



Minutes of Meeting of Balerno High School Parent Council 23 January 2017 at Ratho Primary School at 6.30pm

PC members

Andrea Brewster (AB), Jessica Bryce (JB), Tony Foster (TF) (Chair), Mike Humphries (MH), Sanjay Kallat (SK), Paula Miller (PM), Marion Milne (MM), Christine Paterson (CP), Peter Reekie (PR)

School staff

Neil McCallum (NM) (Headteacher), Lisa Coffey (LC) (Depute Headteacher), Michelle May (MM) (PTC – English, Media & Drama)

Senior pupils

Calum Greer (CG) Head Boy

Public

Ricky Henderson (RH) (Local Councillor), Claire Dixon (Ratho Primary Administrator), Mandy Irvine (Parent)

Apologies

Peter MacLean, Rehana Shanks, Naomi McLeod

Introduction and Welcome

1. The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees.

Minutes and Matters arising

2. 2.1 No changes were suggested to the last minutes. Proposed by Jessica Bryce, seconded by Paula Miller.
2.2 No specific matters were addressed at this point as everything would be covered by agenda items.

Headteacher report

3. Neil McCallum gave his report.

Particular topics covered include:

- **Staffing update**

CL Maths part time post filled – John Ward successful candidate
Music Vacancy
Biology Vacancy
English Vacancy
PSA – Two vacancies filled

- **Events and News update**

Project Wonderland – All S2 off timetable for the week 5th December. A wonderful evening on Thursday 8th with a big turn out from parents and carers.

CABEC – 10 S2 pupils involved in the Building and Construction challenge, initial round held at Heriot Watt university, where they Qualified for the final at the Edinburgh corn exchange. Congratulations on their success in becoming Lothian champions.

Cool Crew – 8 S4 pupils attended a week intensive training with the Scottish Fire service at Livingston fire station. All were highly praised with 4 being recommended for the Phoenix training programme at Liberton Fire station. This is a two-year training course with weekly training to prepare young people for entering the fire service.

Christmas concert – a fantastic evening that was well attended and some inspirational performances.

Trips – MUN (Model United Nations) to Copenhagen and English S3 to London

Prelims – S4 / S5 / S6. All have gone well and the overall feedback is that pupils have achieved well and that good progress is happening to prepare pupils for the final exams in May. Feedback on the timing of return of results received after the S4 prelims and this was actioned for the S5/6 prelims. In future no results will be shared in any subject until the end of the prelim period.

Fundraising – Jaks Den throughout December £2,715 raised. Typeonesie day on November 18th £300 raised.

Building Works - This has been delayed and is now due to start after the February break!

C&B News – Sponsorship received from the C&B News for new girl's football strips.

- **Upcoming events**

Tuesday 31 Jan – Careers Convention

Wednesday 1 Feb – S4/5 Information evening

Wednesday 1 Feb – S3 Information evening

Thursday 9 Feb – S5/6 Parents Meetings

Friday 10 Feb – End of term

Monday 20 Feb – All return

Wednesday 22 Feb – S3 Parents Meetings

Head boy / Head girl report

4. Calum Greer gave a report on their activities in the school since the last meeting. Notable points include:

- Working alongside house captains to raise money for Jak's Den. Fundraising activities included a bake sale, Christmas candy canes, a Christmas jumper day and one pupil having their head shave (which alone raised more than £1000). The total amount raised was £2715.
- Leading the pupil council and working with Lindsay Fullarton to create a homework policy. Completing this will be one of the key aims for the rest of the year. There will be focus groups and also feedback sought from parents.
- Furnishing, equipping and decorating of 6th year area nearing completion and enjoyed by S6 pupils.
- Helping to set up an S6 prom committee and plan the end of year prom.

Other reports

5. 5.1 Marion Milne (Balerno Community Council) commented on the success of the Christmas lights in Balerno Main Street during the Christmas period and thanked the Head boy and Head girl for their involvement in the lighting ceremony.

