

MINUTES

St Thomas of Aquin's Parent Council

Meeting on 31st January 2017

PRESENT:

Jo Kennedy (JK) – Chair
Fiona Bradley (FB) – Vice Chair
Catherine Gray (CG) - Treasurer
Dee Armstrong (DA) - Secretary

Staff:

Christopher Santini (CS) – Acting Headteacher
Peigi Macarthur (PM) – Supporting Headteacher
Megan Gardner (MG) –Depute Headteacher
Isabelle Jean Pierre (IJP) – Acting Depute Headteacher
Sandra Murray (SM) – Teacher Representative
Fr Nick Welsh - Chaplain

Parents

Simon Armstrong, Kitty Bruce-Gardyne, Isabel Cerrió, Gaye Cleary, Deirdre Fitzpatrick, Lucy Freeman Francis, Jason King, Pauline Linn, John McFie, Clare Mackay, Andrea Manning, Eugene Mullan, Naomi Neilson, Stephanie O'Donohoe, Denise Simpson, Julie Slater, Joanne Thin, Michelle Thomson, Yvonne Pryor

Guests Miss Quigley, Miss Whiffen

Apologies: Jo Ritchie, Austin Flynn, Christine Rigouleau, Shona O'Brien, Dianne Watters, Angela Bryce,

1. Welcome	ACTION
JK welcomed everyone to the meeting and there was a round of introductions.	
2. Presentation on positive behaviour	
Miss Quigley and Miss Whiffen attended to give parents a presentation on the working group that had been set up to form a positive behaviour policy (as per the policy <i>Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour</i>). There had been strong working relationships between staff and pupils at the school but the policy had needed updating. A number of staff had joined the working group to look at how behaviour should be managed in the classroom within the framework of 'Better Relationships - Better Behaviour - Better Learning' and had put together the policy which the pupil council had been consulted on. The working group had decided on using a traffic light tool alongside 'I am' phrases that would engage pupils. Posters had been designed for every classroom so that the tool would be visible. The policy now makes it clear what action will be taken by teachers if pupils are not behaving appropriately and this is clearly linked to how the behaviour is affecting the learning of that pupils and other pupils. It is also clear when the teacher will escalate the situation involving the SLT if necessary. A copy of the poster is attached to these minutes. Parents welcomed the new policy and asked Miss	

Quigley and Miss Whiffen a few questions about how it would work on a day to day basis. CS and IJP commented that it was part of wider policies eg on anti-bullying and added that school might move to a merit/demerit system in the future. CS added that it was important to have quantitative as well as qualitative information about pupils' behaviour eg the 'take 5' meetings he regularly has with pupils.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 8th December and matters arising

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3.2 The faith sub-group reported that they had just met with Patricia Carroll and Margaret Murray from the Diocesan Office to discuss various matters related to the curriculum and RE.

3.3 Stephanie O'Donohoe reminded the PC that we were going to write to Tesco about the issue of queues outside the shop.

ACTION: DA/JK

4. Update on Acting Headteacher post and from City of Edinburgh Council

JK reported that the interviews for the Acting Headteacher post would be held on 6th February – she would be on the interview panel. Any ideas for questions should be sent to JK. The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) had confirmed to JK that the secondment of the current headteacher was only until June 2017 at the moment and that, therefore, the Acting HT post could only be advertised as being until June 2017. CEC had said that all secondments are reviewed on an annual basis and that the secondment may be renewed for a second year but that this would not be confirmed until June 2017.

Some parents asked why there had to be a formal process for appointing an Acting Headteacher. PMc replied that this was because there was a limit on the time that a post could be acted into before a formal appointments procedure had to be gone through. Parents commented that there would have likely been a bigger response from external candidates for the Acting Headteacher post if the advert had been for 23 months rather than 4 months. Parents asked whether the secondment of the current headteacher was likely to be renewed for the second year and PMc replied that her assumption was that the secondment would be for a 23 month period but that this could not be formally confirmed at this stage. Parents expressed dissatisfaction at the uncertainty this created - JK said that she would feed this back to Sheila Paton at CEC.

