

STRATHAVEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL

(VIRTUAL) MEETING 20th AUGUST 2020

MINUTES

**WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

**In attendance**: Jack Campbell (Chair), Ali Moon, Simon Jardine, Lorna McAuley, Jo Tunney, Mary Robertshaw, Debbie Neeley, Frances Auty, Councillor Isobel Dorman.

Kevin Boyd (Headteacher), Jillian Kane (Depute Head Teacher).

**Apologies:** Kay Maxwell (Secretary), Councillor Graeme Campbell, Karen Lapsley, Jill Frew, Giovanna MacKenna, Carolyne Mitchell

**AGM:**

Jackwelcomed all in attendance to the meeting. Due to family circumstances Kay was unable to attend the meeting. Ali agreed to take on the role of Secretary for the foreseeable future. With no further nominations for Chair, Jack agreed to remain in post for a further year.

**Chair Report**

Pre covid: The PC discussed mentoring scheme, the litter/recycling project with Mr McGarrie & also mental health projects with Ms Kane and Simon supporting. Improving communications by setting up a PC Facebook page which was led & moderated by Carolyne, Jo & Simon, with the purpose of reaching those parents who might not normally seek out information on school matters through more traditional means.

Post covid: The lockdown and subsequent restrictions have brought very great challenges to the school. On behalf of all parent/carers, the Parent Council offered it sincere gratitude to the teachers who demonstrated great commitment to their pupils and worked innovatively and tirelessly to mitigate the negative impact that the virus restrictions brought.

It was noted that, based on the feedback from parent/carers, there had been a spectrum of experience for young people in school, some coped well and adapted to new learning arrangements while others suffered from the reduced contact, encouragement and leadership.

The school, under Mr Boyd’s leadership, did as much as it was able; much work has gone into planning for possible further lockdowns and it is believed that the negative impact on pupils previously will not be as great should school access be restricted in the future.

It remains to be seen what longer term effects will result from the loss of class time and the reduction in external examinations.

**MINUTES OF PREVIOUS AGM & MEETING**

The Minutes of the AGM in 2019 and PC meeting were approved.

**MATTERS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

There is a meeting for school parent council chairs taking place on 22 Oct at SLC and Jack is happy to take forward any questions from PC members

**HEADTEACHER’S REPORT**

**Roll/Staffing**

Our current roll is 996 pupils and we are staffed at 69.7 FTE (full-time equivalent). This is an increase of 6 pupils and 0.2 FTE from last session. This is helpful in terms of our continued capacity to deliver a wide range of courses. Whilst accommodation in the Academy continues to be very tight, it is manageable at this level. Thanks to Ms Huq for her creative and solution-focused approach to timetabling. In addition to creating the original school timetable, Ms Huq has developed our timetabling arrangements in the event of a move to blended learning and significantly revised the return to school timetable for August to support the implementation of the Scottish Government’s guidelines.

The following new staff have joined us this session:

* Mrs C McAfee – Maths
* Miss L Grant - HE
* Miss McKinven – Biology
* Miss H Atterson – English
* Miss S Harvey – RE

Several other temporary and Area Cover staff are also employed across the school.

Six newly qualified teachers (NQTs) have also joined us for this session:

* Miss K Dunsmore – Art
* Miss L Allison - Business Education
* Miss H Milliken – English
* Mr S Batchelor – Geography
* Mr P Crawford - History
* Mrs R McCallum – Maths
* Miss L Cochrane – PE

Our NQTs are currently being observed by Ms Huq and Mr Greenberg

The focus for this schedule of observations is:

* create a safe, caring and purposeful learning environment
* develop positive relationships and positive behaviour strategies

We are currently in the process of recruiting one unpromoted post:

* Teacher of Technical Education (1.0 FTE)

I am pleased to report that we do not currently have any members of staff with long-term absences. There is no doubt that the current pandemic is putting pressure on staffing across the country. SLC have recruited additional Area Cover staff to alleviate the staffing challenges this session. Whilst this has been helpful, some Area Cover staff are now starting to be redeployed to other schools where necessary. Despite the current challenges, our staffing is reasonably settled for the moment. However, I am fully aware that this could change quickly and know that staff are doing their very best in an extremely challenging environment.

**S6 Leadership Team 2020-2021**

We have appointed a team of eight Captains, House Captains, Prefects and a number of Ambassadors who will help to take forward school improvement in key areas. Ambassadors have been appointed in the following areas: Career, Health, Language, Learning, Music, Sport, STEM & Technology. We feel it is important for all pupils to have leadership opportunities as they progress through school. Ms Barr will continue to work closely with the S6 Leadership Team throughout the session.

