

**St Thomas of Aquin's High School**  
**Minutes of the Parent Council Meeting**  
**30 November 2020**

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Parents:</b> Andrea Manning, Simon Manning, Josephine Beech Brandt, Lesley Broadwood, Gaye Cleary, Andrew Gillies, Alan Seywright, Jonathon Midgley, Michael Gray, Lisi Black, Kirstie Mooney, Clare MacKay, Alastair Proudfoot, Emma Quinn, Therese O'Donovan, Jo Phillips, Tamasin Gray, Callum Proudfoot, Shona O'Brien, Colin Broadfoot, Fiona Bradley, Maria Mcfeat, Robert Marshall, Vivian Anderson-Moncrief.  <b>School staff:</b> Christopher Santini (CS), Stefania Mariani, Isabelle Jean-Pierre.	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Dee Armstrong, James Boardman, Denise Simpson and Jo Kennedy.	
<b>Item 1: Welcome</b>		
	Lesley Broadwood (LB) welcomed everyone and parents introduced themselves in the chat area.	
<b>Item 2: Minutes from last meeting</b>		
	There were no comments on the draft minutes of 1 October:  Accordingly, the document was approved as a true and accurate record. This was proposed by Jonathan Midgley and seconded by Josephine Beech-Brandt (JBB).	
<b>Matters arising:</b>	1. Councillor (Cllr) Claire Miller is raising parents' concerns with the Education and Families committee with regards to supporting schools in the provision for work for pupils who are self-isolating. <u>This action is still in progress and the Cllr will provide an update to the Parent Council (PC) in due course.</u> CS noted that arrangements at the school were in place to send work out to any pupil who is self-isolating from the day following the start of isolation.	CM
	2. PC to write a letter of support regarding the zebra crossing. CS reported that the Pupil Council had already written to the local MP and that he had written to the Council and awaited a response. <u>It was agreed later in the meeting that the PC should add their support and write to Mark Symonds at the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC).</u> Josephine Beech Brandt to action.	JBB
	3. It was agreed that the email addresses for the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary of the PC should be detailed on the school's website. LB has now sent an email to Jo Ritchie with the details.	Closed
	4. LB followed up with parents on the PC regarding sharing email addresses. Not all parents are happy to share their addresses. <u>LB will meet with reps from the PC to discuss alternative means to improve communications between members of the PC.</u>	LB and parents

	<p>5. Concern had been expressed regarding the pupils' high levels of stress given the number of assessments they are being asked to undertake. CS explained that a Health &amp; Wellbeing survey is to be distributed to parents and pupils.</p> <p><u>Isabelle Jean-Pierre will send out details of the survey results to Andrew Gillies on 1 December.</u> The survey results are very positive.</p>	IJ-P
	<p>6. It was noted that currently at St Thomas' doors are left open and possibly windows as well to improve ventilation. Pupils are permitted to wear their coats in the classroom. It was highlighted that some pupils were not aware of this.</p> <p>CS confirmed that he has re-communicated this to all staff and pupils to ensure this was understood. Good ventilation is an important H&amp;S issue and heating levels are monitored to ensure that action can be taken when lower temperatures cause discomfort.</p>	Closed
	<p>7. Reporting on the 2020 challenge– a sponsored event to record 2020km before the end of the year, Jo Phillips reported very enthusiastic participation and that we are beating that target. Two quiz nights had also been held in the past week.</p> <p>Overall, £390 has been raised through fundraising activities and JP and her Group are on target to meet/beat the £500 year-end target.</p> <p>Suggestions for other fundraising activities have been received and passed on to JP by LB.</p>	Closed
<b>Item 3 Areas for Discussion</b>		
<b>I. School Activities: When will St Thomas's school teams i.e. S5/6 football teams resume in line with other schools?</b>	<p>1. CS explained that this issue was governed by rules established by the CEC and by other H&amp;S considerations. Efforts are being made to commence activities when allowed and safe to do so. There are guidelines setting out lower risk activities (outdoor, non-contact, low volume, minimal respiratory level) to high risk (indoor, contact, high volume).</p> <p>2. All activities are led by staff on a voluntary basis. The running club, equalities group, maths after-school, S6 leadership training, Kayak club and other activities have commenced. <u>CS will update parents on activities in his regular HT briefings.</u></p> <p>3. There is no update on S2 football or basketball as yet, nor an update on the Duke of Edinburgh award expedition.</p> <p>4. Music specialists are back in school but there is no brass or singing yet. These activities are permitted when carried out outdoors in line with new guidance. The possibility of erecting a gazebo for such outdoor activity was suggested by Shona O'Brien. <u>CS was interested in will investigate practicality and cost.</u> It was also suggested that this might be something that the PC could consider giving some funding support to.</p>	<p>CS</p> <p>CS</p>
<b>II. Testing. Does the school</b>	<p>1. CS gave an informative introduction on the arrangements for National 5 and Prelims. Regarding</p>	

