

## **Portobello High School Parent Council / Parent Forum Meeting – 29 May 2024**

### **Attendees**

Teachers: Mr Greg McDowall (Head Teacher), Andrew McCulloch, Head of Modern Languages

Local Councillors: Tim Jones

Parent Council (PC): In person - Sharon Fairweather (Chair), Nancy Riach (Deputy Chair), Andy MacFadyen (Treasurer), Alison Adams, Martin Corley, Lorraine Inglis, Lindsay Drybrough, Claire Braidwood, David Atkinson, Anne Steinberg, Spoke Wintersparv. On-line - Claire Haggett, Joanne Macaulay, (total 13)

Parent Forum: In person – Esther Wilson, Jessie Davy, Bridget Campbell, Nikki Isles, Mary Campbell, Stephen Eisenhardt, Lesley Lawrie, Sally Mackay, On-line – Aileen, Alison Payne, Amanda Edwards, Amie Fraser, Andrew Ruck, Claire Duncanson, Claire Jordan, Colin Ross, Cordelia Beattie, Dylan Guilfoyle, Elvira Marina, Euan Byrne, Evelyn Mitchell, hello (name unknown), Houda Marouf, Jacqueline Gordon, Jenny Capon, Jo MacDonald, Jo Worrall, Joanna Wishart, Jolanta Lisicka, Kate Orton-Johnson, Lara Celini, Liz Creelie, Lynsey, Michelle Welsh, Miriam Leighton, Neha, Ola Bakowicz, Onyedikachi John, Paul Ewing, Polly Laird, Shirley, Shirley, Stephan Eisenhardt, Susan, Trudy (total 45)

### **Agenda**

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies
2. Approval of minutes of previous meeting (12 March 2024)
3. Mr Greg McDowall, Head Teacher
4. Any Other Business
5. Date of next meeting

#### **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 Head Teacher, Mr Greg McDowall.

Apologies were received from Kate Forbes – Councillor, Iain Whyte – Councillor, and Kirsten Donaldson-Wheal – PC Member.

#### **2. Approval of minutes of previous meeting – 12 March 2024**

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved without amendment - proposed Andy MacFadyen, seconded Claire Braidwood.

#### **3. Mr Greg McDowall, Head Teacher**

Greg gave a presentation setting out his vision for the school and key areas of focus. Key points included:

- He wants to build the school community beyond the confines of the school, recognising the sense of community that already exists within Portobello and beyond.
- His view is that City of Edinburgh Council's aspirations for education are very ambitious and that the schools are well supported.
- He has been reviewing the results of the recent surveys undertaken with pupils, staff and parents / carers to determine key areas of focus for improvement and discussing these with his staff team.

- He is keen to engage as much as possible with the young people and staff and feels that the school has the core ingredients for success. He is looking to improve the visibility of leadership across the school and to improve transparency with parents / carers so that every parent / carer understands the learning that is taking place and feels connected with the school.
- He sees the potential for a great school that needs better connectivity, for every child to have a good experience and is looking to provide experiences tailored to meet individual learners' needs including an agile curriculum, access to outdoor education and excursions.
- He is looking to improve the collaborative approach both within the school and in the wider community and wants parents / carers to have confidence that their young people will achieve the best outcome for them, so building trust and pride in the school.
- He wants to ensure the school provides the right pathways and where it is not working then there is a need to change it.
- He is looking to encourage innovation and creativity within the staff team to ensure curriculums move with and mirror changes in the outside world e.g. with regards to Artificial Intelligence (AI). He also wants to develop new approaches to the curriculum to be more flexible, from S1 onwards, so that the best outcomes can be achieved from S4 onwards. In particular he is keen to drive up the level of achievements gained across all social groupings – particularly where current performance does not meet expectations - and reduce the number of young people leaving school with no qualifications. He is also looking at ways to enhance the S5/S6 experience.

Other issues that were discussed included:

- **Reporting system** - a new reporting system will be implemented in the autumn, which will aim to ensure that every parent / carer has clear and easily understood information on their young person's progress.
- **Year-groups** – a horizontal model of year groups has been implemented to replace the previous vertical model of key adult groups.
- **Pupil voice** - a new pupil parliament will be set up to ensure the pupils' voice is heard.
- **Development of new policies** - Greg would like parental / carer and Parent Council involvement in the scrutiny of new school policies prior to implementation – information will be made available in due course as to how parents / carers can become involved.
- **Supply teachers** – it was recognised that there had been a need for a high volume of supply teachers in 2023-24, but the position on permanent staff was looking more encouraging and the expectation is that this will reduce in 2024-25.
- **Digital technology charter** – there is a need to develop a charter, particularly around the use of iPads in school, including access to games etc. during class time. Parents / carers were encouraged to contact the Curriculum Lead if they had concerns about how iPads were being used in any particular class.
- **Use of phones in school** – Government guidance is due shortly, although this is not expected to include the banning of phones in school. In the meantime, the Parent Council asked that the school ensure that there is a consistent approach to the implementation of the school Mobile Phone policy. It would also be useful if this policy could be made available on the school website.
- **Uniform** – the new uniform policy will be issued shortly. It was agreed that it should include the option to wear a plain black or white t-shirt under a school branded hoodie.
- **Awards Ceremony** – the Awards Ceremony for S1-S3 will take place on 26 June, but the school is considering the timing of the Awards Ceremony for S4-S6, which will take place after the summer break (once SQA exam results are known).
- **Communication** - there are a number of staff now involved in looking at improving parent and carers, pupil, staff, feeder primary schools and community communication. This has already included attending community council meetings, a weekly bulletin for staff, a weekly pupil assembly in person and online, a revised weekly newsletter, a monthly online surgery for parents/carers and a new customer service charter with more improvements coming.

- **Scrutiny Panels** - Looking for a wide range of parents and carers to get involved and help the school to improve
- **Investment Programme** - There are a wider range of areas the school is investing in to open up access and provide new furniture and creating new spaces around the school as well as widen the usage of facilities such as opening up the football pitches for use at lunchtime etc.

#### **4. Any Other Business**

The Parent Council would really welcome additional volunteers to help out at future events, particularly at the upcoming school shows on 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> June and the Awards Ceremony on 26<sup>th</sup> June. They would also welcome any contributions of raffle prizes. The Parent Council can be contacted via the FaceBook page (Portobello High School – Parent Council), email at [portyhighparents@gmail.com](mailto:portyhighparents@gmail.com), or via the school admin office [admin@portobello.edin.sch.uk](mailto:admin@portobello.edin.sch.uk).

Sharon Fairweather (Chair) confirmed that she is standing down from the Parent Council and Greg and the Parent Council members thanked her for all the work she has done over the last 5 years.

#### **5. Date of Next Meeting**

The next Parent Council / Parent Forum will be held in the autumn term, at the start of the 2024-25 school session. The date will be confirmed once the school calendar has been agreed for 2024-25.