

Minutes of AHS Parent Council Meeting 13th May 2013

Present: Meeting chaired by Robin Jenks (Chair)(Sliddery), Alison Richards (Lochranza), Ruth Betley (Vice Chair)(Shiskine), Andrew Walsh (Whiting Bay), Cil Paul (Lamlash), Jane Macbeth (Teacher representative), Beth Mowatt (Kildonan), Janine Hart (Brodick), Heather Allison (Lamlash) Patricia Jenkins (Brodick) .

In attendance: Mr Auld (Head Teacher), David Fyfe (Depute Head), Mrs Gregg (Depute Head), Kate Jenks (Clerk) and Parent Forum Members: Carole Johnson (Lamlash), Elaine Kilpatrick (Kildonan), Willie Muir (Kildonan), Gillian Thorburn (Corrie).

1. Apologies: Deborah Robertson (Blackwaterfoot), Alison May (Dippen).

2. Minutes of Meeting held 18th April - Agreed for accuracy - Proposed CP, Seconded AW.

3. Matters Arising: to be dealt with in main agenda.

4. Head Teacher's Report

4.1 SQA exams are up and running and the school has a new Chief Invigilator.

4.2 DA confirmed that the new Faculty Head of a) Language and Literacy is an English Teacher b) Social Subjects/Business Management and RME, teaches Geography and Modern Studies. Both will be visiting the school informally this week prior to taking up their posts in August.

DA advised that interviews for a 'Technical' teacher take place next Monday, as Mr Earle will be taking early retirement after the summer break.

DA also advised that both Miss Costello (Chemistry) and Miss Moffat (temporary teacher of History) have secured jobs elsewhere, so will not be returning for the next session.

4.3 The last official day for 6th year students was Friday 10th May. Pupils marked their departure with a variety of activities. Teachers provided refreshments during a short award ceremony in the afternoon.

5. Parental Concerns

5.1 Recent Appointments – while welcoming the appointment of new staff members, concerns were raised that the situations regarding Modern Languages and History have not been resolved. DA advised that there are seven pupils taking French at Int. 2 and Higher, next year. The hours for the teacher of Modern Languages have been increased to full time, to enable this.

With regard to the teaching of History – RB/DR/PJ are to write to Carol Kirk. **ACTION RB/DR/PJ**

PJ brought a document, from the Scottish Executive, to the attention of those present. The 'Commission on the delivery of Rural Education' has recently produced a report which highlights the need to support small rural schools, and states that children's education "must not be compromised". DA advised that he has not seen the report but the school had been involved in the consultation, together with a member of the Community Council. PJ referred to Gairloch High School, which has more teachers despite having 100 fewer pupils than AHS.

It was suggested that Ms Kirk and our MSP be invited to the table

ACTION ??

5.2 Reduction in Teaching Staff

DA advised that the small number of pupils (39) in S1 next year means that there will be just 2 classes in practical subjects. There will no longer be a need for 4 science teachers in the school.

DA welcomed North Ayrshire Council (NAC) support with Virtual Learning (V.L.E.) and advised that many schools within North Ayrshire are unable to offer a full range of Advanced Highers.

5.3 Subject Choices Following the recent 'Options Evening' held for S2 pupils, several parents had expressed concern about the limitations on choice. Some parents had met and PJ presented a summary of their concerns:

- *Music, Art and PE in 1 column only limits the choice pupils have. This seems disappointing given the amazing way the music department have inspired and built up the lower school and then the options form cuts their choices. In the past subjects have been made available in other columns so why no flexibility this year.*

- *Biology in 1 column - confusing as this is normally the science chosen to double with another so why the limitations this year?*
- *French column only 1 national qualification subject then 2 vocational subjects. Bit of "Hobson's choice" for the academic pupil.*
- *The lack of progression in some columns/subjects. Are all subjects in the current options form able to be progressed to higher?*
- *Were teachers consulted in time tabling?*
- *Will pupils be able to change subject choices at the end of 3rd year. If so, do staff feel that pupils will be able to complete the course work in 1 year and achieve their national qualification at the end of 4th year as planned?*
- *Why not a broader range of vocational subjects?*

On a broader platform reduction in staffing continues to undermine the ability for the same range of subjects being available to Arran children as their counterparts have on the mainland. This creates a definite loss of educational equality. Small fluctuations in pupil numbers appear disproportionately large in small schools affecting the numbers of teachers and therefore the subjects available year on year. Some parents have already made the choice to move themselves or their children and, should this situation continue with number crunching dictating subject availability, more parents may vote with their feet.