<p><b>have a clear policy on the maximum frequency of class tests? Where teachers are co-teaching, are they able to coordinate to ensure they don't over test?</b></p>	<p>National 5s, considerable thought has been given to the means of assessment with best practices being shared across Edinburgh schools. The strategy is to have 5 assessment windows (w/c 18 Jan; 22 Feb; 20 March; 26 April; and 10 May. CS will communicate these dates to parents and the subjects being assessed.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Focus will be given to the quality (not quantity) of assessment. Evidence should be limited to 2 to 4 items gathered in the later part of the school year. The assessment windows will spread the evidence gathering over that period to avoid over-loading staff or pupils.</li> <li>3. Other testing is formative. Assessments to formulate grades are those within the assessment windows.</li> <li>4. Prelims will be scheduled between 6 January and Friday 22 January unless the holiday return to school date is changed by Scottish Government.</li> </ol> <p><b>Questions and Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Gaye Cleary (GC) – what about S5 and S6? CS: stressed need to avoid over-testing and be open with pupils. <u>CS will remind curriculum leaders.</u></li> <li>6. Fiona Bradley – any leeway about starting Prelims immediately on return after Christmas? A long discussion ensued around an informative and detailed briefing by Stefania Mariani (SM) about the detailed planning and logistical management. The challenge in balancing the assessment windows; the Prelims; maintaining PE and other classes and the much reduced maximum gathering (to 50) was made clear. The SLT had worked closely with Faculty Leaders to get the balance right. It was not considered desirable to extend the Prelims into February.</li> <li>7. JBB: What if the holiday period is extended (or school return delayed)? CS: this is a matter for Scottish Government. Contingency planning is underway.</li> <li>8. JBB: Will CS seek parental or pupil input? CS: the discussion this evening has provided good feedback and will be considered in the contingency planning that is underway.</li> <li>9. GC: what about pupils returning to a test after a period of self-isolation? Is there a formal process where pupils can find out what contributes to an assessment such that they can appeal against such inputs? SM reinforced the point that only evidence obtained within the assessment windows will be used. <u>Details of the assessment process will be made available to pupils.</u></li> <li>10. What if Highers and Advanced Highers are cancelled? CS: Exams are planned, and an exam diet is on the SQ website. CS acknowledged that this is to be reviewed. If the exams are cancelled, a decision should be made with sufficient time, unlike last year, to ensure adequate time to prepare. The school will await advice and will follow guidance on assessments and communicate the process that will be followed. The National 5 process</li> </ol>	<p>CS</p> <p>SM</p>
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	<p>would be a good starting point and a likely illustration of the type of assessment process.</p> <p>11. Clare Mackay asked about comparative ranking of pupils against peers and about the management of unconscious bias in assessments. CS responded with information about the intended purpose of comparative ranking and the problem experienced last year in using an algorithm to carry out what is essentially a human evaluation/judgement. This year the intention is to rely on such judgement. Recognising the risk that this approach brings in relation to unconscious bias, the SQA, CEC and schools are developing moderation and blind marking strategies to mitigate such influences.</p> <p>CS and SM were thanked for their informative briefing and answers on an important and complex matter.</p>	
<b>III. Water fountain. What measures are in place to ensure pupils who need water have access to it?</b>	<p>1. The old water fountains were removed as a potential hazard on the grounds of H&amp;S.</p> <p>2. The lack of notice and consultation were clear problems. CS raised a complaint and insisted on replacements. These are now in place and available to pupils.</p>	closed
<b>IV. Locker provision. Is it possible to offer lockers to more students?</b>	<p>1. <u>CS stated that he would look at cost and space availability to provide more where practicable.</u></p> <p>2. <u>CS will also clarify to pupils that they can continue to use the lockers allocated to them last year and S1 students will be informed about locker provision.</u></p>	CS CS
<b>V. Arrangements for National 5 Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS).</b>	<p>1. CS reported as background that the school, with participation being on a voluntary basis, had a successful track record on RMPS: 2017/18 – 61 participants (92% pass rate); 2018/19 – 68 participants (85% pass rate) plus 18 participants at Higher level (83% pass rate). In 2019/20, only 27 pupils participated (pass rate TBA).</p> <p>2. CS will be discussing with Mr Wotherspoon how we can best continue to find a good balance between academic and spiritual education and if some form of unit certification is possible.</p> <p>3. JB noted that it was a disappointment that the National 5 RMPS had been withdrawn as an option this year and asked if it was a final decision. CS to confirm but acknowledged that it does not seem likely this year. It was recognised that the school should aspire to re-establish the option in years to come.</p> <p>4. GC noted that RMPS was a much broader subject than RE. Clare Mackay noted that it contributed to pupils being able to aspire to 9 National 5s in previous years</p> <p>5. Several comments gave positive feedback on Mr Wotherspoon's engagement with pupils and the high regard for his course content.</p>	

