

Minutes of the Parent Council Meeting held on Wednesday 22 Jan 2025 at 1830 in the Library of St Joseph's College

Present

Claire Renton (Chair), Bernadette Jones (Headteacher), Jennifer Challinor, T Crombie, Linda Nosratzadeh, Kenneth Pullen, Fiona Purdie, David Stainthorpe, Aleksandra Stores, Shirley Shek, Rebecca Topping, Keith Walters, Amanda Brown (Clerk).

Apologies

Gail Stewart.

In attendance:

Vanessa Morris, J Magill, Sandra McCaughey, Esraa Mohamed, Joanne Pullen, Daniel Callaghan, Stuart Walters.

Agenda

C Renton welcomed everyone and thanked them for making the time and effort to attend the meeting. She especially thanked the Senior and Junior Pupil Council Representatives Stuart Walters and Daniel Callaghan and the local Authority Officer for Parent Council Involvement and Engagement, Vanessa Morris, for agreeing to attend and explain her role.

B Jones then offered the Prayer of Hope: especially written for this Jubilee Year of the Catholic Church.

Vanessa Morris: Parent Council Involvement and Engagement

C Renton provided a brief introduction, stating that in her role V Morris' active support to our Parent Council had been invaluable; especially in helping her and the Treasurer navigate their way through the new application for Parent Council funding.

V Morris stated that she is employed as part of the Authority Quality and Curriculum Team and then gave a brief description of her role with Parent Councils and parental engagement in general.

Since primarily her main aim is to encourage parental involvement and engagement within schools, she acknowledged the large number of parents attending the meeting and was pleased to see Pupil Council Representatives too.

V Morris stated there was great work undertaken by many Parent Councils across the Authority and she continued to strive towards supporting Parent Councils to work towards engaging the wider parent community. She suggested that in addition to using social media (Facebook) to reach out to parents, the Parent Council should try to be as inclusive as possible in the ways they raise awareness meetings and the work they do; suggesting a range of other approaches.

V Morris confirmed that there is a new approach to applying for financial support which has been adopted to try to encourage Parent Councils to promote wider parental involvement. The Application Process is now based on the needs of each Parent Council.

V Morris went on to explain the role of Connect – the national organisation representing Parent Councils which provides Public Liability insurance and training. She also explained the role of the Regional Forum on which she sits, as an advisor. This forum supports Parent Council Chairs and is a way of sharing information both to and from the Local Authority.

V Morris ended her input by stating that she was holding a drop-in session about School Improvement Plans, from a Parent perspective, on 6 February 2025 should parents want to attend. She also stated that should any parent want to contact her they could either do this through C Renton, as Chair or directly via the parent/carer email address:

parentcarer@dumgal.gov.uk.

Following the presentation the following points were made:

- C Renton agreed with the importance of reaching out to parents and carers to encourage involvement, stating that using Facebook to promote communication to the wider parent/carer community had proved successful. This had been acknowledged in the recent HMIE Inspection where, for Parental Involvement, there had been a high score in terms of awareness and satisfaction.
- B Jones stated that there is Parent Council news and dates of meetings in each termly school Newsletter. She indicated that in the past, the Parent Council used Groupcall to inform parents and that this approach could be reintroduced - sending out a notification a week before a meeting is due to take place. To further support promoting awareness and engagement B Jones also suggested purchasing either a Banner or Display Boards which could be used at various school events.

- B Jones also asked if, in light of recent increases in bank charges, if the Parent Council Bank account could be a sub-account of the school bank account. V Morris stated that it had to be a separate account. She did acknowledge that increased charges were an issue, and more would need to be done to consider the way forward for Parent Councils.
- D Stainthorpe asked if the Parent Council should be scheduling their meetings in line with the Education Committee meetings and the Regional Forum meetings so that information from these groups could feed into Parent Council meetings. V Morris suggested that while this might be a good idea, it is up to individual Parent Councils to choose when they hold their meetings.
- T Crombie agreed, stating that every Parent Council is different and has to do what works for them and that the information from Local Authority Council meetings and both local and national forums should be shared back to the Parent Councils; therefore, the timing of meetings should not be an issue.
- D Stainthorpe asked if there could be an annual calendar of Regional Forum meetings so that, as a Parent Council we could try to align with them. V Morris agreed to take the suggestion back to the Regional Forum.
- J Magill asked how a parent could speak independently to Local Authority representatives. V Morris explained that any parent can contact the Local Authority through their elected Council Member, the Parent Council Forum through their Chair and in person through the parent carer email (provided above).

C Renton thanked V Morris for her contribution to the meeting.

Minutes of the Previous Meetings

The Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted.

Headteacher's Report

Pupil Attendance

As requested at the previous meeting, further information was provided on school attendance.

Session 2023/24 - 87.6%, whereas in the current session to date it is at 89.3%.

The attendance for the last three months was as follows

- Oct 88.1%.
- Nov. 89.0%.
- Dec. 87.3%.

To put the figures in context, they are approx. 2% above the D&G average for each month.