5.2 Applications are open for this year's Louise Duncan bursary and MM asked for assistance in publicising it in BHS. Last year's recipient, Annabelle McDonald (now a former BHS pupil) will give feedback about her trip to Balerno Parish Church in mid February.

Course choices and timetabling

6. 6.1 Lisa Coffey gave a report on progress to date:

- In November 2016 the existing situation was evaluated. Focus groups were held with staff and pupils. The Senior Management Team used the feedback to design draft course choice forms which had the aim of allowing the majority of students to study the majority of their chosen subjects.
- Issuing the column choices to pupils is the next (not final!) step. The forms are part of the process of finding out how closely the course choice plans have 'hit the mark'.
- Staff, pupils and parents will discuss any unmet coursing options and senior staff will see how timetabling might work dependent on numbers of pupils requesting the same 'unmet choice'.
- LC commented that 'the process isn't final 'til it's final' with ongoing tweaks and changes occurring both in June and after the summer holidays when students have exam results.
- BHS senior staff are very keen to work with pupils and parents to make the process work!

6.2 NM added

- The school was reviewing the balance of the timetable for S5 & S6
- The school is exploring 'neighbourhood options' enabling pupils to access courses at Edinburgh College, West Lothian College and Queen Margaret University's 'Academy' courses. NM is in dialogue with Currie High School about shared transport options.
- Alongside choices and coursing for senior pupils there was the requirement to fulfil the E&O's (experiences and outcomes) of the BGE (Broad General Education). BHS staff were encouraged to complete level 3 work by late S2 / early S3 thereby allowing level 4 work and the beginning of the Nat 5 syllabus to be taught in S3.
- Maths and English will be offered in 2 columns for S5 and S6 choices to widen the combination of subjects pupils can choose.

6.3 Comments were invited from parents about their experiences of course choices and timetabling. Any responses by BHS staff are in *italics*:

- A request for information as early as possible
- Science - Appreciation that science allocation had increased from 3 to 4 periods per week for S3 pupils; could S3 science not be timetabled for a Monday as it meant many missed periods of a subject already feeling 'squeezed'; clarification that science was no longer being taught in 13 week blocks (allowing pupils to taste all three science subjects before course choices must be made in S3)
- Modern languages – surprise that studying one at Nat 5 level was not mandatory

- A need for ongoing communication and information on Nat 5 courses being a 1 year course (a deviation from most parents' experiences in their own education!)
- Reflections from current S4 parents that it has felt like a stressful year (for both pupils and their families)
- Clarification on the ability to choose music as an exam subject (demand was very low during last years' S2-S3 choices)

This was noted and all pupils who wanted to study music last year had been accommodated.

- Communication on why schools vary in the number of Nat 5s pupils are presented for
- Communication and clarification about the need to select subjects from each curricular area (and which subjects fall into each curricular area)
- Concern expressed over teachers having bi-level classes e.g. teaching Higher and Adv Higher at the same time, and the impact this has on learning and teaching.

This may be managed in future by exploring neighbourhood options (as per 6.2 above)

- Why do all S4 pupils also sit Nat 4 PE (as part of core PE). Is this detracting from studies in other subjects?
- Will class composition change at all in the move from S2 to S3?

Pupils will be in same classes for PSE and HFT but will be broadly banded and reshuffled in other subjects e.g. science and social subjects.

- Why offer choices at all in S2?

It helps to develop maturity in the pupils and prepare them for the forthcoming choices in S3.

- How is helping pupils to prepare for exams factored into the school timetable?
- How can the pupils be given a context in which to make their choices? How much careers advice and guidance is provided in school?
- Could the course choice booklet be amended to not only give information on course content but also how the course is examined. It might help to make more informed choices.

- Will there be an S2 parents information evening?

It is scheduled for the same night as the S2 parents evening.

- Alongside course choices, the benefits of the work experience week in S4 can be varied. Many work places require a minimum age of 16. Are S4 pupils mature enough to get the full benefit of the week? Could work experience also happen in S5?

Many schools now offer pupils flexible work experience throughout the year (although this can impact on learning and teaching as pupils might be absent from classes). LC is joining a wider working group with colleagues to explore options further.