	6. <u>In conclusion CS confirmed that he would discuss the way forward with Mr Wotherspoon and report back to parents.</u>	CS
<b>Item 4: Headteacher's Report</b>		
	<p><b>1. Health and Safety (H&amp;S)</b>  A focus for the SLT is that the school is as safe as possible. This is a very time consuming and daily task. Weekly meetings are held with the H&amp;S team to monitor on the previous week's activities and to plan ahead taking account of any new requirements, best practice or lessons learned.  CS thanked everyone: pupils; staff and parents for their support.  793 pupils are welcomed every morning on a staggered basis. Pupils generally follow guidance well and non-compliance is addressed in a firm but compassionate way. The logistical challenge of lunch times (where no more than 50 people are in any one bubble) is difficult to manage.  All of the above is tremendously time consuming. CS reported that this has been the most demanding term in his capacity as headteacher and it has necessarily curtailed other activities. Notwithstanding, CS looks to the end the term on a positive note with daily Advent events and a strong Can Drive for identified charities. There was a question about the need for pupils to show negative test returns if returning to school after isolating due to symptoms of Covid-19. CS agreed to review and respond.</p> <p><b>2. Anti-Racism</b>  CS reported on the first pupil led house gatherings to all S4 and S5 Groups. Junior school gatherings will follow. <u>CS will issue a report after all house gatherings are completed.</u></p> <p><b>3. Newspaper Report</b>  CS reported that the school had been ranked at number 17 of Scotland's top 100 High Schools. Congratulations were expressed by parents and from the PC for this recognition of the school's performance and direction of travel.</p>	CS
<b>Item 5: Fundraising</b>		
<b>Fundraising events</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JP noted her earlier remarks under matters outstanding.</li> <li>She noted on the 2020 by the end of year – that 3026km had been recorded already! The event has had a lot of enthusiastic support and is worth repeating in 2021.</li> <li>Quiz Night – two events had been held via Microsoft Teams. Both were enjoyed by the participants, but numbers were much lower than hoped for (3 families and 4 families on the 2 events).</li> <li>There were many positive comments and thanks to Jo and the Fundraising Group for their ongoing efforts. LB noted that this fundraising drive was an</li> </ol>	

	<p>important contribution by the PC towards supporting the school and thanked Jo for her great personal effort.</p> <p>5. <u>As before, JP asked for suggestions for future fundraising to passed to LB or herself.</u></p>	ALL
<b>AOB</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There was further discussion on the possibility of a zebra crossing at the school main entrance and noted the road accident involving a pupil in the last week. PC to formally support (see action under matters arising).</li> <li>2. There was a question about poor levels of social distancing on the Meadows during Fire Alarm responses. CS responded with an explanation about the school bubbles. This is the means by which classmates can engage with each other without the need for social distancing. This is not understood well outside the school. Such concerns about an apparent failure to observe social distancing in public spaces such as the Meadows is therefore understandable. CS will continue to drive discipline in the management of the school bubbles and will also explain to members of the public how H&amp;S is managed by the school in line with approved procedures and formal guidance.</li> <li>3. LB closed the meeting with thanks to CS and his staff for all their extra work in keeping children safe and the school running during the pandemic, and with Festive Greetings to all.</li> </ol>	
<b>Next meeting</b>	23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2021, at 6.30pm on MS Teams.	