ACTION: JK

Parents asked whether there had been any further response on the feedback dossier that the PC had submitted to the CEC in May 2016. JK replied that the dossier was being dealt with on a case by case basis. Only one complaint was still being investigated at Stage 2 of the Council's complaints procedures. Parents expressed dissatisfaction that the PC had still not received a formal response from CEC so many months later and discussed what the PC's possible actions could now be in these circumstances. Parents commented that senior officers at CEC had been slow and unresponsive and discussed the possibility of

contacting the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman. JK added that she had recently written to Melanie Main who is one of the school's local councillors (Green party) to express our dissatisfaction with the length of time the whole process has taken. Melanie had previously said she would attend our PC meetings in the future. JK and FB also fed back that over the Christmas holidays they had responded on behalf of the PC to the Scottish Government consultation on parental involvement in school governance, saying that they thought Parent Councils were not always properly heard in the current governance structure.

5. Parent Survey

The Parent Council had launched an online survey for parents on September 2016 asking for the views of parents on what they wished to celebrate about the school and what they thought the PC should be working on going forward. Thanks were extended to Stephanie O'Donohoe (who is experienced in qualitative research) and who had compiled the results of the survey into a report. One parent commented on the phraseology of the first question on the survey, saying that it had might have been better placed at the end of the survey. Another parent noted that some of the suggestions that been made in responses were already in the process of being implemented. The report is attached to these minutes at Appendix 3 and will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting once people have had the chance to read it.

ACTION:AGENDA

6. Senior Leadership Team Report

The SLT report was given by CS and is attached to these minutes at Appendix 1.

Following the recent prelims, there was a discussion about arrangements for exams with there being some concern about where pupils could put their belongings whilst sitting exams in the hall. SLT would look into this before the summer.

ACTION: SLT

An S1 parent raised an issue about lockers not working properly – CS will look into this.

ACTION: SLT

7. Feedback from the 'how we work' meeting

A sub group of the PC had met to discuss how we should work together as a PC and the constitution of the PC. The revised constitution had been sent out in advance and was presented at the meeting. FB drew parents attention to a few changes – it was agreed that (i) parents would be welcome to participate in meetings, not just observe, (ii) that if PC members do not come to 4 consecutive meetings that they will be asked to stand aside to make way for another parent member, (iii) that pupils would be invited to attend regularly but not to every meeting, (iv) that all ward councillors would be invited to meetings, (v) agreed that David Leslie who is our CEC contact would be invited from time to time, (vi) there was still some confusion about the church representative position – the faith sub-group will seek to clarify this (vii) that conduct at meetings will be responsible and respectful (viii) that office bearers will need to be renewed or replaced after 1 year (ix) that the office bearer roles are in

ACTION: DS

addition to the 22 parent members (x) GC would contact the SPTC to ask their advice on what the quorum for the meeting should be. The constitution document will be finalised at the next meeting and then sent out to the parent forum (all parents) for information.

ACTION: GC

8. Support for Learning Presentation

IJP gave a detailed presentation about the work of the support for learning department. The report she spoke to is appended to these minutes. She spoke about the integrated support teams that are now in place which include the guidance teachers. It was noted that guidance teachers have responsibility for over 250 pupils each and juggle this workload alongside 10 teaching periods a week. Their role includes extensive collaboration with outside agencies for pupils with complex needs, as well as within the school. In particular, there is targeted support for looked after children, young carers, asylum seekers, pupils for whom English is not their first language and pupils who are gifted and talented. In addition the team lead on helping pupils with subject choices and coursing decisions as well as liaising with primary school for transition arrangements. There was mention of the 'key adult' role and there would be further discussion in the future about that and how the school would implement it.

