

Portobello High School Parent Council / Parent Forum Meeting – 16 January 2024

(Held in school)

Attendees

Teachers – Kate Fraser, Acting Head Teacher, Andrew McCulloch, Curriculum Lead Modern Languages

Parent Council members - Alison Adams, Andrew McFadyen (Treasurer), Claire Braidwood, Claire Haggett, David Atkinson, Joanne MacAulay, Lindsay Drybrough, Lorraine Inglis, Martin Corley, Nancy Riach (Vice Chair), Sharon Fairweather (Chair), Spoke Wintersparv

Parent Forum - Claire Jordan, Stephan Eisenhardt, Petra Eisenhardt, Alison Payne, Melissa Thomson, Jolanta Lisicka, Lindsay Isaacs, Lesley Lawrie, Marie Swinney, Fiona Schaefer,

(24 Participants Total – 2 School Staff / 12 Parent Council members / 10 Parent Forum)

Agenda

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies
2. Approval of minutes of previous meeting (21 November 2023)
3. Parent Council update (finance, events, current work programme)
4. Ms Kate Fraser, Acting Head Teacher
5. Parent Council – Communications Group update
6. Any Other Business
7. Date of next meeting - Tuesday 12 March 2024

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded attendees of the main aims of the Parent Council. A particular welcome was extended to the new Acting Head Teacher, Kate Fraser.

Apologies were received from Councillors Joan Griffiths and Kate Campbell.

2. Approval of minutes of previous meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved without amendment - proposed Andrew McFadyen, seconded David Atkinson.

3. Parent Council update

Since the last Parent Council / Parent Forum meeting in November the Parent Council has:

- organised parent representatives on the recruitment panels for the appointment of the new Head Teacher (both the initial recruitment for the permanent post, and for the Acting post);
- ran a raffle and refreshment stall at the Christmas Concert, raising £600 of funds for the school, half of which will go directly to the Music Department; and
- ran the on-line Christmas raffle, raising £1,300 of funds for the school. The Parent Council is extremely grateful for the generous donations they received from local businesses and individuals which made this possible.

Fundraising / events – the Parent Council will be selling teas/coffees at the S3 Parents' Evening on Tuesday 23 January. They will also be running a raffle and selling refreshments at the Spring Concert on Tuesday 26 March and the Sports Personality Awards on Wednesday 17 April.

There was a discussion about ideas for additional fundraising events, particularly those that would provide an opportunity to showcase work and achievement of pupils, such as art exhibitions, fashion shows and craft fairs. There was also a discussion on the approach to charging to ensure events were accessible for all, with the suggestions that providing opportunities for overpayment to cover costs for others, or no charge but a recommended donation fee be considered. The Parent Council will consider these and take forward discussions with the school, but in the meantime would welcome any other ideas from parents / carers of alternative fund-raising events. They would also really welcome additional volunteers to help organise future events.

Finance – as at the middle of January, the Parent Council had £3,958.20 in the bank, which included the funds raised in the Christmas raffle and the annual contribution from the City of Edinburgh Council of £1,300. All previously agreed distributions to the school have been made, including the share of the funds raised at the Christmas concert (£297 to Music Department).

At the Parent Council / Parent Forum meeting held in October, Ruth McKay suggested that the Parent Council may wish to fund the following items for the school:

- wireless keyboards to allow pupils who need additional assessment arrangements to practice touch typing etc. on a full-sized keyboard - £1,111.
- Maths Genius Square XL and Prime Climb maths games - £505.
- littleBits STEAM student class pack - plug and play components - £3,766 (school has said they can fund additional add-ons).

The Parent Council has now fully funded the first two items and is aiming to raise sufficient funds to cover the cost of the littleBits STEAM pack as soon as possible. It is confident that it will be able to raise the funds required and is in discussion with the school as to whether the school can purchase the pack ahead of receiving the funds from the Parent Council, so that the pupils can benefit from the kit sooner rather than later.

The Parent Council has received a lovely selection of thank you cards from the pupils who have been using the new maths games and are delighted that they have been purchased so quickly and are being enjoyed so much.

