

**GRACEMOUNT HIGH SCHOOL  
PARENT COUNCIL**

MINUTES OF MEETING  
HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2010

Present:

Pauline Walker	<i>Head Teacher</i>
Ken Gregor	<i>Chair</i>
Gwen McLeod	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Ian Duncan	<i>Parent Member (Treasurer)</i>
Lesley Gibson-Eaglesham	<i>Parent Member</i>
Becky Divine	<i>Pupil Member</i>
Ashleigh Kennedy	<i>Clerk</i>

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Susan Wilson and Gillian Fitzpatrick who was ill.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

There was one change to the Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 26 January 2010. In Item 6 under Issues from Pupils the minute was changed from 'There were no issues from *staff*' to 'There were no issues from *pupils*'.

The Minutes were then approved.

3. Report from Chair

a. Head Teacher Appointment Process

Ken informed the group that Lesley and he were part of the interview panel for the Head Teacher post. At the long leet interview there were 6 candidates and 2 were selected for the short leet interview at the City Chambers in December. Pauline was then selected as Head Teacher.

Ken intimated that he had written to the Director of Children and Families to thank the officers for including Lesley and him so fully in the process. He felt the officers listened to suggestions and were thorough in explaining the whole process of the Head Teacher Selection.

b. Deputy Head Teacher Appointment Process

Ken explained to the Council that after the selection of Pauline as Head Teacher, a vacancy was created for the Deputy Head post. Before Christmas this vacancy was advertised. On Monday 18 January 2010, 7 candidates

were interviewed and 3 were called back for interview today, Tuesday 26 January 2010. As a result Louise Sinclair, Principal Teacher of Guidance was selected as the successful candidate. On both occasions the interview panel consisted of Pauline and Ken, Lesley McOmish, Deputy Head and Sharon Muir, Quality Improvement Officer.

Ken addressed the issue as to whether there would be new thinking with internal candidates being selected for both the Head and Deputy Head Teacher positions. However, he believed both successful candidates were enthusiastic, full of new ideas and were fully committed to the school. He added that the best candidates in both processes were appointed.

#### c. Budget Cuts Update

Ken explained that he had sent letters to Mike Pringle Liberal Democrat MSP for Edinburgh South, Norma Hart Labour Councillor for Liberton and Gilmerton, Conor Snowden Liberal Democrat Councillor for Liberton and Gilmerton, Marilynne MacLaren Liberal Democrat Councillor for the Meadows and Morningside and Mike Russell the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to ask their opinions on the proposed budget cuts. He had replies from them all, which he circulated at the meeting. In summary, all the letters attributed the current dire financial situation as the cause of the impending budget cuts.

Lesley reported that she had attended two meetings held by the Consultative Committee With Parents (CCWP) about the budget cuts. The first was held on Wednesday 16 December 2009 and the other on Monday 25 January 2010. The first of the meetings looked at the budget cuts over the next three years while the second looked at the spending budget.

Many different proposals were discussed at these two meetings about ways to cut spending. For instance it was suggested that Smart Cards could be used in schools to monitor energy and Library staff could be shared amongst schools.

Ken explained that the budget proposals would be put forward at the City Chambers on 11 February 2010 for the next financial year. Therefore it would be clearer after this date what services would be affected.

Ken thanked Lesley for attending these meetings and asked if there were any suggestions to express the Parent Council's disappointment at the proposed budget cuts. Ken explained that he would write to the prospective Members of Parliament to ask what their opinions are on the proposed cuts.

#### d. Catchment Area Update

Ken reported that the changes to the catchment area had been dropped from the consultation that included the closure of Burdiehouse Primary School. Therefore the proposed changes to the catchment area had been stopped. There had been a meeting between the Children and Families Department

and Gracemount and Liberton High Schools to look at how to formalise the catchment area after Burdiehouse Primary had closed.

It is believed that the boundaries would remain the same with the creation of a formal link between Gilmerton Primary School and Gracemount High School. A concern was raised that if a formal link was established Gracemount High School would have to guarantee a place for pupils from Gilmerton even if there was not enough space.

Ken concluded by explaining that there would be a formal consultation in the springtime, which would look at creating a formal proposal.

#### 4. Report from Treasurer

Ian reported that the balance was £446.55 as of 31 December 2009. There was £0.29 interest in the 3 months since October.

