

MINUTES

St Thomas of Aquin's Parent Council

Meeting on 6th September 2016

PRESENT:

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

Staff:

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

Parents

Angie Bryce, Angelo Deponio, Deirdre Fitzpatrick, Austin Flynn, Lucie Francis, Tamasin Gray, Caroline Johnston, Cathy Joyce, Jason King, Monica Kraus, Simon Laird, Stephanie Laird, Toni Lizier, John Macfie, Joanne Mallon, Andrea Manning, Colleen McCrone, Catherine Midgley, Eugene Mullan, Naomi Neilson, Stephanie O'Donohoe. Jessica Privitera. Yvonne Pryor. Nicola Rafaelli, Christine Rigouleau, Navneet Saharan, Montserrat Santandreu, Martin Simpson, Mary Stevenson, Michelle Thomson

Apologies

Simon Armstrong, Janice Baines, Josephine Beech Brandt, James Boardman, Shona O'Brien, Denise Simpson, Julie Slater, Diane Watters

1. Welcome	ACTION
JK welcomed everyone to the meeting and there was a round of introductions.	
2. Minutes of the meeting held on 15th June 2016.	
The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. DA would arrange for them to be put on the school website.	DA
3. Update on meeting with Andy Gray	
JK updated everyone on the meeting she and FB had recently attended with Andy Gray (AG), Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning at Edinburgh City Council. He had also sent a letter to all parents which JK read out at the meeting. JK reported that AG had told them that Mr Hughes remained on sick leave. AG had said at the meeting that one parent's letter submitted as part of the feedback dossier was still being investigated under Stage 2 of the Council's complaints process. It was not clear what the expected timeline was for that process to be completed – JK would check. Parents asked what feedback we would receive and JK said feedback would be confidential to the parent concerned, but that we could ask what action may be taken as a result. Parents asked how much longer PM would remain at the school in a supportive capacity – PM said she would remain as long as was necessary and reported that she had reduced her hours (to 8 hours on 2 days)	JK

<p>now that the substantive depute post had been appointed and the senior leadership team (SLT) was better staffed. Parents expressed surprise that the whole dossier was not being investigated under Stage 2 – PM said that the issues were being dealt with via her own presence and the school’s action plan. JK confirmed that she would keep in close contact with AG and would keep the Parent Council updated.</p>	<p>JK</p>
<p>4. Action Plan</p> <p>PM gave an update on the school action plan. She reported that the school was calm and productive, that a settled SLT was now in place and that she was confident in the way they were working well together. She said the action plan had been focused on restoring and developing good relationships and that this work had been done in agreement with staff, pupils and parents. PM reported improvements in communication and collegiality and commented that there was a positive atmosphere and staff were working well together. PM said that the school’s exam results had been good and that this was a measure of everyone’s hard work – a lot had been achieved in the busiest term of the school year. She felt that improvement was being made in ‘better relationships -better learning - better behaviour’ and that these were all coming together. A parent asked whether pupil representatives would be able to come to future parent council meetings and it was agreed that this would be arranged. CS would arrange for the Head Girl and Head Boy to be invited to attend for the start of the next meeting. A parent asked whether anything had <i>not</i> gone well? PM said that generally things had gone well, but acknowledged that there was still some tension and nervousness amongst some staff about the future. Several parents commented that their children had noticed and commented to them on an improved atmosphere at school and that they felt happier. Parents felt that communication had improved.</p> <p>5. Acting Headteacher’s Report</p> <p>CS gave his report and commented that other members of the SLT would participate in giving the report at future meetings.</p> <p>5.1 Exam results – CS fed back on the school’s exam results and said that 40% of S5 pupils had gained 5 Highers, which was provisionally the best result in Edinburgh – this figure had risen from 27% in the previous year. 53% of pupils had gained 5 or more National 5’s and he expected that this number would rise as the ‘insight’ data had yet to be included to make this figure comparable with previous years. CS commented that wanted to do some work with the PC going forward on ensuring that course choices for advanced higher students was appropriate.</p> <p>5.2 Head girl and boy appointments had been made and the prefect interview process was underway.</p> <p>5.3 The CL for social subjects post was vacant after MG’s appointment to Depute Headteacher – interviews would be held shortly and the pupil council would be involved in the selection process.</p> <p>5.4 The P7 transition visit in June had gone well and the new S1 pupils were</p>	<p>CS</p>

