

**Minutes of the Grantown Grammar School Parent Council meeting.
Held at the school on Thursday 23rd May 2013**

Apologies

Sally Pilkington
Catherine McAuly–Brand
Ollie Bray
Zoe Cooke
Robert Brown

Present

Giles Baker	Chair, Parent Council
Irene Carson	Head Teacher
Claire McGonigal	Depute Head Teacher
Karen Smith	Treasurer
Lindsay Coleman	Clerk
Ene-Karmen Forsyth	Vice Chair, Policy and Planning
Andy Liggat	Vice Chair, Communications
Anne Sullivan	
Elaine Cullen	
Lynne Stephens	
Liz Amphlett	
Victoria Robertson	Highland Council

1. Approval of the minutes dated 19th March 2013

Proposed by Karen Smith

Seconded by Ene-Karmen Forsyth

2. Discussion with Victoria Robertson from Highland Council regarding 'Engagement and Communications with Parents and Parent Councils'.

Victoria is visiting schools and Parent Council meetings in the Highlands and is looking at communication between parents and schools. Her aim is to find out how people would ideally like to communicate and also the methods that work well. She will be producing a survey which will be sent out through schools to parents asking a series of questions around this subject. One of the questions involved asking whether parents would like an online tracking system to see their children's progress/results, rather than relying on written reports or parent meetings, Irene and Claire expressed concern about the timing of this proposal and the lack of consultation with schools. Irene felt that this question should not be asked at this stage as the system has not yet been piloted for this, but if it is, then the wording is critical to ensure that parents truly understand the true meaning of the question.

Giles suggested that he would like there to be access to the children's homework questions.

Karen felt that increased online access would be too time consuming for already overstretched teachers. Lynne said that providing information to parents was what Parents Nights are for. Andy agreed

that too much information can be dangerous and agreed with Irene that the survey must be worded very carefully.

Giles then suggested an open ended question asking parents what communication they would like to see. This could then show up any good ideas already being used elsewhere or that could be introduced. The discussion then progressed as to how the survey would be distributed. Victoria suggested by pupil's mail bags and email. Irene felt the return rate using the mail bag would only reach approx 20% and a letter would require a stamped addressed envelope in order to get a response by post.

Victoria mentioned that other groups had suggested having the ability to email in sickness and other miscellaneous messages. Irene was again concerned with this idea, explaining that the number of miscellaneous emails received at the school is already a full time job for someone. She also explained that there could also be potential Data Protection issues which would need to be considered. Victoria asked what communication method worked well and it was agreed that Parent's Nights and follow up meetings were the best.

She then asked how forthcoming events are communicated. Elaine believed that it would be good to receive more information about events and trips as most of the information is relayed through the child often lacking the detail required.

The group discussed the Grapevine feature which appears in The Strathy. The consensus was that everyone present liked it.

Ene expressed that she personally likes newsletters. The school have tried texting to alert parents when a new newsletter is available.

However our location means that many people do not receive these texts, or receive them late. Giles suggested that the PC Facebook page announces when a new newsletter is available. Andy suggested that it should be announced on all sources possible, ie school bag, website, Facebook page and it was agreed that it is generally up to parents to decide for themselves the best way to receive this. At the start of the year all parents are given all the information needed to make this choice.

Claire expressed an interest to see the results of the survey to see if the school can make any improvements. She then had to make her apologies and leave the meeting.

3. The Treasurers Report

Karen announced that the bank balance is currently £9616 although £3500 is the donation that was given from M Stuart (discussed earlier in the Fundraising meeting).

Karen asked Giles for his help breaking down the Amazon report he had previously sent her for the end of year accounts. The print is too small for her to read the details.

Action - Giles

She reported that she has also given Irene a cheque for the school for the receipts given to her at the last meeting by Irene. Irene thanked her for this contribution.

4. Head Teacher's Report

QIT Visit

Irene told the group about the latest follow up report from the QIT inspectors. The feedback was most positive and the follow through had focussed on the priority areas for action from the HMIE report – QI 5.9 School Improvement through Self Evaluation and 2.1 Learners Experiences.

They suggested a couple of areas for further improvement but were pleased at how much the school was moving forward. In particular,

- Parents and pupils were positive about the school and about T&L
- The general feeling is the school is active, caring and motivating with a very positive ethos
- Pupils were observed enjoying lessons and actively engaging in learning. The pupils told them the same.
- When pupils were asked what was working well they told them about how good their teachers were
- They recognised the very good progress in self evaluation that had been made despite other pressures
- They particularly noticed how positive the parents and pupils were about senior phase options/courses etc. Their confidence has not been seen anywhere else.

