

**GRACEMOUNT HIGH SCHOOL
PARENT COUNCIL**

MINUTES OF MEETING
HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2010



Present:

Pauline Walker	<i>Head Teacher</i>
Ken Gregor	<i>Chair</i>
Lesley Gibson-Eaglesham	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Ian Duncan	<i>Parent Member (Treasurer)</i>
Gwen McLeod	<i>Parent Member</i>
Gillian Fitzpatrick	<i>Parent Member</i>
Christopher Hume	<i>Staff Member</i>
Emma Taylor	<i>Drama Teacher</i>
Ashleigh Kennedy	<i>Clerk</i>

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced Emma Taylor, the new Drama teacher.

No apologies were received.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

There was one amendment from the Minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 23 August 2010.

There was one change to the Minutes. In section (6) point (a) the second sentence was changed from *had returned from the school* to *had returned to the school*.

The Minutes were then approved.

3. Actions and Issues Register

Ken explained the new administrative addition to the Parent Council. The new Actions and Issues Registers were now being used to keep track of Actions Required and any issues raised. Ken intimated he had written to Lothian and Borders police regarding the Evening News Article and Sathia Chetty on his retirement. Pauline explained that there was no Pupil Member at present because no one from sixth year was able to do it. She asked the

Parent Council if the Pupil Member could be from younger years. Ken thought this role was suitable for a fifth or sixth year Pupil. Chris suggested asking members at the next Pupil Council.

4. Report from Chair

a. Change of Deputy Chair

Ken explained that Gwen had relinquished her role as Deputy Chair and Lesley had agreed to step in to do this role. Ken asked if there were any objections. There were not.

Pauline suggested that at the next meeting of the Parent Council, Ken could begin his handover of the Chair. Ken agreed this was a good idea.

b. Evening News Article

Ken explained that Lesley had written to the Evening News regarding the August article on police call outs to Gracemount High School being the highest in Edinburgh. In it she expressed her dismay and the concern that the Parent Council had over this article. She asked that in future, before the paper ran a story, that they contacted either the school or the Parent Council for comment. She had not heard back from the Evening News or seen the letter in the paper.

Ken had written to the Chief Constable of Lothian and Borders Police as the figures used in the article had been requested from them. He asked in his letter if the Chief Constable thought these figures and the corresponding article was an accurate and relevant description of the school.

Ken had received a reply from the Superintendent John Hawkins stating he had no reason to doubt the figures. However, Mr Hawkins and his officers were proud of the relationship they have with the school and were disappointed in the tone of the article.

Ken was happy with the positive response of the letter and did not see any reason to take this matter any further with the police.

Ken also indicated that Mr Hawkins had suggested that the local Police Inspector Alun Williams would be happy to meet with the Parent Council. Ken asked the Parent Council if they felt it would be worthwhile to invite Inspector Williams to a forthcoming meeting. It was agreed this would be a good idea.

Ken to invite Inspector Williams to attend a meeting.

c. Catchment Changes Update

The final proposal for catchment changes to Gracemount was due to be put to the City of Edinburgh Council in September. However, there had been a response from HMle which meant that more time was needed to review the

proposal. Ken reported that the proposal would be published shortly with Pauline attending a meeting on Wednesday 13 October 2010 and Ken attending a meeting the following day; Thursday 14 October 2010 where the final proposal would be explained. Ken would let the Parent Council know the final proposal once it had been communicated to him.

d. Parent Council Rules

Ken reminded everyone of the rules of the Parent Council. No questions should be raised by members regarding individuals i.e. current and former pupils as well as individual members of staff or Parents

e. School Budget

Lesley was due to attend another meeting on Wednesday 13 October 2010 regarding the Children and Families Budget.

There was discussion on what the meeting would discuss as well as the format it would take. Lesley informed the Parent Council that at the last meeting the attendees were put into five groups of six and moved around in a carousel to make suggestions at each station on different topics.

Ken informed the Parent Council that Pauline could not comment on the cuts as she is a City of Edinburgh Council Officer. Members did raise concern on proposals to either merge the Business Manager and Bursar's roles or eliminate the Business Managers role and the proposal to reduce the number of Depute Heads and Principal Teachers at smaller High Schools. This had been a parental suggestion at a previous meeting on the Children and Families Budget. Ian asked if Lesley could contest these proposals at the next meeting as it would mean that the Senior Management Team would have to spend more time in their offices dealing with paperwork and less time in the classroom. Lesley intimated that she believed that a lot of the discussion at the forthcoming meeting would be on staffing. She indicated that she would report back at the next meeting.

Ken concluded this section by stating that the Parent Council would know better what the Budget proposals would be after this meeting and advised that contact would be made with local City of Edinburgh Councillors if needed.

f. Placing and School Exclusion Appeal Committee

Ken explained that there was an opportunity for a Member to become a part of the City of Edinburgh Council Placing and School Exclusion Appeal Committee. This committee concerns itself with appeals regarding placing pupils in schools out with their catchment area and exclusions from schools.