Ongoing assessment

7. 7.1 NM reported that following pressure from the EIS on the Scottish government regarding the number of ongoing assessments required by the current exam structure John Swinney (Scottish Education Secretary) has made the decision to remove all internal assessments. The assessments will be removed on a rolling basis with Nat 5 assessments being dropped in 2017/18 academic year and Higher and Adv Higher

assessments dropping in each subsequent academic year. The SQA have noted that they will have to change the format of final exams accordingly. The SQA will circulate further information by 31st March and NM will inform parents as soon as possible thereafter.

This news has met with mixed response from teaching staff. Opinions differ on the value of the ongoing assessments and even with the removal of mandatory unit assessments, there will still need to be some form of ongoing assessment to establish which pupils will be presented for exams.

7.2 Questions arising:

- TF asked how closely parent could be kept informed, both about the current structure and forthcoming changes.

NM acknowledged that this year was too late to hold information evenings for pupils who were half way through their courses but information evenings were planned for parents of senior pupils in June '17 to explain the changes in assessments.

- PR asked about the role of prelims in assessing pupils' suitability to be presented for the May exams

NM reiterated that prelims could no longer be used for appealing results in the May exams (except in 'exceptional circumstances'). Prelims will still be valuable in assessing pupils but don't always fit cleanly with the assessments currently carried out at the end of a unit.

- SK asked if prelims might move later in the year to give a better indication of how a pupil is managing once more of the course has been taught.

NM said he was open to reviewing the timing of prelims but they had a value in occurring earlier in the year to give pupils an opportunity to experience exam conditions and to assess them while there was still enough of the year to address gaps in learning.

- AB commented that current mandatory assessments were set at roughly C grade level. Any future inhouse assessments might vary in the level at which they are pitched and understanding the level at which individual subjects set assessments at would help pupils and parents meaningfully interpret any results.

Governance review and wider parent participation

8. 8.1 TF opened up a discussion on the review. Comments from PC members included reporting that there was a poor response rate to the online Governance Review questionnaire and that it had been widely criticised as not being 'parent friendly'.

TF asked NM for his response to the review.

NM commented that in many ways he would like greater control of school budgets and a degree of devolved management. It offered opportunities to develop aspects of the school such as wider partnerships and ways to develop Scotland's young workforce. However, he also acknowledged that many shared local authority resources e.g. educational psychologists were very beneficial and may be much more expensive services to source if not centrally managed. More work had to be done to find a better 'happy medium'.

8.2 TF led a discussion on how to increase parental participation / input into school matters and how the PC could better represent the wider parent body.

NM commented that greater parental engagement was a key improvement area.

Suggestions included more online surveys, use of social media, an individual coursing interview with each pupil and their parent / carer (not only creates contact with parents but helps staff to get to know any skills the parents may also be able to offer the school).

TF to email PC and invite people to join a small working group looking at progressing this further.

Communications from school / PC

9. 9.1 JB and AB have received training on website maintenance. JB will be first line person to add or amend PC section of the BHS website with AB helping if required. MH will be available to provide support until the end of the school year.

9.2 Comments on twitter feeds:

- Positive feedback was given on the number of fun tweets by many departments during the school reading week.
- Could houses other than Mallyen develop an active Twitter feed as a way of communicating with parents?
- NM to discuss with Martin Bleck re which twitter feed appears on homepage of BHS website

9.3 Claire Dixon has offered help and advice on how to use Facebook and other communication means more effectively. There was insufficient time to discuss fully but will be added to the agenda for the March meeting.

AOCB

10. 10.1 Dean Park Primary school PC has a new chair – Fiona Bell-Scott. AB to forward contact details to TF to add to BHS PC email circulation list.

10.2 NM requested that Lisa Coffey and Michelle May are added to the email distribution list as well.

10.3 JB's email address needs to be changed on the email distribution list.

10.4 MM will attend the next South West neighbourhood meeting on 20/2/17 and will circulate minutes of previous meetings to the PC members.

Date / time of next meeting

11. Next meeting is Monday 13th March 2017 at 6.30pm in Kirknewton