

**GRACEMOUNT HIGH SCHOOL
PARENT COUNCIL**

MINUTES OF MEETING
HELD ON 5th SEPTEMBER 2011



Present:

Lesley Gibson-Eaglesham	<i>Chair</i>
Ken Gregor	<i>Depute Chair</i>
Ian Duncan	<i>Parent Member (Treasurer)</i>
Gillian Fitzpatrick	<i>Parent Member</i>
Susan Hall	<i>Parent Member</i>
Ashleigh Kennedy	<i>Staff Member</i>
Lauren Burnett	<i>Pupil Member</i>
Pauline Walker	<i>Head Teacher</i>
<i>Bill Cook</i>	<i>CEC Cllr Labour</i>
Rachel Matheson	<i>Clerk</i>

Due to Cllr Bill Cook having to leave early, it was agreed that Item 7 on the Agenda would be taken first, to allow Bill to leave the meeting when needed.

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Lesley welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited members to introduce themselves.

Apologies were received from Norma Hart, CEC Cllr Labour and Andrew Graymuir, co-opted member.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

On page 3 item 4(a) 'The administration posts would be the first to go August' was changed to 'The administration posts would be the first to go in August'.

On page 7 item 5 'Whether or not the new clerk should be paid the top of fee of £10' was changed to 'Whether or not the new clerk should be paid the top up fee of £10'.

There were some minor grammatical changes to the Minutes.

3. Report from Chair

Lesley announced that a new co-opted member had been found, Andrew Graymuir. Apologies were made on his behalf, for this evening's meeting.

4. Report from Treasurer

Ian reported that the balance for the Parent Council account was £952.94. This included a £10 top up cheque being cashed in June.

Ken raised the issue of a cheque for £5.83 paid to Ashleigh last term, regarding provision of tea and biscuits, which Ashleigh was concerned had not turned up in her account. Ian was able to confirm that this amount had been cashed out from the balance on the 5th of April 2011. Ashleigh agreed to re-check her account for that date.

5. Report from Head Teacher

a) Initial exam results

Pauline distributed copies of the initial exam results to all members of the council and stated that overall, the school were very happy with this year's attainment. She pointed out that there had been marked improvement in many areas, particularly regarding S5 and 6 pupils attaining greater numbers of Highers. It was pointed out that although there was a drop in S6 achieving Advanced Highers, this could be down to the fact that staff are now encouraging pupils in this year group, to focus more upon increasing the number of Highers attained, as it is felt this improves their options concerning university places. It was noted that where there was a drop in certain levels of attainment, it should be taken into account that these figures also cover the grades achieved by pupils who are non-attendees, and thus out with the school's influence, including those sitting English at Panmure

Concerning practices put in place to help students achieve good results, Pauline mentioned services such as GASS (Gracemount After School Study) and the Easter study school. A major focus was being placed on those pupils in S4 who were on the cusp between general level 3 and attaining credit level 2. A positive mentoring programme had been put in place between these pupils and members of management.

Ken asked whether or not the reduction in management would affect this, to which Pauline responded that due to the importance merited to

the programme, it would remain a priority regardless of cuts or restructuring.

b) Positive destinations placements

Pauline was able to inform the council that all but 7 pupils from the 2010 leavers cohort were yet to find Positive Destinations but she is hopeful that 5 of those should be arranged with placements soon. She is extremely proud of the placement team for their efforts, particularly as it has such positive effects upon the local area.

Cllr Cook offered the possibility of making placements and visits available within the company where he works, inviting pupils to gain experience in engineering and computing. This suggestion was well received by Pauline, and it was agreed that Bill would look into this further.

c) School improvement plan

Pauline was able to confirm that the new school improvement plan is now complete and in the process of being printed. Copies will be sent home to parents, and she will provide additional copies for the PC at the next meeting.

d) Sharing common practice

A package of presentations, workshops and information evenings is being organised, in order to share common practice in the three main Curriculum for Excellence strands; Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Well Being. This is to inform parents of the way in which these aspects of the new curriculum are being tackled, and therefore help them to gain a better understanding of how they can promote learning in these areas in the home environment. Pauline asked whether the PC would be willing to test run various parts of this at the next meeting, in order to gain feedback before rolling it out to the whole school. The PC agreed to this.

6. Issues from Staff/Pupils/Parents

a. Staff

Ashleigh was able to report, that all though she had sent out a whole school email, no points had been returned by staff members. Ashleigh was asked to remind staff that they should raise issues through the normal management chain in the first instance before contacting the PC.

Ashleigh agreed to discuss this with Chris Hume and Heather Livingston, the two staff members who will be sharing the role on the council.

b. Pupils

Lauren was able to report that the pupil council elections would be held in the school the following week, and there was hope for seeing new faces being voted in.

At the moment the major issue that the council are trying to tackle, is that of finding ways to encouraging pupils to feel able to approach them with any ideas or concerns that may need addressed.

