

MINUTES

St Thomas of Aquin's Parent Council

Meeting on 8th December 2016

PRESENT:

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

Staff:

Christopher Santini (CS) – Acting Headteacher
Isabelle Jean Pierre (IJP) – Acting Depute Headteacher
Sandra Murray (SM) – Teacher Representative
Jo Ritchie, (JR) - Business Manager
Christopher Wotherspoon (CW) – Curriculum Leader, RE

Parents

Simon Armstrong, Kitty Bruce-Gardyne, Angelo Deponio, Dominic Fergus-Allen, Tamasin Gray, Pauline Linn, Andrea Manning, Colleen McCrone, Jonathan Midgley, Shona O'Brien, Stephanie O'Donohoe. Yvonne Pryor, Denise Simpson, Joanne Thin

Apologies: Peigi Macarthur, Naomi Neilson, Eugene Mullan, Angie Bryce, Diane Watters, Lucy Francis, James Boardman, Julie Slater, Maria ?

1. Welcome	ACTION
<p>JK welcomed everyone to the meeting and there was a round of introductions. CS opened with a prayer to remember teacher, Jacqui McCloskey, on the first anniversary of her death.</p> <p>2. Update on the Senior Leadership Team</p> <p>JK reported that Mr Hughes had been seconded to a 2-year post at the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) leading a project on school leaver destinations and developing the young workforce. CS had recently sent a letter to parents home with pupils explaining the same. JK had been informed that there would be a consequent 'review of the Senior Leadership Team' in the school and she had written to Sheila Paton asking for more detail on this – SP had responded that she could not give any further detail at this point but that there would be more information in January. Parents asked what would happen to the substantive Headteacher and Acting Headteacher post in these circumstances. CS responded the he understood that Mr Hughes remained in the substantive post whilst on secondment and that in accordance with CEC recruitment procedures there would now be a selection process for the Acting Headteacher post. The details of this process remained unclear, however. Parents asked what would happen if Mr Hughes decided he did not want to remain on secondment and JK said she would discuss this with Sheila Paton. CS reported that Peigi Macarthur would continue to work with the school on an ongoing basis. Some parents commented that they had not received the letter from CS about this because their children had been on work experience the week it had been sent home and other parents said that they felt this news should have been communicated to parents directly from CEC.</p>	

Parents also asked for an update on the dossier that had been submitted to CEC in May 2016. JK said that one complaint in the dossier remained under investigation. Several parents expressed dissatisfaction with communication from CEC on this whole issue, remarked that there seemed to be a lack of transparency and said that it was difficult for the school to cope with ongoing temporary arrangements. It was agreed that the Parent Council would contact CEC in January summarising the situation and seeking a formal response from CEC on the dossier. CS commented that he felt the current senior leadership team was working very well, with the support of PM, and was driving the school forward collectively with the support of the Parent Council. SM was invited to give feedback from staff and she commented that staff felt that there was a lack of clarity about the future and a lack of resolution of issues that had been raised by staff. JK summarised the feeling of the meeting that parents wanted more information from CEC by the next meeting on 31st January 2017.

JK

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 26th October 2016.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

4. Presentation by Mr Wotherspoon, CL for RE led by Faith Sub-Group

4.1 Denise Simpson introduced the parents who are members of the faith sub-group – she leads the group and other members are Simon Armstrong, Joanne Thin and James Boardman. DS introduced Christopher Wotherspoon (CW), who had taken over as RE Curriculum Leader at the start of 2016/17.

CW introduced himself saying that he had done his teacher training in Glasgow and has recently moved back to Scotland with his young family.

CW reported that there was still an RE teacher vacancy in the department which had recently been appointed to and the new teacher would be starting in January 2017. CW said that all pupils in the school from S1 to S6 have 2 RE lessons a week. Especially in the senior phase more of these lessons are taught by general teaching staff and CW said that the aim was to make the RE curriculum as accessible as possible. In S6 the lessons are academic and rigorous but there are no exams. CW explained that the RE syllabus is published by the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Scotland and is called *This Is Our Faith* – the Catholic Church, through its bishops, has the authority to propose a different curriculum for Catholic Schools. CW gave some examples of positive messages about Catholicism that were portrayed through new posters he had got for classrooms which were about science, music and faith. He said that open discussion was commonplace in lessons and said that children of other faiths or of no faith were encouraged to share their views. He said that it was important to keep the teaching of RE modern and up to date and that his aim was to keep the pupils engaged and interested. His priority for the short term had been to get the department vacancy filled and that he was now looking to establish the Higher exam qualification in RMPS (Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies) for those who were interested. CW would like to build the academic profile of RE at the school but budget constraints were an issue – accessing extra resources for external speakers for example would be desirable. CW asked for the support of parents going forward and DS thanked him for