#### 5. Report from Pupil Member

Becky explained that the Pupils Council Elections had taken place. The successful candidates were as follows:

- First Minister – Ben Gardner
- Charity Minister – Beth Gregor
- Sports and Schools Minister – Sam Anthony
- Health and Eco Minister – Kimberly Blair
- Communications Minister – Jade Brown

She explained that groups had been formed to address issues in all key areas. Proposals had been made to organise more fundraising for charity, more choice in P.E. and sport after school, to tackle problems about litter and how to effectively communicate the Pupil Council to pupils and staff.

Pauline was due to meet with the Pupil Council on Thursday 5 February 2010 to discuss these proposals and other concerns.

#### 6. Report from Head Teacher

##### a) Staffing

Pauline began with her report on staffing. Louise Sinclair's new appointment as Deputy Head had left a vacancy for Principal Teacher of Guidance. She explained that an advertisement for the post would be submitted the following day, Wednesday 27 January 2010.

On 8 February Jim Brown currently Principal Teacher of Science would leave to become Acting Deputy Head Teacher of Tynecastle. Initially this secondment would last for a minimum of six weeks, however, it could last for longer. Gillian Morison who is currently a Biology teacher is to become

Principal Teacher of Science while Jim is away. Adeela Rana would replace Gillian as soon as her Disclosure had come through.

Louise Taylor, Business Education Teacher will be leaving at the end of February to act up as Principal Teacher of ICT at Liberton High School. Shona Valentine will return to the Business Education Department on 1 April 2010 from maternity leave.

Kate Mountford recently announced that she was pregnant with her first child and would be taking her maternity leave from the summer.

#### b) Curriculum for Excellence

Pauline handed out an information sheet about the new curriculum that the first years will follow from June 2010. She explained that pupils will follow a common course during first and second year comprising of 8 areas; Literacy, Numeracy, Modern Languages, Social Subjects, Health and Wellbeing, Science, Technology and Expressive/Performing Arts.

Pupils will receive 4 periods a week of Literacy (English) and 4 periods a week of Numeracy (Maths). Modern Languages will be retained for 3 periods a week. Social Subjects will change radically with a common Social Subjects course comprising of elements from History, Geography and Modern Studies and also incorporating a Scottish element. One teacher would teach this for 3 periods a week. The Health and Wellbeing course will include 2 periods of P.E., 1 period of R.M.E and 1 period of P.S.E. a week. These subjects would have a strong link to other subjects such as Home Economics. The Science course will remain the same, being taught by one teacher and will comprise elements from Biology, Chemistry and Physics for 3 periods a week. The Technology area includes Home Economics, CDT and ICT. Home Economics and CDT will begin to operate on a rota basis with pupils rotating between attending CDT for 3 periods per week and Home Economics for 3 periods per week. The rotation will change every 10 weeks. ICT currently operates the same system, rotating with Art. In the final column of Expressive and Performing Arts, Music will reduce to 1 period a week and Art will rotate with ICT as aforementioned.

Drama was to be offered as a subject, however, due to financial constraints it cannot be provided. It will be included on a cross-curricular basis. Lesley informed Pauline that Karen Richardson, Cultural Co-ordinator at Queen Margaret University would be able to teach Drama within the school. Pauline explained that Bruce Foley, English Teacher is taking Drama forward. Currently he runs the Drama Club after school.

An element of choice will be introduced for pupils in all subjects in second year with a choice column. Opportunities will be given for pupils to choose such options as joining a committee, group or one of the Academies or to specialise in subjects such as Music.

Pauline also explained that GLOW would help with the introduction of the new curriculum by offering data walls for pupils, best work profiles and the ability for parents to comment on work that is provided. Ken added that GLOW would be ideal for the Parent Council to communicate to other parents. Pauline made the Council aware that parental access had been switched off for the time being and would hopefully be back on soon.

Pauline finished by stating that the new curriculum would be very exciting for pupils and if there were any questions she would be happy to answer them at the next meeting.

#### c) Results Summary 2008/09

Pauline handed out the Results Summary for 2008/09.

#### 5 – 14 Results

Pauline began by reporting that Reading and Writing had both improved, however they are still trailing Maths in attainment levels. Pauline indicated that English Writing grades were trailing in comparison to Reading and this would be addressed. She also intimated that 5-14 would be replaced in the next two years.

#### S3/4 Results

Pauline reported solid attainment in the middle school. 94% of pupils passed English at Level 3 or above. The 6% that did not achieve a grade were made up of pupils who did not attend school but had to be kept on the school register and 3 pupils who sat English below Level 3 at Kaimes.