Options / Timetables

Options have now been finalised. Staffing will once again include a number of probationer teachers some being partly funded by the authority to allow us to release a high proportion of our teachers to be verifiers for the new qualifications. There is a new NQT in Biology and an additional science post has been filled for Chemistry and Biology. There will be a probationer in French, two in Maths and two in Technology. (Since the meeting it has been confirmed that the French Probationer will not be coming)

Budget

At the end of the financial year the school faced an over spend of around £24,000. There was an under spend at the start of the year of £25,000 so therefore there is really an over spend of £50,000. Permanent staffing is £66,000 over, so actually the school has saved £15,000 in other areas. It would not have been possible for the school to run with less staff.

Irene expressed concern about the budget situation for next session because of a very small S1 and a very large senior school, as well as the transition year with new and old courses running.

There have been savings with fuel / electricity etc which have been zeroed for the first time so the school has not seen the benefit of this. Had the previous years approach been taken then the school would have shown about £20,000 saving on oil alone.

Parents Evening On the subject of University Admission

Irene announced that the next Parent's Meeting will be changed from June until August or September.

Digital Magazine Launch

This has been very successful. School magazines dating back to 1913 have all been digitalised and there is a link to these on the school website. The pupils have all been extremely interested in them.

Building Work

Plans are at a draft stage for significant improvements to the office which we hope will begin this summer. There will be a new front door and secure entry. There will be a lot more office space and one of the Deputes offices will be split into two to make a new sick room for pupils. The staff room will have a fire exit external door.

5. Web Communications update

In Ollie's absence Giles led this part of the meeting. He mentioned the direct link from the school website to the new Parent Council site. Andy declared that the new format of the Parent Council site blog has immensely improved and content can still be moderated by Ollie and Andy's replacement.

It was then decided that at the new parents meeting in June, the Parent Council should try and recruit someone to replace Andy. Ollie will remain in the background to keep the site up and running but the new person will be responsible for the content. Irene asked Andy to write a little piece about what is required, and also to make it clear that the person doesn't necessarily need to attend Parent Council meetings.

Action – Andy

Giles then thanked Andy for all his help over the years and also asked that he attend the AGM where he may have the chance to meet his replacement.

6. Other Matters

Projection Equipment

Ene asked Irene if she has ever approached 'Rewards for All' for funding. This organisation had been suggested to her by Karen Derrick to raise money for the new equipment. Irene will look into this as there are often various Awards for all requests on the go. Quotes are also required so Ene asked Irene if she would ask Ollie to put together specific costings.

Action – Irene/Ollie

Engraving

Giles asked Irene whether Claire had asked Kirsty Laing to speak with local engravers regarding engraving school cups.

Action - Irene

Autism

Ene announced that she is to take early retirement from the NHS on the 28th June, so therefore will lose her contact with the NHS and the Council regarding this issue. However she believes that the Pines Centre in Inverness will actively start to target schools in the Highlands in the future. Giles asked Lynne whether she would like to take on this subject and she agreed.

Action - Lynne

Driving Ambitions

The Road Safety officer is happy to hold an evening at the school with the simulator. This might permit attendance by reasonably high numbers and advanced booking is recommended by her. If spaces permit, it may be a good idea to open up the invitation to the primary schools. Giles is also going to find out whether it would be possible to have the seatbelt demonstrator also available during school hours, however, if parents are required to be present, then it must remain an evening event. Giles will speak with the Road Safety Officer.

Action – Giles

7. AOB

Bike Lights

Lynne Stephens showed the group two types of bike lights that were loaned to her by the Bike Shop in Grantown as an example of 'trendy lights' that children may be happy to use. A discussion took place about how it is best to promote the use of lights to pupils. Irene suggested that it could be best for the Bike Shop to visit the children at the bike park or alternatively, maybe something could be incorporated into the bike maintenance class. Photos of the lights could go into the newsletter for parents to see. Lynne wondered whether S1 and S2 pupils could go to the bike park and talk to the other children.

Commonwealth Games

Lynne Stephens asked if the school would be organising anything for taking pupils to the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Irene did not think so as it will be taking place during the summer break and so parents could take their children to the Games if they so want to. In response to Lynn's suggestion that the Parent Council should push for the school to organise such a trip, Irene reminded those present that the staff of the school all work well beyond what can reasonably be expected of them and it would be totally inappropriate to ask them to do anything during holiday time. Pupils in GGS are lucky to have so many staff willing to give up their own time during holidays

and weekends to provide extensive opportunities for pupils. Giles then suggested that maybe the Parent Council could organise a trip. Irene asked if this meant organising transport to allow parents to take their own children or organising a full trip where the PC would be responsible for the children as this had major implications for the organisers. Giles confirmed that it would be for parents taking their own children. It was decided to add this question to Sally's questionnaire for new parents to find out the level of interest.

Action – Sally Pilkington

8. Date of next meeting and AGM

Parent Council meeting – Tuesday 27th August 2013 at 6.30pm
AGM – Tuesday 24th September 2013 at 7pm

The meeting closed at 9pm

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