

Balerno High School Parent Council

Minutes of Meeting of Monday 31 March 2014

Present

Tony Foster, Mike Humphries, Karon Gilhooley, Rhona Baird, Rehana Shanks (Dean Park), Graeme Sives (Head Teacher), Marion Milne (BCC), Lindsey Middleton, Lindsay Fullarton

Apologies

Bill Henderson, Helen Purves, Liz Carrie, Jessica Bryce, Kirsty McKeown

Community Access to Schools (CATS) Review

Tony provided an update.

He had expected CATS to be discussed at the recent CCWP meeting but it wasn't.

Edinburgh Council are working towards a preferred model which will see all schools providing access for their communities. The existing community budget will be spread across the entire estate with a saving on current costs expected (Balerno's community budget is approximately £200k). The target date for implementation remains August 2014.

Currently Graeme and his team have responsibility for the community function at Balerno HS. This includes providing cover during school holidays – there is always a member of the school's senior management team 'on duty'. This is not the case in all community schools. For example, Currie has a Community Programme Manager who is responsible for vacation use.

If CATS is implemented as is currently proposed, the community functions at Balerno will be managed centrally and the school staff will have no involvement. There is also worry that extra-curricular school activity could also be impacted – for example, the Holiday Head Start programme.

The school budget is under significant pressure and CATS will remove the opportunity to use elements of the community budget to support school activity.

There is concern that existing levels of service to the Balerno community will not be maintained under CATS proposals - the Community Council think engagement between the school and the community is the best it's been for years.

It's almost certainly the case that the status quo cannot now be maintained - the only realistic chance to challenge CATS is to offer an alternative. The Heads of the current community schools have suggested alternative approaches, which will still achieve cost reductions. However, the extent to which alternatives will be considered is unclear. The Council feel they have an evidence base which they have analysed and drawn appropriate conclusions.

It is likely that non-community schools won't see much change as a result of CATS proposals.

Tony has briefed BCC and they will meet with David Bruce (in charge of CATS) to provide their view point. It is likely they will challenge the process as well as the conclusions. They will feed back the outcome of the meeting and will also endeavour to find out whether or not local councillors support CATS.

School update (Graeme and Lindsay)

- The recent maths trip to London was very successful. Graeme emphasised that the trip is packed with educational content.
- There has been some feedback from parents about the timing of the Chicago production and its potential to interfere with exam preparation. Graeme confirmed that students and staff had been consulted before the dates were set.
- The school has been hosting 50 delegates from a range of European countries as part of a British Council-sponsored event.
- Graeme attended a 3-day conference in Livingston on self-evaluation. 20 schools were represented.
- Council 'improvement teams' are in decline and it is likely there will be more emphasis on schools assisting each other with improvement activities. Heads from other institutions will visit Balerno to provide input, and Graeme will reciprocate.
- A group of students met with representatives of the Indian government as a 'spin off' from the school's involvement with The Lyceum.
- Lindsay will bring a group of pupils to a future PC meeting as part of work to make Balerno a 'Rights Respecting' school. Exposure to PC activity will contribute to student development.
- Graeme and Lindsay are encouraging students to feed back their thoughts on learning and teaching within the school.
- Graeme has visited Dean Park and Ratho (and is about to visit Kirknewton) to talk about an enhanced process of transition from primary to secondary school. One aim is to give P7s experience of Balerno HS at an earlier stage than at present.
- Balerno enjoyed considerable success at the 'YES' awards, winning 8 out of 12 categories, as well as taking overall first and second places.
- All staff are working very hard to support the new 'Nationals' and highers.
- It is expected that the school will favour a move to 6 rather than 7 Nationals in the future, as staff believe that 7 is too heavy a load. The feeling of the meeting was that this would be resisted by parents. Some schools in Edinburgh are offering 8 Nationals.

Parent voice

- The use of supply teachers was discussed. Graeme was clear that there will always be a requirement for cover teachers to be used, but emphasised that Balerno has the lowest rate of teaching staff absence in Edinburgh.

- Use of peer assessment was discussed. Feedback from students to staff suggests that they are comfortable with this approach. However, feedback from students to parents is less positive. There is a feeling that students would rather have teachers review and mark their work.
- It is more difficult for Ratho and Kirknewton students to participate in after school activities. The PC will investigate whether use can be made of the school mini-bus to provide transport home.

Date of next meeting

Monday 26th May, 6pm, Kirknewton Primary School