



**STRATHAVEN ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL
(VIRTUAL) MEETING 26th JANUARY 2021
MINUTES**

WELCOME & APOLOGIES

In attendance: Jack Campbell (Chair), Ali Moon (Secretary), Karen Lapsley, Simon Jardine, Lorna McAuley, Jo Tunney, Debbie Neeley, Frances Auty, Kay Maxwell, Adele Brennan, Andy McIntosh, Iain Gilroy, Jill Frew, Carolyne Mitchell, Saraid Lawson, Kevin Boyd (Headteacher), Jillian Kane (Depute Head Teacher). Rhona James (Depute Head Teacher)

Apologies: Mary Robertshaw, Councillor Isobel Dorman, Councillor Margaret Cooper

Jack welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced Adele Brennan, Iain Gilroy (who shares membership with Clare Gilroy) & Andy McIntosh as it was their first PC meeting. He also introduced Rhona James who was invited along by Kevin Boyd as she is heading up the school's home learning.

MINUTES OF MEETING 20th OCTOBER 2020

The minutes had been amended to reflect that Kay Maxwell had stepped down as Secretary. Jack extended his thanks to Kay for her dedication and support as Secretary on the PC and was pleased that she is continuing to sit on the PC until the summer. The Minutes of the PC meeting were approved.

MATTERS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

At the last meeting, Councillor Isobel Dorman raised the issue of the school bus arrangement, provided by Whitelaws, from Stonehouse which was due to end. The bus company had provided a free bus during covid however needed to withdraw this service. Frances highlighted the concern amongst pupils/parents in Stonehouse. At the meeting it was felt that Councillor Dorman's response did not alleviate concerns. Jack followed up with Frances & Councillor Cooper, who contacted Whitelaws and it was explained that they were unable to legally run a 'pay as you go' system for pupils. Fees needed to be paid for by parents in advance, which was financially not an option for many parents. Frances reached out to other parents to see if they were willing to arrange a collection of fees. She updated the meeting that it was not possible for a group arrangement, and as a result Stonehouse parents have made their own arrangements by car sharing, getting local bus etc. She expressed her disappointment at the local authority's lack of support in the matter but felt that with everyone home learning again it was not a priority for them. This unfortunate situation remains unresolved.

HEADTEACHER'S REPORT

Non-Covid

Kevin stated there is very little to report. He was pleased to report that almost all of the staff are fit and well, however some have been impacted by the Covid-19 virus and he wished colleagues a full and speedy recovery. He was delighted to share that following competitive interview Ms Huq had been successful in gaining a temporary Quality Lead Officer (QLO) post with SLC. She will work in partnership with existing QLOs within the CQIS team on Covid curriculum responsiveness and recovery between now and June 2021. The remit of her new post will be a blend of SQA alternative certification and moderation work, along with the use of data for statutory standards and quality reporting and performance management. There will need to be a short transition period and the school looks forward to working with Ms Huq in her new role. He wished Ms Huq every success for the future. Ms Huq's post has been advertised within the school and Kevin has asked colleagues for expressions of interest for an Acting DHT post by close of school tomorrow.

Home (Remote) Learning

Kevin showed a brief powerpoint presentation (a copy is attached to the minutes). Yesterday the school shared the updated school home/remote learning guide which included a video by Ms James. It reflected national and local guidance and initial feedback from all stakeholders (including PC members). Kevin stated that remote learning is challenging for everyone and wished to start by thanking pupils, parents/carers and all staff for their hard work and support in these difficult circumstances.

HMIE have now been asked by the Deputy First Minister to review the effectiveness of remote learning for the duration of school closures, providing a national overview of practice. For South Lanarkshire Council (SLC) this means that one secondary school, around five Primary schools and perhaps one ASN establishment will be selected on a weekly basis. Last Friday, Kevin was informed that Strathaven Academy had been selected to engage with HMIE and on Monday he had a Teams meeting with (Alison MacDonald) HMIE. The discussion focused on three areas:

- What is working well at Strathaven Academy?
- Concerns and challenges we face?
- What further support is needed?

