should be visible there. There are some staff who need training on this to ensure the system is being used consistently. It was suggested that it would be useful for information to be added to the school website to help parents / carers navigate their young person's Teams account.

#### **4.7 Policies**

##### **Homework policy**

There isn't currently a clear homework policy. Individual faculties set homework differently. There is research on homework going on into how impactful it is. KF asking staff to take this forward as there isn't a clear existing policy.

##### **Uniform policy**

There is a policy but it's not adhered to by lots of pupils and not challenged.

Important to have a meaningful policy - uniform can engender a sense of community, but there need to be choices, for example for young people with sensory issues a shirt and tie is uncomfortable.

There's been a period of consultation within school and a questionnaire will go out to gather the views of young people, parents, and staff.

Proposal is to gather feedback by Easter so KF can share with the new Head Teacher. She is aware that they need to do this quickly if changes are to be made for next year.

#### **5. A.O.B**

**5.1** Some questions had been put forward by members of the Parent Forum ahead of the meeting. Due to limited time these were shared with KF after the meeting, with the following responses:

- mobile phones - there appears to be an inconsistent approach to the application of the mobile phone policy in class in that "no phones during lessons" is not being strictly adhered to. Is there a reason for this and can this be addressed?  
*KT - The policy should be adhered to consistently and she will remind staff of this.*
- mobile phones - can they be banned in school for the whole of the school day?  
*KT - This will be a decision for the new Head Teacher – but she will pass this sentiment on.*
- study skills sessions - the sessions for S4 and S5 seem to have been well received. Is it possible to do these sessions for other years, e.g. S3 this school session so that they are better prepared for their prelims in S4?  
*KT - Absolutely agree. She will try and plan a session for S3 before she leaves on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. If this is not possible, she will pass over to the teaching and learning lead, Mrs Bulloch.*
- QR codes for mental health - is it possible to position some of these in more private spaces in the school so that pupils don't worry about other pupils seeing them use it? (The same would apply to other QR codes like the anti-bullying one). Could they also be added to the school website so that they could be accessed out of school hours?  
*KT - Yes, she has requested this to be added to the website*
- Is the school familiar with the social model of disability and if so are they working towards it by training staff? <https://inclusionscotland.org/get-informed/social-model>  
*KT - All staff have to complete mandatory training with regards to all aspects of inclusion, and meeting our statutory and moral duty to do all we reasonably can to meet the needs of all our learners, including many of the issues raised in the social model of disability. There is an on-going consultation across Edinburgh Council with regards to the vision for inclusion. She actively encourages all parents and carers to feed into this, to make sure all voices are heard with regards to the vision for inclusion moving forward. Information has been shared via the Weekly Update and on the Parent Council Facebook site.*

**5.2** KF is keen that parents/carers get involved with Edinburgh Council's inclusion review. In addition to face to face events, a survey is available live at <https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/cf/inclusive-education>

**5.3** SF concluded the meeting, stating that it has been a pleasure to work with KF and the Parent Council had been energised and excited by what she's brought into the school in the short time she's been here. Thanks were also extended by attendees in the room and online.

#### **5.4 Next meeting**

29 May: Final Parent Council/Parent Forum meeting of the year and AGM of the Parent Council. Some members will be leaving. Parents/carers interested in joining should get in touch via the email or Facebook page.