Ken asked whether it would be possible to have a copy of the minutes of the previous pupil council meeting. Ashleigh has agreed to organise this with Chris Hume for the next meeting

c. Parents

No issues had been put forward by parents.

7. Report from Cllr Cook re Learning assistant provision

Cllr Cook was able to state that he had over the summer months, raised questions at full Council Meetings and corresponded with Cllr McLaren regarding Support for Learning (SFL) provision.

He advised he was yet to receive full response to his questions but he is hopeful that during September, more specific answers may be available. He would like the point to be made clear, as to whether the reduction in SFL is down to budgetary reasons or not.

He was able to add that current budget pressures are leading head teachers to have to haggle, in order to obtain the necessary SFL staff. This leaves the discretion as to whether to challenge the support hours allocated or allocate part of the school's personnel budget to support the pupil, in the hands of the head teacher.

Cllr Cook added that he is currently looking for a trend amongst schools for cuts in SFL city wide. He was of the opinion that this was going to have a major impact on both staff and pupils, and stated that his aim was to keep working at calling the council to account over it, remarking that it may very quickly become a political issue.

Pauline was able to confirm that in Gracemount, the number of audited hours had been reduced from 130 hours last term, to 80 hours this term initially and currently up to 95 hours.

According to the new ASL act (Additional Support for Learning), extreme needs are required, in order to merit support hours, leaving aspects such as behavioural issues and dyslexia discounted from the audit.

She was able to explain also, how difficult and changeable the SFL audit is for each school, with hours changing as pupils with particular difficulties come to be flagged up, or come and go during the School year.

In severe cases, audited hours can be passed straight up with pupils who have had them in primary school, but the majority of the time, the pupil must be re-assessed when they reach the High School.

As such, she has arranged for experts to be involved in the next audit meeting in October, in order ensure that all hours possible are picked up and audited.

Regarding the ASL act, Ian then asked how such policies could be picked up by the public, before being passed. Pauline responded that it was possible for members of the public to respond through the normal consultation process

Cllr Cook asked whether there was a set minimum level of support in schools across Scotland, to which Pauline was able to respond that no, there was not, that hours had to be attributed to a specific pupil, and owing to the Additional Support for Learning act, it seemed these pupils, would have to be deemed to have exceptional needs, almost to the point where in previous years, they would have been liable for special education.

Ian raised the question of whether or not these pupils with extra needs were flagged up to external examiners, when their papers were being marked? Pauline responded that when organising exam provision and support then yes, but concerning marking, no.

Ken suggested that writing to the MSP about the practical implementation of the ASL Act in schools might be of merit. This was agreed upon by the PC as a good idea.

8. AOCB

- a) Police link officer

Ken informed the council that the previous post at Howdenhall covered by Alun Williams, has now been taken over by Inspector Alan Bowie, who is keen to continue working in partnership with the school. He is currently on holiday, but has been given the dates of the meetings and it is hoped that he or one of his officers will be able to attend future meetings.

Pauline was very positive about the benefits of the partnership during the initial months, citing the example of being able to obtain information on pupil behaviour in the community over the summer holidays, as having been of particular value. She is hoping to engage the school's police team in events such as fireworks night, alongside visiting members of the fire service.

b) Housing developments

Ken raised the issue of proposed building developments in the area, noting particular concern in regards to school provision in the community.

Pauline responded that at the moment, the school have the number of free spaces available in each year group sitting in single figures.

Bill was able to add that one of the major concerns for the community was the loss of green belt land. He felt that building groups were showing complete disregard for the local community in the insensitivity shown in how development sites were decided.

Ian then asked about the Alnwickhill Waterworks development, which Bill explained was brown belt land, and therefore there were fewer arguments available to protect it.

Cllr cook left the meeting at 8pm.

c) AGM

Ian brought up the issue of this year's AGM. Ken responded that there was one a year, where all parents are invited to come along. The date for this school year is still to be decided.

d) New members

Ian pointed out the need to encourage new blood in to the group, noting that himself and Ken would both be finishing their service to the council with the graduation of their children in the coming years. Pauline suggested word of mouth seemed to be the best means of getting people on board, but also offered the possibility of emailing all parents of Gracemount pupils regarding this, or adding a note in with the October posting. She also offered the possibility of a stand at the

open evening on October 13th, where recruitment could be pursued. This idea was well received. Lesley was able to report a positive increase in the number of members to the PC Facebook page.

e) Participation in school choir

Concerns were raised about the extent to which activities such as choir and band are considered voluntary, but enforced as seemingly mandatory to pupils pursuing musical tuition, with the implied idea that their lessons will be stopped if they do not participate. Pauline replied that it was not the case that participation in the choir is mandatory to pupils receiving musical tuition, though they were strongly encouraged to get involved. She has promised to look into this for the next meeting.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The dates of all meetings for this year are:

Mon 7th November 2011

Mon 16th January 2011

Mon 5th March 2011

Mon 23rd April 2011

Mon 11th June 2011