The school's engagement will contribute to a national overview report (including a focus on meeting learning needs) which will now be published shortly. Weekly reports will also be published on Education Scotland's website. Engagement with parents and learners is also taking place nationally (surveys, focus groups) and this will be included in the national report, alongside other findings to help support and improve the delivery of remote learning. SLC are also planning online surveys for parents/ carers. Kevin was pleased to report this engagement with HMIE was a very positive experience and the school's remote learning offer was very well received by Education Scotland. Whilst individual schools do not get feedback it was clear that HMIE recognised the many successes that Strathaven Academy has achieved over a relatively short period of time. He was delighted to be able to share this excellent feedback with staff and SLC.

Publication of the national report will help to support and improve the delivery of remote learning across the country

Kevin talked through the powerpoint presentation which has the key points regarding remote learning.

Education Endowment Foundation touched on 5 key things to consider:

1. Teaching quality is more important than how lessons are delivered - it found no clear difference between live & recorded lessons
2. Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged children - the school has handed out 56 chrome books on a permanent basis and also others are out on loan (which didn't happen in the first lockdown)
3. Peer interactions can improve motivation and improve learning outcomes - e.g peer marking feedback, opportunities for live discussions mainly directed towards older pupils.
4. Supporting learners to work independently can improve learning outcomes - prompt pupils to reflect on their work, provide strategies for when they get stuck, disadvantaged pupils often benefit from structure like lists of tasks.
5. Different approaches to remote learning suit different types of content and pupils - teachers should be supported with content re. age & stage, e.g games for learning useful for learning vocab in modern languages

Education Scotland Guidance:

Remote learning involves a combination of 'live' interactions between teacher and learners, and also learning which takes place away from the direct presence of the class teacher. It may involve a range of learning experiences which take place in a variety of learning spaces, including outdoors and includes active and physical learning.

Whilst remote learning is not a substitute for full time classroom-based learning and teaching, effective remote learning can mitigate some of the adverse impact of a reduction in face-to-face learning and can offer learners:

Key principles (excerpt)

- remote learning will not replicate face to face in school teaching - in style, approach or hours of delivery
- class teacher retains responsibility for planning and organising children's and young people's learning, with learning supported by parents and carers
- opportunities for learners to progress and extend their learning

There is an understanding of the difficulty for parents trying to support children in their learning. Unlike the previous lockdown the school is moving onto new work rather than focussing on consolidation work.

Teacher Professional Associations

Kevin also shared with the PC what the school can & can't do based on guidance from Teacher Professional Associations which has provided some helpful support for good practice.

- Remote learning should be a mixture of pedagogical approaches, varied according to age and stage. A straightforward attempt to duplicate in-school arrangements is completely inappropriate and should be challenged e.g secondary timetables which follow the same pattern as normal.
- "Live lessons" can be a useful part of a remote learning offer, but their use needs to be proportionate and it is the Council's responsibility to ensure adequate IT provision and, where necessary, professional learning. Ultimately, they are not a contractual requirement ...

Live lessons can be a useful part of remote learning and will evolve as the weeks go on with appropriate support to teachers being provided.

Strathaven Academy remote learning.

Continued challenges of remote learning shared with HMIE (excerpt):

- Supporting parents/carers and managing expectations of the remote learning experience
- Relatively low expectations (perception) of some professional associations versus very high parental expectations - some professional associations would have the school doing less than in first lockdown however Kevin assured the PC that the school is going above and beyond what is expected.
- Ensuring the wellbeing of our school community given the uncertain picture and the rapidly changing demands - Kevin explained there are plans being drawn up for what happens from mid Feb onwards which have not been shared with HTs yet and he will let us know once known.

Moving forward, in addition to provision in the remote learning guide:

- Live interactions in Google Classroom can be via Google Meet, Google Classroom chat facility or email
- Senior Phase - we have encouraged all staff to use Google Meet to interact with learners (this may be a brief interaction to set tasks and give instruction about resources, etc. some staff may wish to offer live lessons)
- BGE (S1-S3) - working towards at least one live interaction per day or 5 across the school week.
- We are introducing weekly pastoral check-ins using Google Meet - started this week for BGE and next week will contact senior pupils (S4-S6)
- Formal Quality Assurance is already underway - DHTs have been joining google classrooms as they would do if they were in school.

Last Thursday, Kevin shared feedback from the PC with all members of the Extended leadership Team (ELT) during their Teams meeting. He stated that whilst members are very appreciative of the hard work of staff in delivering remote learning, the majority of PC members' feedback reflects a level of disappointment.