**ACTION:
AGENDA**

9. Fundraising report

CG gave the fundraising report which is attached to these minutes at Appendix 2. There was £5,195 in the PC account as at 21st December 2016. The next event is the quiz night which is on 28th March. It was agreed that a hardship fund would be set up to support families in need – money would be allocated to this fund for staff to allocate in confidence.

There was a discussion about how the continued lack of a way for the school to email all parents was hampering our ability to publicise events. This needs to be sorted out urgently.

ACTION: JK

10. Any other business

10.1 A parent asked about critical thinking and evidence based learning and how those were being implemented. CS said that this would form part of a review of the Broad General Education that would be carried out next year.

AGENDA 2018

10.2 YP pointed out that the Scottish government was currently consulting on what should be included in PSE.

10.3 A parent expressed concern about S6 pupils leaving school before the end of the academic year with the worry that this might become widespread. CS commented that some pupils who had been very successful in S5 and had received unconditional offers from university had made the personal decision to leave school. He thought that this was not widespread though and commented that some universities were now expecting the S6 year to be completed.

10.4 DS and CG fed back from the national assembly of catholic school parents in Carfin. The theme of the day was 'parents making sense of This Is Our Faith'. The Scottish Catholic Education Service comments on the day on its website:

The responses of those present were very positive and encouraging. They fully supported the idea of providing additional information and advice for parents about Religious Education and about other aspects of their children's school experience. They suggested that every Catholic school and parish should make efforts to make links from their own websites to the SCES website which provides a great deal of information about Religious Education and many other issues relevant to parents and their children. The SCES Parental Involvement Working Group will move on to finalise the first in a series of publications for parents which will be made available through schools, parishes and on the SCES website.

Further information is available at www.sces.org.uk

10.5 Additional parents are being sought to undergo training for school interview panels. Parental involvement is required for posts at curriculum leader level and above. Anyone interested please contact Jo Kennedy. It was noted that both YP and EM have been trained in the past.

10.6 It was agreed to set up a sports sub-group. DA would email all parents about this.

11 Date of the next meeting

Wed 22nd March 2017 @ 6:45pm

ACTION: DA

Parent Council Meeting - Acting Headteacher Report

31st January 2017

1. Improvement Plan

- The 2016-17 Improvement Plan continues to be evaluated every 6 weeks. All secondary schools in Edinburgh will self-evaluate in the areas of Learning, teaching, and assessment and Wellbeing, equality, and inclusion (24th March).
- Along with self-evaluations in the above 2 areas, schools will be asked at the end of the year to self-evaluate on Leadership of Change, Raising attainment and achievement, Curriculum pathways, and Partnerships – impact on learners.

2. Positive Behaviour Policy

- A new Better relationship, Better behaviour, Better learning policy has been drafted and shared with staff and the Pupil Council. I would like to thank the impressive work of Ms Whiffen and Ms Quigley in leading the positive behaviour working group.

3. Curriculum

- The school's new curriculum structure is entering its third year of implementation. The success of November's S2 and December's S4 straw polls have allowed the school to draft a timetable for the 2017-18 session. S2 coursing is taking place in school now and S4-5 coursing will start after prelims.

4. Key Adult

- Key Adult time ensures that all pupils should have frequent opportunities to discuss their learning with an adult who can act as a mentor, helping them to set appropriate goals for the next stages in learning. Ms Jean-Pierre is leading strategy in this area and has already liaised with schools across Edinburgh to understand the good practice which already exists in the city. Mr Whyte and Ms Taylor have been appointed co-ordinators of the Key Adult programme and the school will meet on Thursday 2nd Feb after school to continue to plan.

