

Balerno High School Parent Council Meeting
Venue: Ratho Primary School Date: 15/05/13

Present: Aileen Macleod (Chair), Mike Humphries (Minutes), John Thomas, Sally Gartside, Alan McKinney, Lindsay Fullarton, Bill Henderson (Councillor), Claire McGlynn (Ratho PS Head), Gillian Rutherford, Jessica Bryce, Christine Humphries, Kim Craven

Apologies: Helen Purves, Liz Carrie, Graeme Sives, Marion Milne, Kirsty McKeown

Previous minutes: Accepted.

Matter arising: No progress made with the 'social media' working group but Mike indicated he still intended to pursue this.

New arrangements for the last week of term:

Alan McKinney attended the meeting to present proposals for the last week of term – Challenge Week.

Attendance traditionally dips during the final week. The aim is to provide a varied programme which attracts and engages pupils but also has more of a Learning and Teaching focus than in previous years. Teachers submitting ideas for the week have been asked to focus on Experiences and Outcomes. Putting the week together has been a major logistical challenge.

One feature of the week is Balerno's Big Breakfasts. It is estimated that 50% of pupils don't have breakfast. The intention is to promote the importance of eating in the morning and of a balanced diet.

The PC was asked to consider how parents could get involved in this part of the week. Could parents donate food? Could pupils cook items such as pancakes to bring along?

The PC is supportive of Alan's proposals and agreed that an endorsement should be added to the letter to parents.

Communication consultation & mobile phone position paper JG to report on these at the next meeting.

Local updates (Bill Henderson):

- * A group of senior councillors made a very successful visit to the school.
- * The cap on numbers attending Dean Park Primary has been removed.
- * A meeting to discuss community access to the school is imminent. Topics include the janitor's house, after school club and library.

Senior Management Report

1. The school hosted a Danish delegation, sent by Education Scotland. They were interested in the Scottish system and in improvement planning in particular. A group of Danish students will visit the school in September.

2. The S1 intake in August will be 120-125 pupils (max. intake capacity is 155). The relatively high numbers of senior pupils compensate to some extent but the situation isn't sustainable. Staffing and course choices could be impacted.

Claire noted that the new houses in Ratho are having a positive impact on Ratho's role, particularly in the nursery.

Graeme requests that the PC join him in supporting the development of new houses in Balerno. This is not a straightforward topic so it was suggested that discussion be carried over to the next meeting.

One option might be to bring Hillwood Primary in Ratho Station into BHS's catchment.

Balerno received excellent publicity from Project Dream and this will contribute to a positive image. Balerno is strong in sport and creative subjects – is there an opportunity to create a 'centre of excellence'?

There is evidence that some parents believe that Balerno is full – could this be stopping placing requests?

3. An S6 Awards Evening was piloted this year. 90 awards were given out. The school also has its first Dux – Bruce Collie.

4. All 11 Principal Teachers attended an 'away day' of leadership training.

5. The school is trying to maintain 3 deutes – it is only entitled to 2 based on the current roll. Some recruitment in English, Maths and Science is expected before the summer.

6. The school will host a science event for P3, P6 and S2 on 24 May.

7. Assemblies have been held to discuss adoption of blazers. A 'buy back' scheme is proposed to help mitigate costs.

8. Graeme is continuing to push for greater spend on the school's infrastructure, particularly in light of the underspend over the last few years.

Parent Voice and other business:

1. The Mobile Phone Position paper was referred to and it was asked why there should be no mobile phone contact with teachers as this could be very valuable e.g. for children suffering abuse.

Alan McKinney explained that teachers are likely to be uncomfortable giving their mobile numbers to pupils and have to be careful they don't put themselves in a vulnerable position. Pupils are encouraged to contact teachers in school time.

2. It was reported that the information provided on 'pathways' for S4 came 'out of the blue' and that the significance of the 3 pathways wasn't well explained in the letter and insufficient time was allowed for choices to be made. Could some context be provided? Could the full set of pathways be explained? It was suggested bringing parents in for a briefing might be more effective.

Lindsay responded in detail by explaining the context of the wider S4 Curriculum and the new National Qualifications. He informed the meeting that:

- the Extended Learning Programme is for two hours on the timetable.
- pupils were allocated to pathways and that these pathways had different areas of focus that were best suited to the needs of individual pupils. For some it is about consolidating and securing learning, for some it is about adding breadth of learning while for others it is about increasing the challenge. All pathways are about supporting the needs of learners based on the evidence generated across the school.
- staff in each subject area were at present examining the details and standards required in the new assessment material released by SQA. This material was released in April and at present the subjects were absorbing this information to make sure that the courses that they have planned are going to meet this standard. Faculties are at present in the process of deciding timelines for assessment in the Senior Phase as well as the on-going work in the S1-S3 Broad General Education on Assessment and Moderation and also within the Cluster. Work is on-going to have an

assessment calendar that will build on the Blue Booklet produced by Jim Gladstone last year and issued to all parents.

He suggested that a Parent's information Evening for S4 along the lines of the S5 Parent's Information Evening might be a way forward to reassure parents. It was agreed that it would be helpful to have a meeting as early as possible in the new term. This meeting would be about time lines and how decisions about presentation levels for each subject are reached.

Lindsay will feed the comments back to Jim Gladstone.

3. Prelims for S4 will be later to allow for more of the syllabus to be examined. S3 Parents' Night was earlier this year but there will be a written report by the end of term.

4. Kirsty requested (by e-mail) that the regular lateness of the Kirknewton bus be raised. On one occasion this resulted in her receiving a text from the school saying her daughter hadn't turned up – which was alarming.

It was noted that a parent had received a text saying her daughter was absent (she had forgotten to tell the school) but there was no follow-up. Alan said guidance staff normally would follow up if they didn't hear from the parent of an absent pupil. He will raise this at his next meeting with the guidance team.

5. Gillian Rutherford suggested that in her view pupil morale is lower at the moment as a consequence of the huge amount of change that has occurred recently.

Lindsay responded that the school had gone through a significant number of staff changes but that he did not recognise the low morale amongst staff and pupils described, and he believes the period of change is coming to an end and expects there to be more stability going forward. He referred to the main factors of change being items that were being imposed by external bodies, i.e. SQA, Education Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council which implemented a Secondary School Management Restructure to all city high schools and which had had the potential to be very disruptive to the ethos of the school but in fact had been handled well by Graeme as he had experience of dealing with this situation in another Authority. A benefit to the school. In fact evidence shows the ethos and the morale in the school amongst staff and pupils is very good and a number of events and initiatives were listed that had occurred since Graeme had arrived which had fostered this ethos (including : bringing in outside experience, improved pupil voice via reinvigorated pupil parliament, new courses such as photography, economics, lower class sizes, etc.)

The main change in direction in the school has been to make Learning and Teaching the main focus for improving the school. The Head Teacher has done a good job in leading the school through these changes and maintaining good morale in the school.

6. Positive feedback on the quality of the S1 Reports was received.

7. The distance between S3 Parent's Evening and issue of reports was raised.

8. The PC will continue to meet on Monday. The start time will be left at 6 pm for the moment.

DONM: The next meeting will be on 3rd June @ 6:00pm Room F10 at Balerno High School