The Stretch aim for the Authority is 90%. The school continues to have a focus on improving pupil attendance which includes liaising with parents/ carers as required.

Representation of Pupils at Events

Both Year 1 and Year 2 Marist leaders met with the Marist Education coordinator Leigh Ellis from Ireland, Brother PJ McGowan and Brother Brendan Geary when they visited the school on the 9 January 2025. All were very pleased to be able to visit the school, reflect on its heritage and hear about some of the work the Marist Leadership teams are doing.

Burns Commemorative Events

Friday 24 January

10 am - Burns Statue - S6 Pupils

1.30 pm - St Michael's Church DGBA Service - S6 Pupils including Niamh Stainthorpe who will perform on the fiddle.

A Burns lunch is being offered by the catering service to all pupils and staff. Good uptake from staff at present - not sure what the uptake is like yet from pupils. Pizza may well be preferred to haggis!

Commonwealth Day Service Westminster Abbey London Monday 10 March 2025 -8 S3 pupils will attend.

150th Anniversary of St Joseph's College

Pupils will participate in a range of activities on and off campus on the afternoon of 19 March (St Joseph's Day).

Planning is beginning to take place for further events for both present and past pupils on Friday 6 June (Marcellin Champagnat Day) and Saturday 7 June 2025).

Recent Achievements

- Elf: The Junior Musical.
- PFA Carol Service.
- Participation of very large numbers of pupils in both the Junior and Senior Ceilidh's which were financially supported by the PFA.
- Solway Eclipse and Stars Synchronised Ice-skating teams, of which more than half of each team are St Joseph College pupils, were each the runners up in their events at the British Championships. Solway Stars will now go on to compete in France at the end of January.
- 12 pupils qualified for the finals of the Scottish Schools Swimming Championships being held in Aberdeen on [Friday 24 January 2025](#) - one of which (Amber Hinton) is not able to compete in as she is currently in Geneva training and competing with the Scottish National Junior team.
- Boyd Howat of S1 has been selected for the Scottish under 13 Ice-Hockey squad.
- Football - all teams are doing well.

Staffing

- K Henderson has been appointed to an additional teaching post within the school until the end of this session. This is as a consequence of an allocation of funding to the school to help reduce the overall pupil to teacher ratio. Miss Henderson will work with pupils in different curricular areas of the school to help them raise their attainment.
- Following the retirement of a Learning Assistant and funding available from the Pupil Equity Fund, 2 temporary Learning Assistant posts have been filled.

- In line with the Authority timeline, we are currently working through a staffing exercise looking at staffing needs for next session.

Changes to the Structure of the school Day

Main changes for St Joseph's College:

- Morning break will be 5 minutes shorter
- Lunch break will be 5 minutes longer
- Addition of a 15-minute period every day at the end of period 2.

Consultation is currently taking place with staff and pupils regarding what will take place during these periods.

Storm Eowyn (Friday 24 January) Amber weather warning from the Met Office ⚠

B Jones will keep a check on how best to ensure the pupils and staff remain safe.

We can't demand pupils stay on site during breaks but for safety, should this be required, parents/ carers will be asked to encourage pupils to adhere. There is no blanket school closure planned at present. She explained she will receive an update early tomorrow afternoon, information will be acted upon and communicated to parents/ carers.

T Crombie asked in reference the 150-year celebration if there could be an opportunity to raise funds by selling commemorative items to the past pupils. It was agreed this should be considered and T Crombie is to look into possibilities.

Treasurers Report

L Nosratzadeh stated that the funding application for this session had been lodged and it is expected to cover the Parent Council costs. We will receive £351. This will be added to the current balance of £4.07. She reported that Local Authority has agreed to pay the bank charges for this year but that another funding application may be required for future bank charges. Given the issues with bank charging, L Nosratzadeh stated that a review of the bank accounts held by both the Parent Council and the PFA will be required and possibly a change of bank too if an account is available that will make minimum charges since we have limited funds and only a few transactions per session.

L Nosratzadeh also reported the welcome news that S Shek has agreed to take over the Treasurer's role for the Parent Council enabling her to resign as she had intimated at the AGM.

The PFA has just over £3,540 in its account. The PFA financially supported the Ceilidhs and provided refreshments at the Annual Carol Service. It also increased its funds by running a very successful Tuck Shop at the recent school Christmas show.

The 100 Club is still short of support with only 61 number taken up at present despite promotion of this fundraiser before Christmas. It was agreed we should try to raise more awareness by announcing the winners through the Facebook page. C Renton agreed to make parents aware of this through Facebook. It was also agreed that to try to cut down on bank charges, those supporting the 100 Club should pay annually either in cash or by BACS as cheques are now too costly to process and direct debits also incur charges.

PFA Update

K Walters stated that given the potential issues with banking and insurance the PFA/ Parent Council will review how the PFA is organised. It may be that it will have to become a sub-group to the Parent Council rather than remain a separate entity. He reported that this will be discussed at the next meeting.

Additionally, support for summer school show will be considered as well as succession planning since he and other members of the PFA will not have children attending school after this session and they may not be able to continue their support due to having different commitments.