<p>speaking.</p> <p>4.2 Questions from parents and meetings held by faith sub-group</p> <p>The faith sub group led the response to CW's presentation and started by saying that they had met separately to identify a number of issues and questions that had been raised by parents over the previous few months. These had been distilled into a tabulated document which was presented by Simon Armstrong (SA). He commented that there were several areas where there had been debate and speculation but an absence of clear fact - the aim was to engage with parents further to answer these questions. In addition, members of the faith sub-group had met with the new chaplain Fr Nick Welsh and were due also to meet with Margaret Murray from the Diocesan offices soon.</p> <p>Joanne Thin (JT) fed back from her meeting with Fr Nick. He had experience of working with primary schools before but this was his first post working with a high school which brings different challenges, so this was a time of transition and there would be a period of time needed for him to establish exactly what his role is. He had already started to say mass weekly mass in the school. JT suggested that we could ask the senior pupils for input into what they thought pupils need from the chaplaincy team. There are also 3 members of the teaching staff who play a part in the chaplaincy team and who work alongside Fr Nick, CS and CW – they are Mr Whyte (Maths), Mrs Winders (Home Economics) and Mrs Patrick (Music).</p> <p>JT also fed back that parents had been invited to meet with an organisation called Healthy Respect and that meeting would take place the next day. Healthy Respect provide young people with advice and support related to sexual health and relationships. It may be that St Thomas' has slightly different needs to other schools but she and DS would be meet with Healthy Respect and hear what they had to say. CS added that SCES has designed a programme called <i>Called To Love</i> which provides teaching materials on the Christian view of love and relationships – CW said that he had not yet used Called to Love at St Thomas' yet as he wanted to get to know the pupils first.</p> <p>A more general discussion about teaching related to love and relationships then took place and CW commented that it was a difficult area to tackle in Catholic high schools and that there certain 'red lines'. Some parents said that it was exactly those red line areas, for example, around LGBTI issues, that needed to be aired and discussed openly and that it was very important not to shut down debate. IJP commented that the guidance staff provide support to LBGTI pupils on a day to day basis and that she felt that this was an area in which the school was strong. There is also and Equality and Ethos Group at school (which has parent representation from Joette Thomas) and which is working on a bullying leaflet and a policy with a flowchart of intervention. Parents commended the school on this and some added that implicit messaging for pupils in this way needed to be matched with more explicit messaging in RE lessons. All this links in with the work of PSE and the PSL Department have been invited to the January PC meeting to have a discussion with parents about their work.</p> <p>The questions which the faith sub-group have identified have been summarised in a separate document (attached). Anyone who has any queries or who wants to add to these should contact Denise, Simon, James or Joanne. Email</p>	<p>DS/JT</p>
---	---------------------

stthomasofaquinpc@gmail.com to be put in touch.

5. Senior Leadership Team Report

The SLT report is attached in full at Appendix 1.

6. Feedback from the staff representative

The PC had decided that it was important to hear the views of teaching staff at every 3 PC meetings. The staff representative was invited to feed back the views of staff for the first time at this meeting. Sandra Murray had sought views from Curriculum Leaders beforehand and teachers had been asked by their CLs what they felt was working well at school, what needed improving and was any parental help needed? The full response from staff is included at Appendix 2. In particular SM drew attention to:

- teachers' concerns about the impact that pupil lateness was having on lessons under the new timetable – now that there is no buffering registration period lessons are being directly affected. Parents asked about how the new timetable was going more generally and CS said that there would be a formal review of it.
- concerns about the withdrawal of specialist library staff which will impact on support for literacy, author visits, book festival trips etc – JK said that she would write to CEC about this on behalf of the PC.
- Staff concerns about the lack of behavioural base – CS commented that the cost of this was prohibitive.
- teachers sharing parents' concerns about uncertainty around the future leadership of the school.

7 Any other business

7.1 A parent raised the issue of reported recent incidents at Tesco in Bruntsfield, where state school pupils had been made to queue for access to the shop whereas private school pupils had not. The PC agreed that it would write to Tesco to add its view to others that such discriminatory practices were unacceptable.

7.2 The parent survey had so far received 71 responses – there were 2 more days for parents to respond and then the survey would be closed and responses presented at the January meeting.