If members were interested in this, Ken asked if they could let him know.

g. Curriculum for Excellence

Ken indicated that he had copies of new Curriculum for Excellence leaflets regarding assessment. They were available for Members to have a look at.

5. Report from Emma Taylor, Drama Teacher

Emma thanked the Council for inviting her to the meeting. She explained that she was there to introduce herself and explain what the new Drama Department was doing.

She explained what the Events Committee was doing this academic year:

16 December 2010	Christmas Concert
March 2011	Easter Concert
April 2011	Dance Show
22 and 23 June 2011	<i>Fame</i> the Musical
30 June 2011	Celebration Evening

Emma commented on the production of *Fame* the Musical. This was a new addition to Gracemount's Event Calendar. She explained that auditions were currently taking place and rehearsals would start after the October break. She informed Members that she was looking for parental involvement. This could range from helping backstage, helping with set design, sponsorship or other related tasks. Emma stated she was keen to use parents' skills in this project.

Ian intimated that the Royal Bank of Scotland is involved in sponsoring schools. He thinks that they could possibly provide £250 for this. Ken stated that the Parent Council received funding to be used for communications with Parents and suggested that the Show may be a good way of advertising the Parent Council. Ken to check the financial rules to find out if it is permissible to use the funding to support the show in this way. The Parent Council will discuss this at a future meeting.

Emma thanked everyone for their suggestions and asked if anyone had any further questions or wanted to volunteer to help in the production they could contact her email on the following address:

emma.taylor@gracemount.edin.sch.uk

Ken to circulate Emma's email address to Parent Council Members

Emma then left the meeting.

6. Report from Treasurer

Ian reported that all cheques had cleared since the last meeting. The balance was £927.39 with £0.08 interest accrued.

Ian raised the point that the Football Academy would not be expecting any money from the Parent Council this year. He asked Pauline how the Football

Academy is managing to be kept running. Pauline answered by stating that the equipment had been recycled and she had managed to obtain money from the staffing budget. She added that the pupils who took part in this had come on leaps and bounds in other subject areas. Twenty pupils per year from S1 – S3 take part in the Football Academy and Pauline and the School at large are very proud and happy to have this as a feature at the school.

7. Report from Pupil Member

No pupil member at present.

8. Report from Head Teacher

a. Staffing

Pauline began with her report with staffing. Laura Kelly from Maths had resigned and would be returning to Northern Ireland at the end of the week. Pauline had appointed Michelle Woods as her permanent replacement. Pauline commented on her keenness and enthusiasm and looked forward to her joining the school.

Sathia Chetty's temporary replacement in Physics would be Andy Scott. He starts the Monday after the October break. Again Pauline commented on his enthusiasm and wealth of ideas.

Anne Robertson, currently Principal Teacher of Modern Languages would be leaving the school to take up a post as Development Officer at the City of Edinburgh Council. Donna Richards, currently a French teacher in the Department would be Acting Principal Teacher while Anne was on secondment. Pauline had been unable to find a suitable alternative for Donna's position; therefore she would not be releasing Anne until this was done. Another advert for this post would be advertised.

Fiona Lundius, currently PT Guidance for S1 and Gatsby Behavioural Base would be leaving after the October break to take up a position at Liberton High School. Pauline intimated this would be a big loss for the school especially with pupils' pastoral care. To ease the transition from when she leaves, S1 would be moving to their individual Guidance Teachers now instead of when they went into S2. An advert would go out to seek her replacement. Gwen asked if her replacement had to be a teacher. Pauline answered by stating that they did, however, not necessarily a teacher from the Secondary Sector. Fiona had been a Primary School teacher before she joined Gracemount.

Jenni Scott the Bursar would be leaving the school at the end of the week to immigrate to Australia. Pauline had appointed a temporary Bursar, Kenneth Taylor who has experience in the Financial Sector. The post is temporary as it is unclear whether this role will remain.

Sandra Scott from the English Department had been released to the City of Edinburgh Council to undertake an EAL (English as an Additional Language)

secondment. Pauline had appointed Jenni McEwan to cover Sandra's vacancy.

Finally Pauline appointed a new Learning Assistant, Sam Hardie who had started in the Support for Learning Department.

b. Communication

Pauline reported that e-mail communication with parents was now underway. She had made sure these were relevant and targeted select groups where appropriate. She is looking to target those who have not supplied e-mail addresses to see if this can encourage more communication.

Ken stated that he had had a few e-mails from Diane Crichton. He knows that Diane works in the School Office but the e-mail is not explicit that it is from Gracemount High School. Pauline explained that BT will not give the school access to change the e-mail signature.