**PSE – Test and Protect process**

This week staff are delivering a presentation during PSE on the Test and Protect Process. Young people asked that we share this information so they understand why decisions are made concerning confirmed Covid-19 cases. We hope that this information helps to prevent the spread of the virus within the community. A special thanks to Mrs Kane for creating the presentation, which has also been shared with school staff and will be shared on our Covid-19 page on the school website.

**SCHOOL RECOVERY PLANNING**

Our priorities, along with all other SLC schools for this session are:

1. Continuity of Learning
2. Health and Wellbeing
3. Equity

**Continuity of Learning**

Mrs James leads our work on learning, teaching and assessment. She has led the recent publication of our ‘Learning from Home Parent/Carer Guide’ and our ‘Learning from Home Pupil Guide’ along with other documents to support home learning.

Our September staff INSET had a focus on developing staff’s digital pedagogy. I launched our day with a live broadcast to all staff using Google Meet, then teachers attended 3/4 of 7 sessions which were delivered by colleagues with expertise in the following areas: Google Forms; Virtual Jotters; Microsoft Teams; Powerpoint +; Video recording; Youtube Channels; Screencasting. In addition, Mrs James led a session on Google Meet, there was a drop in for Google Classroom and our Tapestry group met to plan for the year ahead. Thanks to Mr Brown (FH Sciences) for organising our professional learning and feedback from staff was extremely positive. We will continue to support and upskill staff to improve their skills and confidence in using digital platforms.

I have also met with our primary Head Teacher colleagues to share our Learning Community readiness to learn from home and capture areas of consistency across the learning community. Mrs Kane also joined us to discuss plans for transition for the year ahead.

Mrs Kane reported on Health & Wellbeing, Equity and the remits of our two new Acting PT Equity posts (Mrs Wellcoat & Mrs Juskowiak), which are funded through PEF. The focus on return to school in August was health & wellbeing. The pupils have shown immense resilience and have come back in a postive manner back into learning & managing the new routines. Staff have provided additional support for those pupils with anxiety and additional support needs. The school is continuing the SeeMe & the anti-bullying programmes. As a result of the pandemic & lockdown every secondary & primary school has been given funding for an in-school counselling service. Pupils can self-refer; guidance staff & parents can also do so. Some pupils have already self-referred. The school has been selected to participate in the Blues programme by Action for Children, targeting the S3 year group, which is about working with anxiety & depression. There will be people coming into the school to run this. Setting up the nurturing facility is still in progress. The S1s have settled in extremely well however there are a few who will need nurturing. With regards to PEF – the two Acting PT Equity staff have taken on the role of identifying the barriers to learning in lockdown not just for those on free school meals but there are also other families with hidden poverty. They will be asking pupils their views & collecting data. Other projects to receive funding are ‘close the vocab gap’ (S1-3) & Bikeability course, which will be tailored to Strathaven Academy. A bid has been submitted to SLC to obtain chromebooks for those who don’t have access to wifi at home and PEF funds will be put towards this. Debbie asked if any one was looking after the staff’s wellbeing. Kevin explained there is wealth of support available to staff online. For headteachers they meet together online and are supported by education psychologist. He will be meeting with the learning community primary headteachers for the intial meeting. The staff also look after each other and there is flexibility with staff and their time in school if not teaching face to face. A number of small things that make a difference. Mr Boyd has sensed a heightened anxiety amongst the staff since the October break and as a result the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are making the effort to walk around during the day & talk to staff and provide support. It is also important to give staff time to upskill as ‘time’ is their most valuable commodity. Debbie checked Kevin is satisfied that SLC are providing staff with appropriate support. Mrs Kane gave a special mention to the PE department for coping outdoors without complaint and that they have been remarkable with the variety of activities they have arranged. All members of staff have completed their Professional Review & Development (PRD). Overall school attendance is higher than the national average at approx 97% not significantly different from previous years. There are now two dedicated members of staff to support young pupils having to self-isolate, Ms McGinlay & Mrs Wellcoat (acting as family liaison) - contacting pupils at home with work and supporting them on their return. Simon asked if self-isolating counts as an absence and how quick does the information from class teaching arrive in Google classrooms. Ms Kane confirmed it does not count as an absence and time for the classwork to be uploaded depends on the availability of staff. They are encouraging pupils to email staff to chase up their requirement. Mr Boyd also suggested encouraging pupils to have a buddy in class to support them. Mrs Kane explained both the parent/carer & the pupil will receive a separate email to show what is required workwise during self-isolation.