School Trips

B Jones reported that the following school trips are going ahead this session/ are at the planning stage for next session.

- S5/6 - Ski trip - 20 pupils January 2025
- S1 - London trip – approx. 40 pupils May 2025
- S2 French Trip -119 pupils May 2025
- S5/6 Krakow - September 2025
- S5/6 Iceland - September 2025
- S5 L'Hermitage France October 2025 for Marist Leaders
- S5/6 - Ski trip to Italy - January 2026 (possibly also S4)

- S4/5/6 - New York - October 2026

C Renton asked about advance warning for trips. There had been some strong feeling noted about the lack of notice for the S1 London Trip. Since it is costly, this had put additional financial pressure on some parents who want their children to have the experience but did not feel they had sufficient time to save for it. B Jones agreed that the timescale was short and apologised stating that for future trips there would be a longer advance notice period.

S McCaughey asked how the school ensures there is a balance of academic and leisure experience on trips. B Jones explained that the school uses NST (National Schools Travel) a trusted organisation with a wealth of experience in designing educational trips for schools. The proposed itinerary is discussed with teachers/ Group Leaders to agree a balance of educational activities, social experiences and leisure time.

S McCaughey stated that the cost of the trip to London at £750 was expensive and could anything have been done to try to reduce this cost – such as fewer activities. B Jones agreed that the costs of trips have risen, and this is in part due to more expensive travel costs. Therefore, to ensure added value, the school together with NST make sure that the trip is worthwhile in terms of activities undertaken hence packing as much into the trip as possible; schools do get discounted prices meaning pupils have experiences that they might not otherwise be able to do on an individual or family basis.

Both Pupil Council representatives agreed that having trips is great and these are enjoyed by pupils who are generally excited about both the excursion and the time to spend with friends and have fun too.

B Jones agreed that trips are also about building relationships across year groups and therefore the school tries to ensure that all pupils have an opportunity to attend at least one trip; including children who may be financially disadvantaged. Some Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) can be used to support pupils in these circumstances.

School Policy Update

C Renton stated that it was good that parents are able to be involved in supporting the update of school policies. A current policy being reviewed and updated is the use of Mobile

Phones and Other Digital Devices in School Policy. J Magill attended a meeting in school as a parent representative on this working group.

J Magill gave a very impassioned speech about his opinion on the use of mobile phones in schools, citing evidence suggesting mobile phones have been detrimental to attainment and well-being, as well as promoting increased bullying. He also made it clear that although this was his personal opinion, he, as a member of the working group would have liked to have seen full parental consultation on the policy before rolling it out. C Renton thanked him for his report.

There followed considerable discussion about the Parent Council's role in the Policy update. D Stainthorpe asked if we should be more focused on agreeing the process of policy update.

B Jones stated that while the previous policy had served the school well it was agreed that it needed updating and this had started in May of last session. The Scottish Government then issued new guidelines in August 2024. These were discussed with staff during INSET in August 2024 and the Draft Policy was considered again in light of these. At this stage the school, having consulted pupils, staff and some parents through the Parent Council forum, now has a working document that focuses on safe and responsible use of technology. She stated that she would like to summarise the policy for parents/ carers and continue to roll it out so that pupils, parents/carers and staff have time to consider its appropriateness/ effectiveness before it is reviewed towards the end of this session. Should the response to the review, which would include seeking information from the whole parent/carer community, indicate the need for amendments to the Policy, then this work would be included in the School Improvement Plan for next session.

There followed a great deal of discussion from which the following arose:

- T Crombie stated that technology was too integral to life and work to be removed from school, and he was unsure if that could be successfully implemented in any case;
- J Challinor stated that there were two issues – the use of IT in classes and the impact of cyber bullying via social networking sites and that she, as a parent would welcome support on how to best navigate this. B Jones agreed that cyber bullying can unfortunately be an issue and she would look into support/ guidance for parents perhaps through the Police Service;

- J Magill reiterated that he wasn't looking for a total ban but that the parent body is consulted;
- K Walters stated that careful consideration would need to be given to the formation of any questionnaire to prevent any bias;
- R Topping agreed that at the stage consultation is to take place, it is important that both the pros and cons of mobile technology are given;
- C Renton suggested we might look at what other schools have done since as a community of different opinions, seeing examples might help us to decide on the best way to consult;
- Pupils stated they would not like to see a stricter policy but accepted that not all pupils/ staff currently followed the policy consistently;
- K Pullen stated that as well as creating the update, it was crucial that staff/ pupils did adhere to it, if it is to be successful;
- D Stainthorpe suggested that to help enforce it where the policy reads 'should happen', this should be changed to 'must happen';
- That while J Magill had provided a detailed account to back his views, since these were his views, they could not be shared by the Parent Council.

It was agreed that the Policy update should be summarised for parents and include within it the need for a yearly review; particularly in light of constant technological advances.

This updated policy would be reviewed once it has had time to be embedded and as part of this review, there would be parental consultation.

AOCB

There was no other business, and the meeting closed at 2105. C Renton thanked everyone for their full contribution.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 7 May 2025.