Pauline also reported that a Parent Communication Group had been formed to encourage better ways of communicating with parents. She indicated that one initiative would be taking place in the New Year. Parents would be posted a double sided A5 piece of paper with one side encouraging parents to have a New Years Resolution to 'Commit to our school' through events such as attending Parents Evenings or engaging in the Parent Council or School Committee. On the other side there would be a note of significant dates. Pauline hoped to continue communication through the post at least twice a year.

Gwen asked if there was an option to just receive communication by e-mail. Pauline said there was not as paper copies of School reports had to be sent to parent and guardians address due to legislation.

c. Green Flag Success

Pauline reported to the Council that the school had been granted Green Flag status. Gracemount is one of three secondary schools in Edinburgh to have this status.

Pauline explained that the assessor team had visited the school after break, a time when schools can have a high volume of litter, and rigorously questioned the Eco team. Scott MacKenzie, the Business Manager had sat in on the meeting as the Amey representative and reported the pupils were fabulous in answering the assessor team's questions on issues such as reducing the school's carbon footprint.

Ken asked Pauline to pass on the Parent Council's congratulations to the Eco team.

d. Curriculum for Excellence

Pauline reported she and the Depute Heads had been visiting the new first year classes who were undertaking the new Curriculum for Excellence. The visits had been exciting and there had been a big change in teaching which was embracing the diversity of learners. As a result there had been better behaviour and engagement in learning.

e. Improvements in Results/Performance

Pauline reported that the school was in the HMIE's Amber Zone for inspection which means the school could be inspected within the next eighteenth months. If the school was inspected there would be a short notification period of 10 – 14 days.

The school was planning for the possibility of inspection, making sure that every pupil achieves Level 3 in Mathematics and English.

Pauline concluded by stating the school was innovative and the attainment levels did not always back this up. However, the school was doing its best to support vulnerable learners within the school.

Ian asked if the exam figures Pauline discussed at the last meeting were the confirmed results. Pauline stated that these results were provisional until the appeal results came through at Christmas.

f. Budget

Pauline reported that the City of Edinburgh Council had increased the school's letting target by 500% which had wiped out any contingency funds the school had. This increase had happened to the PPP schools in Edinburgh to maximise occupancy. The school operates fairly well but with this increase the school will be £7000 short this year if the lets stay the same.

Gwen asked if the lets could be promoted through leaflets or posters, however, Pauline stated that this had been tried but had found that people tended to seek out lets rather than respond to promotion.

Pauline had sent a strongly worded letter to the City in protest and Ken stated the Parent Council could take their concerns further if required.

The school was beginning to feel the constraints of the budget. The school had received a bill of £800 to repair musical instruments and there was a £300 bill to fix a laptop.

Ian suggested that parents could be asked to donate old instruments to the school. Pauline thanked Ian for this idea and would include it in the next newsletter.

9. Issues from Staff/Pupils/Parents

a. Staff

There were no issues from staff.

b. Pupils

There were no issues from staff.

c. Parents

i) *'What are the guidelines for the use of media and materials in Religious and Social Education Classes?'*

An issue was raised before the meeting by a parent with regards to the guidelines of showing media in Religious and Social Education Classes.

Pauline reported that it was not an offence to show films and media to pupils who were younger than the age limit. Age restrictions were for cinema use and did not apply in schools.

Pauline intimated that it was up to the discretion of staff what they showed to pupils. If there was anything that might take pupils out of their comfort zone then staff were encouraged to chat this through with their PT or Pauline if there were further doubts.

If a particular piece of media was particularly graphic then the school would write to ask for parental permission. There was also an option to opt out of watching any media that parents thought was unsuitable.

Gwen felt that pupils should be prepared and supported if they were to watch something that was pushing boundaries. Pauline agreed that this should happen.

ii) Cheques

Ian raised an issue regarding the time taken to clear cheques paid to the school as cheques he had paid to the school had taken some time to clear.

Pauline apologised for this. She explained that the School banking was carried out monthly. Due to staff security and time, cash and cheques were collected by a security firm. Ian asked if the school could arrange for the bank to pick up from the school premises. Pauline explained that the school would also have to pay a fee for that and the current arrangements were the most cost affective.

Pauline explained she would remind staff at the forthcoming inservice day after the October break not to hold onto cheques for any length of time.

Chris suggested that a note on letters sent out to parents requesting money could have a note that cheques may take a number of weeks to clear. Pauline agreed this was a good idea.

iii) Insurance

Ian asked if a family's insurance policy could be used to insure their children on school trips to reduce the overall cost.

Pauline explained that she had looked into this before and the prices for school trips included group insurance in the price of their packages and the overall cost changed very little.

10. Any Other Business

Pauline reminded members the school's open evening was taking place on Thursday 14 October 2010. There were workshops taking place throughout the school including one on Glow.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 7 December 2010.