4. Ms Kate Fraser, Acting Head Teacher

Kate told us a bit about her background. She is the mother of two children who are currently in S6 and S3 at Firrhill. She is from Liverpool and read History at Edinburgh University. She worked in the educational side of the arts for a while before doing her teacher training and moving into teaching History. She has been a teacher for 23 years, mainly at Royal High. She was the Curriculum Lead for a period of time before becoming an Acting Depute Head at Balerno High School. She then transferred back to Royal High as a Depute Head about 7 / 8 years ago. She has also completed her Masters qualification required to become a Head Teacher. Her senior leadership roles have covered a wide range of aspects such as teaching and learning, child protection, safeguarding and well-being.

Her top priority is to ensure that the very best teacher is in front of each child. She is passionate about the quality of teaching – and professional education for staff - and very ambitious about what education can do for every child. She is also very passionate about working with parents / carers to ensure the best experience for families.

The advertisement has now been placed for the permanent Head Teacher position and closes on 25 January. (Kate is intending to apply for the permanent post.) Hopefully that means that a decision on the permanent post should be reached by Easter. (The Parent Council will ensure that there are suitable parent representatives on the recruitment panel.)

Kate covered the areas that she is keen to progress in the short term:

- website - there are a range of improvements that can be made to the current website to ensure that it is providing the information needed by parents in an easily searched and accessible format. Content should include, for example, school policies, contact information, and information to enable parents to support their children's learning.
- dress code policy - whilst the majority of pupils are wearing school uniform, and are therefore identifiable as PHS pupils, this is not universal. This gives rise to a health and safety issue in that not all pupils can be automatically identified as belonging to PHS. There is also a desire to develop more of a sense of community and belonging through the uniform. The school are exploring the potential to introduce a school branded hoodie, and the introduction of school badges that could be attached to other plain black sweatshirts, jumpers or cardigans. The idea being that this would give pupils the choice of wearing a shirt and school tie, or a school branded hoodie, jumper, cardigan or sweatshirt. Blazers would be retained for S6 pupils. The school will consult with parents / carers and pupils and any changes or updates to the dress code policy would only be taken forward following those discussions. The school are very cognisant of cost and equity, so are looking to ensure that the uniform is affordable. The aim is to introduce any changes to the dress policy in time for P7 transitioning and the start of the next school session in August.
- strategic – support to pupils entering the exam phase. The school are entering the build up phase for exams, and Kate is keen to look at the ways that the school can best support pupils who are at risk of not achieving their full potential. The school would also wish to look at the potential for running study skills events for parents and pupils together, and to provide more information on the school website around study support.

There was a good discussion at the meeting about these areas for improvement, with strong support for improvements to the website and for the idea of introducing a school hoodie. The need for a consistent approach once a new uniform policy is introduced was also discussed.

The Parent Council will look to seek volunteers for a small working group of parents / carers to work with the school on suggestions for content for the website. The Parent Council will also provide whatever support is needed on the consultation around uniform policy.

Kate is also keen for the school to support the move to hybrid meetings for future Parent Council / Parent Forum meetings, including the option to film the meeting so that the film can then be posted on the school website. The school will investigate this with hopefully a solution in place for the next Parent Council / Parent Forum meeting in March.

5. Parent Council – Communications Group Update

The Parent Council communications group has been working on a number of areas. The Parent Council logo has been updated, and discussions have been had with the school to look at developing improvements in communications - both ways - between school and parents / carers. Discussions are ongoing around developing a school communications policy and exploring areas such as a school app. However, it was agreed that improvements to the website would be the most significant aid in improving communications.

6. Any Other Business

A question was raised about school behaviour. Kate's view was that her impression from her first week in the school was that overall, the school was a calm place, with good focus on learning in class. Needless to say, there are always incidents that require addressing and an on-going focus on continuous improvement.

8 Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday 12 March 2024

The next Parent Council / Parent Forum will be held on Tuesday 12 March. This is due to be held online, but the Parent Council are hopeful a hybrid option will be possible with the school. Further information will be issued nearer the time.