5. Prelims

- The 2017 prelim examinations started on Monday 23rd of January.
- Ms Gardner has ensured that all S4-6 pupils have their timetables prior to the Christmas holidays.
- Pupils' behaviour and ethos has been exemplary
- Prelims are a very good source of information of where pupils are in their courses. Prelims are not used in the Post Results Service. Many thanks to Ms Gardner

6. Staffing:

- Ms Laura Macdonald has started as permanent Religious Education teacher. Acting Headteacher position was advertised last Monday. Closing date for applications was Monday 30th, with interviews taking place on Monday 6th.
- English temporary position until June – Mr Merrall and Mrs Mulcahy

7. Feast Day of St Thomas of Aquinas – Friday 27th of January

- His Grace, Leo Cushley celebrated Mass at The Sacred Heart for S1-S3 and visited the school – met with staff and S1-2 pupils.
- A successful Film festival assembly for S1-S3 pupils was organised by Mr Whyte and Ms Henderson

8. Pupil Equity Funding and ICT refresh

- Information on the PEF and CEC ICT refresh will be forthcoming at the next 2 Parent Council meetings

Appendix 2

Treasurer and Fundraising Update 31/01/2017 - Catherine Gray (Treasurer)

email:stthomasofaquinfundraising@gmail.com

Money in PC Bank Account

PC Account at 21/12/2016	£5,195	PC Account at 26/10/2016 (excluding calendar)	£1,892
Calendar cash	£68		
Fayre proceeds	£1,270		
Calendar sales	£1,361		
Calendar adverts (£50 x12)	£600		
Easyfundraising	£140		

A film night was held on Thursday 19 January. S1 & S2 pupils enjoyed watching Guardians of the Galaxy on a big screen in the hall. If you didn't hear about the film night, please purchase a copy of our fabulous 2017 'Scenes of Edinburgh' Calendar.

Quiz night: Tuesday 28 March Adults: £5 / S5& S6 pupils: £2

Please put your name down or pay your £5 entry after this meeting.

Or by Bank transfer to PC account, Sort Code 80 02 83, Acc No 06002539

and email *stthomasofaquinfundraising@gmail.com*

If you are unable to attend please support this event by purchasing raffle tickets after this meeting.

Parent Council Small Grant Bids 2016/2017

Forms have been issued by Jo Ritchie to be returned by Friday 24 February 2017.

Trust or Foundation

School is considering setting up a foundation or similar tax efficient donation scheme for parents & former pupils to contribute to school funds.

Any parents with knowledge or ideas please email *stthomasofaquinfundraising@gmail.com* and / or Christopher Santini

Easyfundraising

Please help raise funds for school by registering with easyfundraising.

The school gets a % of your online shopping from John Lewis, Amazon , M&S, vodafone, ebay, Booking.com & many more

Please register <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/stthomasofaquins/>

Parent Council thanks the 55 members who have already registered - We have raised £543 so far.

St Thomas of Aquins Parent Council survey report, 29.1.2017

The survey, containing four questions, ran between September and December 2016. It was distributed in paper form at Parent Council meetings during this time and online via a link sent to everyone on the PC email list. Efforts were also made to share the survey with parents and carers who had not been involved in the Parent Council, in order to obtain a wider range of views. Overall, 78 responses to the survey were received.

1. Three things to celebrate.

Parents and carers were first asked to identify up to three things that they would like to celebrate about the school. There were 204 responses to this section, making 229 points overall. Key themes and the number of responses referring to these themes were as follows:

Staff, teachers and quality of teaching: 60

There was some mention of variability in teaching standards, but there was much praise for “wonderful”, “talented”, “excellent”, and “committed” teachers, staff offering support for learning, and “great staff” more generally. Particular members of staff and departments were identified in some comments, and there was praise for teachers who regularly “go the extra mile”, through revision, extra-curricular clubs and after school study sessions for example. Related to this, there were some calls for more celebration of student activity/achievement in art, music, dance and sport within the school.

Sense of community: 54

Around half the comments on this theme involved a sense of the school as a “community”, valued for its friendly, caring and supportive atmosphere; it was described as a “small, friendly, safe environment”, with “good relationships” and “respect” between staff and pupils. Other dimensions to celebrate included values of inclusiveness/diversity/tolerance; the current Parent Council and positive relationships between the school and parents and carers; and a sense that pupils generally felt safe, happy and contented at school.