**SQA PLANNING/ALTERATION TO COURSEWORK**

On 7th October, SQA announced that the 2021 National 5 exam diet had been cancelled

and will be assessed in schools based on a system of quality not quantity of evidence.

There will be quality assurance courses ran for staff. The school is still waiting for subject

specific guidance which is being sent out by SQA on a rolling basis. Mr Boyd will be

meeting Mrs James (SQA Co-ord) and Mr Fleming to support the planning for the implementation of upcoming SQA guidance. The timings of the prelims have been changed based on feedback from this year’s prelims and the parent forum. For Highers & Advanced Highers, the exams have been delayed until 13 May 2021 and will run until 4 June. The exam timetable is expected to be released by SQA at the end of October. Mr Boyd highlighted that there are 30 members of staff who work in different positions with SQA which is beneficial to the school. The school will be subject to moderation and is working with other schools in EK around this. Jack asked if the school would be providing plenty of opportunities for exam practice especially for the current S5 cohort whose first external exams will be their Highers next year. Mr Boyd confirmed there will be prelims however they will differ from previous years, as it will not be possible to use the usual external invigilators as many are over 70 and this will have to be done internally instead.

Lorna asked about Music and for those taking singing as their practical element. Mr Boyd explained the school was now set up for musical instruments but were still awaiting guidance from Education on singing. There is a similar issue for those taking PE and Mr Boyd is keen to get the appropriate SQA guidance as soon as possible.

**SENIOR PHASE AWARDS**

Jack explained this had been added to the agenda as a result of questions raised by

parents as to the difference to criteria for this year’s awards. Mr Boyd explained that in determining the recipient of any award, the school considers a wide body of key evidence relating to pupil progress, achievement and estimates, and measure this against the requirements of the course. This wide body of key evidence consists of end of unit assessments, homework, informal assessments, quality of response to key questions, formal assessments, specific assignments and practical evidence. He said the criteria has not changed and that it has never been shared. He would like to see a shift to August and base awards on SQA results rather than prelims. This year pupils were not awarded £10 vouchers as Mr Boyd thought this was not a priority in the current circumstances. Simon agreed that gifts were not necessary just the certificates of recognition that pupils can use on their CVs/ personal statement. It was highlighted that it is important to celebrate all achievements in school – other skills & non-academic achievements also recognised.

**PARENTS’ EVENING ARRANGEMENTS**

Jack asked re the plan for this year’s parents evening. Mr Boyd explained at a recent Head Teachers’ meeting they discussed the need to consider alternatives to face to face parents’ evenings given current Covid-19 related limitations.

Following this, Mrs James has been invited to be part of a SLC short life working group to discuss and explore alternatives to face to face parents’ evenings, including the use of interim reporting on Progress and Achievement (BGE). The group will produce a guidance document for Head Teachers which will include some guiding principles along with ideas and any good practice examples.

Plans for parental engagement this session have been discussed and agreed across the Learning Community and the EK and Strathaven area (Secondary schools) to ensure a consistent approach. There are currently no plans for online parents’ evenings. The school will of course implement any good practice shared from the SLC group. In short, the plan is to increase the number of reports to parents/carers and young people. At Strathaven Academy, this will see an additional report for each pupil this session. In both the BGE (S1-S3) and SP (S4-S6), each pupil will receive two tracking reports and one full report. The staff will be trained in improving the comments in reports to focus on strengths and what further development is required. Deputy HTs will create videos to support the launch of full reports for each year group and will promote the work of these year groups at relevant times through online platforms such as Twitter. Mr Boyd will share the Tracking & Reporting timeline with the parent forum. If there are concerns regarding the progress of certain pupils, staff will still speak on phone to parents/carers and limited appointments may be arranged in school if required.

**AOCB**

Isobel Dorman made the PC aware Stonehouse pupils will have difficulties getting to school after 30 Oct as Whitelaws bus company has cancelled the extra free bus for pupils. Although not a school issue, Ms Barr will communicate to parents/carers regarding this matter.Frances suggested that during these unprecedented circumstances the council should help to resolve this issue and, on behalf of the parents, help arrange for the provision of a replacement bus service for the 60 plus pupils. Simon stepped in to support this request and suggested that Isobel Dorman as an elected councillor should be supporting families with this issue. The parents are not asking the Council to provide free school transport and they already pay £100 per pupil per term however to arrange alternative transport and payment would be challenging for any parent to co-ordinate on behalf of all 60 pupils. Frances will look into this further and Jack asked the PC to be updated.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Not in a position to set future date at this time.