7.3 A sub-group of parents had met separately to discuss the constitution of the PC and the way we work together as parents – this would be discussed at the January meeting.

7.4 Thanks were extended to Catherine Gray for coordinating excellent fundraising events. The Christmas Fayre had been a very successful event and had raised £2935. In addition Andrea Manning and Christine Rigouleau were thanked for the work they had put into organising the school calendar.

7.5 There would be a meeting of the annual Gathering of Catholic Parents

JK

DA

AGENDA

AGENDA

organised by the Parent Involvement Group of the Scottish Catholic Education Service on 21 st January near Glasgow to which all parents are invited.	
---	--

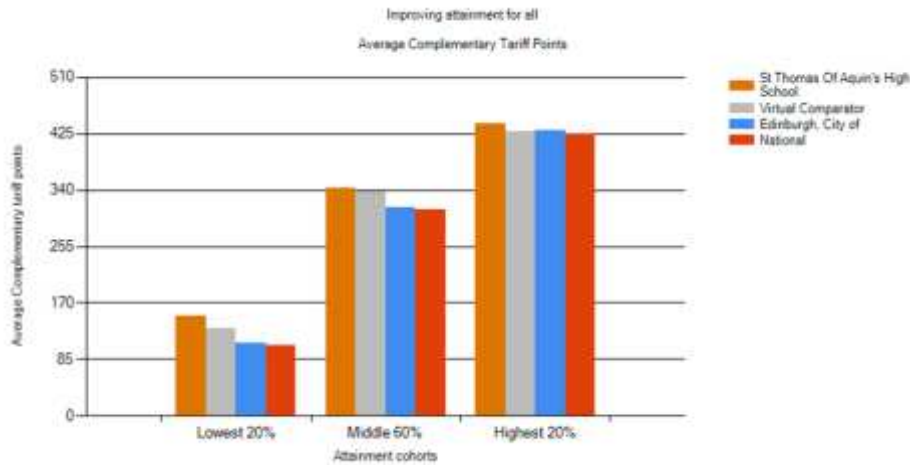
10 Date of next meeting: Tuesday 31 st January 2017 at 6:45pm.	
--	--

St Thomas of Aquins Parent Council - Senior Leadership Report

Date: Thursday 8th of December

Complementary tariff scores in previous attainment information update

The complementary tariff score for a pupil identifies the best 5 exam results for pupil. This ensures that whatever the amount of courses S4 pupils take in schools across Scotland, a meaningful and transparent comparison can be made.



1. Staffing:

Mr Ian McNally has started at St Thomas as the new permanent English Teacher.

Ms Christian Taylor has started at St Thomas as the new permanent Geography with Modern Studies Teacher.

Ms Lucie Yavruturk has started at St Thomas as temporary Drama Teacher

Ms Laura McDonald is the preferred candidate for Permanent Religious Education Teacher, a starting date is yet to be decided.

Ms Emma Gammock is the preferred candidate for Temporary Support for Learning Teacher with a starting date of the 19th of December.

Mrs Melissa Ross will be returning to St Thomas in January in the Maths Faculty. A vote of thanks to Mr Hamish Davidson for his work in the school.

Mrs Susan Brown will be retiring from St Thomas at the end of the term. A huge thank you for the compassion, professionalism, and dedication of Mrs Brown. A temporary post will be advertised.

2. School improvement plan:

- The senior leadership team meet every six weeks to update the school improvement plan. The updates are posted on the school website. In October and December, Pupil Support Leaders and Curricular Leaders have been invited to take part in the meeting to ensure all the work of the school is evidenced.

Please see photocopy for an update

- Areas to look at in the 2017-18 school improvement will be discussed as of January 2017.

3. School success information:

S1/2 pupils who took part in testing for and represented our school in the East of Scotland round of the Kids' Lit Quiz on Monday 31st October

S2 & S5 pupils who represented St. Thomas' in the 'Children's University' event at Queen Margaret University in October

S2 Pupils took part in a STEM event at Heriot-Watt University with the Science Faculty on Tuesday 29th November.

Emma Simpson (S5) and Myada Eltirafi (S4) took part in a conference in Glasgow at the beginning of November. They are involved in a group called Youth Edinburgh Action which promotes young adults' participation in decisions made by Edinburgh City Council. They presented a film about the work of the Youth Edinburgh Action group which Emma helped to design and star in.

Two S6 pupils, Sophie Drury and Anna Andrews, have been awarded a Silver CREST award by the British Science Association for their work at the Zoo over the summer holiday with the lions.