Many strengths and good practice are recognised by the PC. However, initial feedback asks for more live teaching, a more consistent provision from all teachers and more 'real-time' support and interaction with their children, amongst other things. School staff have made over 450 calls to parents/carers (HMIE were blown away by this) in relation to pupil engagement and almost all of these have been extremely positive conversations. Mr Fleming had contacted 84 parents that week and not received any negative comments.

Kevin acknowledged that the PC feedback is a small sample of the wider parent forum, however that the PC is keen to support the school and hope that this feedback will help to improve the school's remote learning offering. He and his team are all fully aware of the raised expectations, the levels of scrutiny and the need to continuously develop and refine their remote learning offering. Whilst Kevin is confident that the school has a very good remote learning offering that is appropriate for our own context, he recognises that there is more work to be done. He & his team will continue to consult and listen to pupils, parents/carers and staff as we move forward to ensure the provision is appropriate. Each week is part of an iterative process and a collective journey, where they take stock, make changes and seek continuous improvement.

Jack thanked Kevin for the update and his honesty. He was delighted to hear that contact with the wider school community has been positive. Jack commented on the 'handcuffs' being placed on the school and staff by professional associations and found that distasteful. He expressed his huge admiration for Kevin and the academy staff who are going way above what is expected of them. Kevin said that he has an excellent relationship with the professional association representatives, and they meet weekly to discuss any concerns. There is a good two-way communication at local level.

Carolyn received a call from staff and she is delighted with support for her child with ASN. She explained the only issues they have are technical issues and this has been recognised. Kevin said part of the conversation with HMIE was that there has been a lot of good developments with regards to ICT and this should improve education moving forward. He explained, that although the academy is a relatively small school it currently delivers 12 Advanced Highers, which pupils from other schools attend classes and with evolution of Google Meets it will possibly help with this provision in the future. Mrs James shared with all staff today a number of new apps coming out which will help with online delivery and the school will reap the benefits post pandemic. Jillian Kane shared that she was immensely impressed by the staff reaching out to families, being flexible and bringing struggling pupils into the hub. She thanked her staff for all their support. From his own personal experience Kevin understands how challenging it is for those parents who have children.

Lorna had gathered feedback from her children and their friends. She highlighted there are challenges for BGE who are struggling without a timetable and not being able to contact teachers at a certain time when they are having difficulties with work. She felt there was a need for more vocal explanations for younger pupils. She asked about the fact that it was not a contractual requirement for staff to offer live lessons & wondered why this has not changed due to current circumstances. Kevin said to his knowledge, he doesn't have any staff who do not wish to offer live lessons but there may be challenging home circumstances for some staff & therefore they would not be able to deliver such lessons. He commented that it was really useful focussing on the use of ICT during the last INSET day in September and some staff may need a bit more support and encouragement.

Rhona explained using Google Meet for senior pupils is working well and so this is now being looked at for BGE. She is looking to arrange a drop-in either via Google Meet or the chat facility for the younger pupils and moving towards more scheduled Google Meet timetable slots for them.

She reiterated Kevin's earlier point that each week they are improving the provision based on the learning from the previous week. Rhona asked people to be mindful that teachers are also at home with children and may have difficulty running live lessons. Jillian stepped in to explain that the feedback received from pupils regarding the recorded voiceover lessons is proving to be positive as that they can replay lessons as required. Live lessons are not popular with all pupils and more prefer the recorded lessons. Jo thanked the staff for the transparency and taking on board the feedback from the PC and explained how important the pastoral contact is and appreciated how much the school is improving its offer and wanted the wider parent forum to know this. Kevin has been keeping in touch with other Heads and he appreciated the positive comments. Debbie asked if there was an expectation that pupils are receiving a 100% education whilst at home. Kevin explained that all guidance is stating that remote learning is not replicating a full time in-school education. Learning & teaching is moving on and assessment & certification will be done when back in school. The expectation at the moment is that the senior phase keeps consolidating previous learning and engage with new learning so that pupils are where they need to be on return to school. Staff have kept an eye on the ball so that the home learning is appropriate.