DA explained that the S3 curriculum is the final year of 'Broad General Education' (BGE) – it is not, as previously, the first of a two year course towards Standard Grade exams. As such, pupils are expected to complete the "Experiences and Outcomes" (Es and Os) as defined by Curriculum for Excellence. The columns in the option sheet ensure that each pupil fulfils those expectations.

All pupils are required to do Maths, English, Science, a Social Subject, one of the Expressive Arts (Art, Music, PE) and study a Modern Language until the end of 3rd year. Although there is a national move towards two modern languages and the school had planned for that at the start of the last session, the withdrawal of the Faculty Head last summer prevented the introduction of 'conversational German' as an option.

DA confirmed that the process of timetabling, undertaken by Mr Fyfe, includes consultation with teachers as to their requirements for each class. "Anything but not Everything is possible".

While Music was included in two columns last year, parents were advised

that this was a 'one off' and it is not possible to repeat that in the coming session. There is no flexibility available this year, as there are just 39 pupils in S2 (soon to be S3), whereas there were 58 last year.

As far as the Skills for Work courses are concerned, these are provided under an arrangement with Argyll College and AHS does not pay for the staffing. DA is discussing the possibility of other courses (e.g. Child Care; Rural skills; Aquaculture; Equine skills) with Argyll College but the potentially low numbers (fewer than 10) would stop these being viable. He also advised that the new Faculty Head (Social Subjects etc.) may teach 'Travel and Tourism'. DA is meeting with the Schools Liaison officer for CforE (Curriculum for Excellence) in the next couple of weeks.

There was some confusion as to whether French is compulsory – DA advised that it should be taught until at least the end of S3.

Beth voiced her concerns about discipline issues in some classes where children were asked to leave the class (?to avoid the disruption). This had also been highlighted in the parental questionnaire (?PC). DA confirmed that parents, who have concerns about anything that affects their children's learning, should contact him directly.

Andrew expressed concern that the incoming Faculty Heads are teaching the wrong subject (in terms of gaps in the current teaching staff availability), while acknowledging that Mr Auld's hands may be tied by the system.

Tricia referred to Gairloch academy – the principle of extending choice and avoiding early specialisation appears to be contradicted by the proposal in North Ayrshire Council, to reduce the number of subjects studied in S4 to 5 or 6. It seems as if education is being compromised at each level and parents can't predict what is going to be available from year to year.

In response to concerns about what students will need to achieve in order to access Higher Education, Mr Auld reiterated that universities will be looking at each pupil's achievement by the end of S5 – as is the case now. He acknowledged that some schools have put forward students for Highers at the end of S4. DA is to circulate link to Glasgow University qualifications and Tricia to circulate link with Gairloch. **ACTION DA/PJ**

Mr Auld advised that S4,5 and 6 will be amalgamated in future as the Senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence (CforE) follows the 'Broad General Education' phase up to S3.

Mr Auld advised that he and the Depute Heads will be meeting on Wednesday, with principal teachers and faculty heads and a 'blank piece

of paper', to discuss how many hours are needed to deliver the National 4 and 5 courses next year. Although nominally this is 160 hours per subject, some prior learning may be taken into account.

The current S3 class will be taking 8 subjects in S4, however Mr Auld has concerns about this number and has decided that future year groups will be taking fewer subjects.

A letter is to be written to MSP and NAC regarding Staff ratios, realistic funding and educational quality ACTION **RB/DR/PJ**

It was felt that more than 25% of S2 parents were unhappy with the option choices offered. Mr Auld suggested that, in order to do both Art and Music, the whole year group would have to take both subjects on a rotational basis i.e. 19 weeks of each.

When asked whether Faculty Heads could be given more flexibility, DA reminded everyone that it was not just S2 – S3 pupils who needed to be considered but that pupils higher up the school need to be catered for equally.

Andrew asked whether any subjects were over-subscribed (currently 2 too many wanting to take Biology) – this has not yet been resolved but Mr Auld confirmed that it would not be 'names out of a hat' but would be done based on discussion with Mrs Logan, other science teachers and pupils.

Robin thanked the S2 parents for attending and suggested another forum if further discussion is needed. Tricia suggested that it is important to keep the dialogue open with the school, who should be the first point of contact. She expressed the hope that parents could see that we are listened to and they would be welcome back to the parent council.