Pupil-related: 46

Around half of these comments related to academic performance/motivation; for example, there were references to “strong results” and pupils being willing to learn. The remainder of pupil-related comments were broadly split between acknowledging (and calling for greater celebration of) wider pupil achievements, and praising the pupils more generally. An example of praise for pupils included a reference to their generally being “excellent ambassadors for the school through their behaviour outside the school, their desire to learn and their friendly relations with each other”.

Ethos: 23

Although the sense of community could be seen as a key part of the school ethos, some comments referred directly to a “great” or “positive” ethos more generally. Six comments referred to faith or a “positive, Catholic ethos”, and five mentioned charity/wider community outreach. Others made reference to academic “ambition” or “excellence”, “high standards” and in one case to the school’s “moral compass”.

Resilience and improvements in the face of recent challenges: 15

These comments either highlighted improvements in atmosphere and experience in recent times, or praised staff and student resilience and hard work under challenging conditions before then; for example, the school was described as having a “less toxic atmosphere”, “bouncing back after a couple really difficult years”, and benefitting from the “commitment, perseverance and resilience of teaching staff in a period of significant turbulence”.

Current head teacher/senior leadership team: 11

These comments generally praised “the huge effort put in by the current Acting HT”; two comments valued his welcoming pupils each morning for example. The positive work of the senior leadership team, with support and guidance from Peigi McArthur, was also mentioned.

Discipline/uniform: 10

Here comments were split evenly between pupils looking “smart in uniform” and references to pupils generally being “well-behaved”, “well-mannered”, and to the “good mix between discipline and freedom”.

Other: 10

Other aspects that were thought to be worth celebrating included extracurricular activities, the small size of the school, its location and facilities, its history, and its status as a good local authority school.

2. One thing the Parent Council should focus on that could be achieved quite soon:

The 77 responses to this question included two “don’t knows” and some made multiple points, leaving to 78 points overall on the following themes:

Communication and parental involvement: 35

Although improvements in this area were acknowledged, this was seen by many as an area to focus on in the short term. In some cases it was simply about the school providing information about school trips, homework and marking, test results, contacting individual teachers, and upcoming art, drama or music events. There was also seen to be a need to continue to work involving more parents and carers, and involving them more in school activities as well as in governance issues, without micro-managing or interfering. It was thought that the school could ask for help more often. One suggestion was to have a few evening events giving parents and carers a chance to meet each other as well as staff. The need to communicate using various methods (but relying less on paper), and the role of front office staff were also raised. Last but not least it was suggested that parent/carer appreciation for the hard work of staff be communicated.

Recovering from challenging times: 11

Here comments focused on the need for stability and clarity regarding the HT role and for everyone to work together on the agenda that has been agreed, in a positive and constructive way.

Pupil support: 8

This category included advocating for reinstating the 6th year common room, and developing academic peer support, extra-curricular activities, charitable outreach and mechanisms for informing pupils of teacher absence. It was also suggested that younger pupils could be supported in playing in the Meadows at lunch/breaktime, and in buddying up to cross the Meadows on dark evenings.

Curriculum and teaching issues: 7

Comments on this theme referred to concerns about class cover, more flexible timetabling to give students more options, and balancing depth and breadth in curriculum choice; while "a 13 year-old doesn't know what they want to be", some develop a clear sense of direction early on and should be able to pursue areas in depth. It was also highlighted that 'narrowing the attainment gap' should not mean limiting the potential of the most academically able pupils. There was one request for more homework and more teaching of the Catholic faith, and one for "better, more inclusive" sex education.

Building and resources: 7

Issues raised here related to the appearance of the school reception area, healthy choices for lunch, lighting and upkeep of the girls' toilets, a coat rail for wet days, more interesting outside space for pupils, and window-cleaning. The need for pupils to have access to a scanner and printer was also mentioned since not everyone has these at home and they are not necessarily available in libraries now due to cutbacks.