The statistics for Maths were skewed due to an administrative error. Information had not been entered to show that the third unit had been completed and therefore some candidates were certificated later than normal. Ian asked if this could happen again. Pauline assured him that procedures and checks had been put in place so this would not happen again.

Pauline explained that some of the increases in English and Maths attainment were due to the Alternative Pathways and Access to Success programmes, which aimed to help pupils that had fallen behind in subjects. The aims for the middle school were to maximise potential to ensure that it results continued to improve.

#### S5/6 Results

Pauline reported individual pockets of excellence within these years. However, the results showed that all departments should have done better. She believed that one of the main reasons for this was that pupils were not responding to support that was on offer. In addition there was a lack of studying at home as a result of part-time jobs and some pupils' social life. As a result confidence was low because pupils were not putting the effort in to do

well in their subjects. Becky agreed with Pauline that some pupils were not trying hard enough and were not using their free periods as an opportunity to study.

Gwen asked if this issue of low confidence was a result of the financial situation of the global economy and if the repeated reports on television were having an impact on pupils' self esteem. Pauline did not believe that this was the case. She did acknowledge that more pupils had returned for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year than normal because of a lack of apprenticeships and jobs. However, she believed that the lack of confidence in these year groups was down to lack of effort by some pupils.

Pauline reported that Prelims would begin the following week and her outlook remains positive for these year groups.

### Other Attainment and Achievement

Pauline attributed an increase in the number of pupils leaving with 5 or more qualifications at Level 3 to Maggie Bisset, Deputy Head who co-ordinated such programmes as Alternative Pathways and Access to Success. These statistics had bucked the local and national trends. Maggie was also instrumental along with the careers advisor in securing 97% of leavers in further education, job or placement.

#### 7. Issues from Staff/Pupils/Parents

##### a. Staff

There were no issues from staff.

##### b. Pupils

Becky raised an issue on behalf of senior pupils who were unhappy about Jim Brown leaving the Science Department to act up as Deputy Head at Tynecastle High School. At the moment he teaches the Higher and Advanced Higher Biology classes. Pupils felt he is a very effective teacher who is good at encouraging pupils and their studies would suffer when he left. Ian seconded this by explaining that he believed his son had went backward in Biology when Jim acted up as Deputy Head while Pauline was on maternity leave.

Pauline answered these concerns by explaining that the Higher and Advanced Higher classes had covered 80% of their subject so far and therefore Jim had taught the majority of their subjects. In addition Gillian Morison, an established Biology teacher would take over these classes from Jim and the new Biology teacher Adeela Rana would take on the Intermediate classes. Pauline accepted that it was sad to see a popular teacher leave, however, it was important to balance the needs of staff.

Becky suggested that activities should continue in classes to maintain motivation and enthusiasm amongst pupils.

c. Parents

Classroom Behaviour

Lesley raised an issue about behaviour in the classroom. She overheard a pupil saying that in one class a group of pupils were drinking vodka from a bottle and were discussing how they smoked, drank and took drugs. Pauline asked Lesley if the pupil that had witnessed this had alerted the teacher. Lesley was unsure, as she had only heard a brief description of the events in the class.

Pauline condemned the actions of the pupils and assured members that if these pupils had been caught they would have been excluded. She also explained that a very small number of pupils were known to abuse alcohol in the evenings and would come into school in the morning 'hung-over'. In addition there were around 12 seniors who were known to smoke at the back of the school. Their parents had been informed and the school was offering a supportive role in trying to encourage the pupils to give up. This included a weekly smoking cessation group. Gwen was encouraged by this approach as she felt it was addressing the issue and trying to help as opposed to ignoring it.

Speed Signs

Ian reported that the safety signs that flashed for drivers to reduce their speed to 20 mph at the start and end of the school day and break and lunch, had failed to flash on Captains Road up from the Kaimes Junction. He had noticed this twice; Friday 22 January and Monday 25 January.

Pauline thanked him for bringing this to her attention. She would inform Scott MacKenzie, Business Manager who would contact the relevant outlet to rectify this.

Parent Council Newsletter

Ken handed out Parent Council Newsletters to members. In addition he handed out a flyer for an event called '*Involving Parents in Children's Learning: Sharing Practice Event*' which is to take place on Saturday 20 March 2010 at the Radisson Hotel. Contact details were available on the flyer if anybody wished to attend.

8. Any Other Business

There was no any other business.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Monday 15 March 2010.

It was agreed to hold the AGM at the meeting in June with an invite to Primary 7 parents whose children would be joining Gracemount High School after the summer break.