St Thomas' Christmas Fayre – a fantastic community event which has raised over £2500 for the school. Thank you all very much, we are looking forward to the 2017 Christmas Fayre already!

4. School Partnerships and stakeholders:

- **School Governance review – Responses should reach The Scottish Government by 6 January 2017.**

- This governance review offers an opportunity to build on the best of Scottish education and to take part in a positive and open debate. The Scottish Government wishes to hear views from across every part of Scotland – from children and young people, from parents, teachers, practitioners and the wider community. There is also a wish to hear from those with a formal role in the education system and those who share a stake in its success.

- **Key lines extracted from the paper:**

1. Evidence shows that co-operation and collaboration, not competition or marketization, drives improvement. Scotland pioneered publicly-funded comprehensive school education for all and the Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to this.
2. This review of governance examines the system changes required to deliver our commitments to empower schools and decentralise management and support through school clusters and the creation of educational regions...starting with the presumption that decisions about individual children's learning and school life should be taken at school level...These reforms are part of The Scottish government's wider commitment to the reform of public services to ensure they are fit to serve communities across Scotland.
3. Each year around £5 billion is spent on early years and school education across Scotland. It directly impacts on the life changes of over 680,000 pupils in primary, secondary and special schools and around 125,000 children in early learning and childcare.

- Below I have given you the questions the review is focusing on. I am happy to meet parents to discuss our views on this over a cup of coffee after school before the end of term.
- I have made copies of the Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve paper for you to take home. I am inviting parents and staff to meet with me on Tuesday 20th of December from 5pm until 6.30 for a “meeting of minds” discussion regarding the governance review.
- **Question 1:** What are the strengths of the current governance arrangements of Scottish education?
- **Question 2:** What are the barriers within the current governance arrangements to achieving the vision of excellence and equity for all?
- **Question 3:** Should the above key principles underpin our approach to reform? Are there other principles which should be applied?
- **Question 4:** What changes to governance arrangements are required to support decisions about children’s learning and school life being taken at school level?
- **Question 5:** What services and support should be delivered by schools? What responsibilities should be devolved to teachers and headteachers to enable this? You may wish to provide examples of decisions currently taken by teachers or headteachers and decisions which cannot currently be made at school level.
- **Question 6:** How can children, parents, communities, employers, colleges, universities and others play a stronger role in school life? What actions should be taken to support this?
- **Question 7:** How can the governance arrangements support more community-led early learning and childcare provision particularly in remote and rural areas?
- **Question 8:** How can effective collaboration amongst teachers and practitioners be further encouraged and incentivised?
- **Question 9:** What services and support functions could be provided more effectively through clusters of schools working together with partners?
- **Question 10:** What services or functions are best delivered at a regional level? This may include functions or services currently delivered at a local or a national level.
- **Question 11:** What factors should be considered when establishing new educational regions?
- **Question 12:** What services or support functions should be delivered at a national level?
- **Question 13:** How should governance support teacher education and professional learning in order to build the professional capacity we need?
- **Question 14:** Should the funding formula for schools be guided by the principles that it should support excellence and equity, be fair, simple, transparent, predictable and deliver value for money? Should other principles be used to inform the design of the formula?
- **Question 15:** What further controls over funding should be devolved to school level?
- **Question 16:** How could the accountability arrangements for education be improved?
- **Question 17:** Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the governance of education in Scotland?

Feedback to Parent Council from teaching staff

1. What is working well?

- Improved communication and greater transparency. *Depts.*
- Staff welcomed the Friday briefings. *Dept.*
- Continued professionalism of staff and good nature of the pupils. *Depts.*
- Improved collegiality. *Depts.*
- Better atmosphere in school. *Depts.*

2. What needs improving?

- Work load issues. *Dept.*
- Staffing, cuts to support staff, more SFL staff required. *Dept.*
- Attendance concerns. *Depts.*
- Need for a behavioural base for those pupils refusing to go on the Out of Class TT. *Depts.*
- Concerns about lateness – is there anything parents can help with? *Depts.*
- Concerns about the removal of experienced / specialist staff in school libraries and the impact it may have on support for literacy, author visits, Book Festival trips etc. *Individuals*
- Some concerns about communication regarding final situation with regard to T Hughes and role of Peigi McArthur. *Individuals/Depts.*

3. Any parental help needed?

- Invitation for parents to shadow a teacher/pupil. *Dept.*
- Contact council regarding school librarians having to re-apply for jobs. *Individuals*
- Advice/ support in tackling lateness/attendance *Depts.*

4. Anything else? No