Fundraising: 6

Comments referred to raising funds for the school in general, and for specific items (books, IT).

Discipline: 4

Here concerns were raised about discipline policy in general and more specifically, how teachers address individual pupil's disruptive behaviour affecting the rest of the class, and how parents and carers can be reassured that steps are being taken to deal with such challenges. A concern was also raised about vaping and fighting outside school.

3. *One thing the Parent Council should focus on that might take us longer to achieve:*

There were 72 responses to this question with one "don't know" and some making more than one point, leading to 76 points being made across the following themes:

Management and staffing issues: 16

Seven comments made direct reference to management and leadership: "the lack of a permanent Head Teacher is worrying" and "appointing the right Head Teacher" is crucial. The need for clarity and stability in relation to the Head Teacher position was highlighted. One response called for an end to the "witch-hunt" against the previous HT, while another expressed concern about the nature of the Church's influence on the HT appointment process. Other comments addressed staff turnover, and the importance of recruitment, development and retention of good teaching staff.

Teaching and curriculum issues: 14

Half the comments related to this concerned raising academic standards, and two called for the return of form in some way. There was one call for more PE, one for more homework, and one to use RE, enrichment and PSE to encourage greater engagement with the world around them in keeping with the Curriculum for Excellence. One response called for greater inter-school collaboration in relation to the curriculum and other suggested that teaching staff could benefit from "really good CPD sessions on teenage education". Two concerns were raised about how class cover was organised when teachers were absent, with one highlighting the need for pupils to be able to continue with their work "instead of watching countless DVDs".

Greater parental involvement and communication: 10

Several themes featured here: clearer communication to parents and carers about what is being covered each term, how to support pupils' learning; announcing all trips at the one time to help with financial planning; involving them more in the school and Parent Council, and benefiting more from parental time and talents.

Sports/extra-curricular activities: 8

Concerns were expressed about the level of sports and extra-curricular provision in the school, in terms of access to/distance from facilities, commitment to competitive sports, and after-school activities. Some suggestions included making greater use of the Meadows and benefiting from Heriot's charitable status by using their facilities.

School building/facilities/systems: 8

Suggestions here included improving the boys' toilets; using wise pay for school meals; healthier school meals. upgrading interior décor; converting car park to garden; opening windows in class

Faith issues and inclusiveness: 7

A range of views were expressed in relation to faith; one comment referenced direction of Catholic teaching in general terms, one called for the Catholic ethos to be emphasised further, not least on the website. The remaining comments called for an ethos that was more welcoming of all faiths or none; for RE teaching to be reduced or more encouraging of engaged and critical learners. Three other comments called for a more inclusive ethos more generally, with two highlighting the need for less academically-oriented pupils to feel valued by teachers and in the awards ceremony.

Finance and fundraising: 4

Financial pressures and the need to raise funds for the school were mentioned here.

Uniform: 4

In addition to one call for more pride in the school uniform, concerns were expressed about skirt lengths and/or skinny jeans and make-up.

Other: 5

There were two calls for senior/6th year pupils to be given greater responsibility and treated as young leaders, and one for better support for students in relation to educational needs and bullying. Two other responses referred to "repairing" the school's reputation and developing a "positive culture".

4. Three words to describe the school

This question generated 218 responses, 89% of which were positive. The relative frequency of particular words is visualised through the Wordle image below. The most common words – supportive, inclusive (14 mentions each), caring (10), friendly (9), and community (8) – reinforced the key theme from the first question about what should be celebrated; other terms like "kind" and "nurturing" further reinforced this view.

There were 14 references to "excellence/achievement/success" and "improving" was mentioned 7 times.

"Aspirational/aspiring/ambitious" received 6 mentions, as did "academic/education/learning". "Catholic" was mentioned four times and "Christian" twice.

Of the 24 less positive words, a third related to "damage", "risk", "chaos" and "uncertainty"; in some cases these words were accompanied by a sentence about recent difficulties and concerns that they were not yet resolved.