Debbie expressed the view that there is currently a lack of communication that leaves senior pupils unsure what is happening. Rhona explained that pupils will be given plenty of notice before assessments will take place and information will be sent out when known. Simon said he was delighted that the school was moving forward every week and appreciated the staff are working hard. He did raise the concern that some pupils, like his son, struggle to engage with remote learning and how will this affect their grades. Rhona replied that she was in a meeting today to discuss how pupils are affected by this type of learning and she reassured Simon & the PC that there will be a consistent response across the local authority to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged by their 'covid responsiveness'. Jillian is currently tracking online engagement; she was impressed that senior pupils are sitting at 95% and the BGE around 75% so constantly working on how to improve this. She explained that they understand it is really difficult for parents to monitor engagement. Kevin explained that the 'next phase' guidance will likely change to further support those pupils with ASN and also those who are struggling to thrive with remote learning may be invited into school to work.

Lorna asked about the S4-S6 pupils who are taking subjects with 50% practical elements that have not been able to be taught in school this year and how will they be assessed e.g PE & music. Kevin advised that SQA guidance will be coming out at the end of this week (29th January) so that plans can be put in place in school and pupils are not disadvantaged (covid-responsiveness). Kevin thinks the practical elements will take priority on return to school. Carlyne raised the issue about musical instruments (brass & wind) & singing & asked what provision the Scottish Government putting in place for this. Kevin stated he was confident this will be a priority and, with his previous experience working with SQA, they will always err on the side of caution, as will he to ensure pupils are not disadvantaged. There needs to a clear plan for future learning and future assessments.

Wellbeing & Mental Health

Jack said there were quite a few concerns from parents regarding this. Jillian explained there will be pastoral check-ins and, as next week is mental health week, the S6 ambassadors will be doing some sessions on this also. The school received significant funding for an in-school counselling service which currently provides a counsellor two full days in school per week. Access to this service is either by self referral, guidance teachers or parents. This has continued during lockdown via telephone and the school is hoping to increase to three days. The school is also encouraging physical wellbeing as it doesn't want pupils in front of screens all day. Staff are working on this

however Jillian always welcomes any suggestions from pupils or parents/carers. Simon commented that connection from school really does improve the wellbeing of pupils. Kay asked if 'Wellbeing Wednesday' was just for pupils and Jillian explained it is for all the family 7-8pm on a Wednesday. It is publicised on the website and through Google Meet. Access to the session is via their pupil's account. It is a fitness and relaxation session. Monday & Friday morning there are keep fit classes for staff prior to the school day and also a book club for staff to promote their physical & mental wellbeing. There is a Headteacher pod for HTs; SLC have activities going on too. One of the staff is running a 'biology & blether' session and Kay said that this has been positively received by pupils.

Senior Phase Coursework & Teacher-Led Assessments

Jack said that although some of this has already been covered, it is causing concern with pupils & parents and they require reassurance and clarity. Mrs James & Mr Fleming are preparing a communication in form of FAQ. Kevin said that when rumours happen in school it is easy to respond to so it was most helpful to hear these concerns so they can be addressed. Rhona said in addition to the FAQs she thinks a video clip providing an explanation will be helpful for pupils and parents so they will aim to address these concerns. Jack said this would be appreciated.

Support for Vulnerable Pupils Including ASNs

Jack asked if the school had any further comments. Jillian explained the vulnerable pupils are being supported in the hub and there is a large team of ASN support.

Music Tuition - Wind Instruments

Jack said that Carlyne's earlier question had probably covered this. Lorna said that it is possible to learn online as her daughter has been having music and drama classes online throughout lockdown and cannot understand why it is not possible in school. She feels more 'out of box' thinking is required to overcome this issue. Kevin stated he is open to creative responses however his hands are currently tied by national guidance, but this will hopefully change through the HMIE reports and exchange of solutions. He is confident that his colleagues will ensure practical subjects are a priority and solutions will be found. Jillian explained there is an issue with copyright when delivering lessons and it is not possible to share resources live and links need to be sent. Carlyne raised the issue of home economics that there may be some families struggling to purchase ingredients. Frances advised that Mr Sinclair has been looking into getting equipment & ingredients to families and the school is looking into funding for this. Rhona spoke to parents and Mr Sinclair to explain that although Google Classroom sets timings for the completion of work the school staff understand this is not always possible to complete recipes/tasks within this time frame. Frances wished to thank Kevin and the academy staff for all their hard work, and she appreciates all they do. As a teacher herself she understands the pressure they are under. She believes the focus on wellbeing is a priority.

AOCB

There being no further business Jack thanked Kevin, Jillian and Rhona on behalf of the PC and parents. The PC are supportive of the school and all feedback was meant to support their work.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Jack thanked everyone for attending and there is no date planned for the next meeting at this stage.