(Jane Macbeth, Elaine Kilpatrick and Willie Muir left the meeting)

6. For Discussion

6.1 P7 Parents' night – Beth and Andrew will be attending this event on Thursday 13th June as parents and will make a short presentation to the other parents - regarding the parent council, 50:50 club, requesting email addresses. They will need badges to identify them as members of the PC. ACTION **BM,AW**

6.2 Training – Ruth has been in touch with the primary school parent councils, most of whom would welcome some training. Ruth to email Frances Rodman and will co-ordinate dates for training. ACTION **RB**

6.3 Parent Council Questionnaire – Beth reflected that, by being present at the S2 parents' evening, the number of responses received from that group of parents was much higher than from the rest of the school. In

total 8 paper copies and 32 online responses were received. The key points in relation to the school were 'lack of homework' and 'subject choices'. There were a number of people who would like more Parent Council information and more frequently. Clerk to email collated responses to PC members. ACTION **KJ**

6.4 Website and Facebook page – none of the members of the Parent Council currently have access to the relevant pages of the school website, so information on those pages is not as up to date as we would like. It was decided to set up a separate page that could be 'linked' to the school site. Beth is willing to make a web page ACTION **BM**

7. Chairman's report – changes to the constitution to be discussed at the next meeting.

8. Curriculum for Excellence – Subject choices discussed under 5.3

9. School Improvement Plan: responses to the school questionnaire indicate a general concern about homework and the school policy will be targeted in the development plan for the next session. Other weaknesses identified were in relation to Social Subjects, and lunches. ? Action plan.

10. Finance

10.1 Internet Banking – Andrew explained that Mr Fyfe and Beth have established a PayPal account. In order for this to be operated successfully, it is necessary to set up internet banking. It was unanimously agreed that Andrew Walsh be authorised to operate these accounts, in his role as treasurer for the Arran High School Parent Council. ACTION **AW**

10.2 Fundraising – Mrs Gregg circulated a letter for approval – "No need to Bake, just Donate". The plan is to send this out on behalf of the School and the Parent Council at the start of the new session.

10.3 50:50 – to be promoted at the P7 and other parents' evenings.

11. a.o.c.b.

11.1 Robin read out a letter from Mrs Johnston, regarding the School Play, that had been sent to parents of the cast. There are two weekends before the Show when help may be needed. She was also looking for a couple of props – a silver cigarette case is yet to be found.

11.2 Tricia graciously thanked Cil and Robin for their contribution to the Parent Council as it was their final meeting.

Meeting Closed at 2120

5. Chairman's report

5.1 Fundraising – It was agreed that 'Transport off the island' be the focus for future fundraising. Discussion as to how to take forward fundraising ideas – CP put forward view, supported by several parents who had spoken with her, that many parents would be happy to be asked for a donation in lieu of fundraising 'events'. AR suggested pupils could design an envelope that could be given to parents/family members for donations. CP/AR/RJ are to meet next week to discuss this further.

50:50 to be revived. **ACTION CP/AR/RJ**

Suggestion put forward that the Auchrannie would be willing to display artwork. Although the sale of Senior Artwork was suggested, this is the property of the school (as produced as part of their studies) and pupils would be unlikely to have time to produce separate pieces.

AW asked whether 'Programme' sponsorship would be feasible, i.e. for school Shows.

Plan to try direct donation – possibility of using 'Paypal' – DF to set up – the link for this could be sent by email. **ACTION DF**

If this doesn't work – Fundraising events need to be planned, RJ asked JM to thank pupils for producing their list of ideas. **ACTION JM**

5.2 RJ asked DF to pass on thanks from parents to the teachers for all the extra tuition time they are offering.

6 Curriculum for Excellence

6.1 DF provided a collation of responses, from pupil focus groups, regarding interdisciplinary teaching. This has proved a very useful exercise but has yet to be analysed.

7. School Improvement Plan

7.1 School Questionnaire feedback – analysis of this to be brought to the next meeting.

AR raised concerns that there appears to be much less homework set. Pupil reports state 'excellent homework' and 'always on time' despite there being no homework given at all, in some subjects. 1st to 3rd year pupils do not seem to have enough homework. JM confirmed that homework diaries are being checked.

8. Head Teacher's report

8.1 SG confirmed that the postponed last day of the Music Festival will take place tomorrow.

8.2 Re History teaching - SG advised that the position regarding this subject teacher could not be confirmed at present. Interviews are taking place for Faculty Head of Social Subjects and Miss Moffat's position could be dependent upon that appointment as it would have a knock on effect.

9. Treasurer's report

9.1 Admin account £726 (most of which is accounted for)
Fundraising account £1286

10. a.o.c.b.

10.1 CP and RJ will be stepping down after the next meeting as their children are leaving school.

RJ thanked all for attending – meeting closed at 2050.

Meeting dates for 2013

May 13th (Mon)

June 10th (Mon)