<p>settling in. There would be a P7 parents' meeting for prospective pupils on 2nd November.</p> <p>5.5 Fr Nick Welsh had started as the school chaplain - Fr Nick said that he had been welcomed and was enjoying the good atmosphere at the school.</p> <p>5.6 CS reported that the school had decided to invest in Place2Be – a counselling service for S1-S3 pupils to augment the service that was already on offer. Pupils may self-refer for 1:1 sessions or come on a drop-in basis. There is already a school counsellor who has 3 spaces a week for older pupils and a parent also mentioned the services of The Junction which offers counselling for young people. IJP added that there was exam support available from the educational psychology department. JK said that it would be helpful for parents to have a summary of all the support available for pupils. DA to liaise with IJP to arrange this.</p> <p>5.7 CS reported that he had discussed with staff the spending priorities for any funds raised by the PC - there was general agreement that the school needed ICT equipment.</p> <p>5.8 Take 5 – CS said that he would be starting an initiative where every Thursday he would be speaking to 5 different pupils about what they felt was going well at school and what could be better.</p> <p>5.9 CS reported that Mr Hughes' mother had passed away the previous week. He had attended her funeral along with MG, Fr Nick and Geraldine Kelly and a mass card had been sent.</p> <p>5.10 The school awards ceremonies would be held in October – Nick Barley, the Director of the Edinburgh Book Festival, would be the guest speaker. Pupils would be awarded for attainment and achievement. In addition, there were 'colours' for sports and music. CS said that the awards process was intended to be transparent. CS said thought that the awards process would be re-evaluated and he had asked curriculum leaders (CLs) for feedback on timing and method. This would be put on the agenda for discussion at a future PC meeting.</p> <p>5.11 CS said that he was keen for parents to become more involved with school life generally and was aware that many parents have skills that can be shared with pupils. JK said that the PC would think about how to approach parents asking what they could offer.</p> <p>5.12 A parent commented on the front of house aspect of school reception. It was agreed that 'customer service' could be worked on. CS told parents that the Council had asked for a 10% budget reduction in business services in schools this year which would be going up to 20% next year. This would create a difficult financial situation for the school's support services and any measure put in place would have to be sustainable financially. He also reported that one member of office staff would be off sick for the next 12 weeks, so the office is under pressure at the moment.</p> <p>6. Fundraising report</p> <p>6.1 The cheese, beer and wine evening had been successful and had raised</p>	<p>DA/IJP</p> <p>JK/DA AGENDA</p> <p>JK</p>
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<p>£340.</p> <p>6.2 The fundraising sub-group was meeting to plan a series of events for the rest of the school year which would include a pre-Christmas event and a fun family event next year.</p> <p>6.3 In addition, a 2017 school calendar is being planned. This will feature the artwork of scenes of Edinburgh by S6 art pupils. The calendar will raise funds by being sold to families and via advertising. In addition, the artwork itself will be sold in a silent auction at the December event. Spending decisions on the funds raised by the artwork would be made by Lee Wilson, the CL for Art.</p> <p>6.4 There was a discussion about whether all funds raised by the PC should be donated to the school or whether the PC should donate a proportion to charity. It was agreed that the pupils have other opportunities to raise money for charity themselves and that therefore all funds (minus costs) raised by the PC would be given to the school. It was agreed that the pupil council would be involved in decisions about how to spend money raised by the PC.</p> <p>6.5 ‘Easyfundraising’ is a way for funds to be raised for the school when parents make purchases online by using the easyfundraising portal. Instructions on how to sign up had been sent out via the fundraising bulletin. The easyfundraising page for the school is https://new.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/stthomasofaquins/</p> <p>6.6 Uniform recycling – two parents had offered to run a recycling shop for school blazers. Any parent wishing to donate a blazer should hand it in to the janitors’ office. DA will email parents to promote this.</p> <p>6.7 There is much fundraising work to be done – any parent able to offer their help with fundraising activities should contact Catherine Gray on cathe4ine@googlemail.com</p> <p>7 Gathering feedback from parents</p> <p>The Parent Council is keen to hear from as many parents as possible about their experiences of the school and is aware that some parents are not able to come to meetings and their voices are not easily heard. The PC wants to encourage conversation, participation and communication. It is recognised that parental involvement in school is a key driver for a pupil’s success and so it is important that the PC consult as widely as possible. JK explained that the PC was asking all parents at the meeting to make contact with 3 other parents they know who may not be as engaged and ask them to answer 3 questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What would you like to celebrate about St Thomas of Aquin’s High School (up to 3 things) 2. What do you think the Parent Council should be focusing on in order to support the school to improve? One thing that could be achieved now and one thing that might take longer. 3. Put three words that sum up the school for you. <p>Responses will be anonymous. DA would be sending out a survey monkey form</p>	<p>DA</p> <p>DA</p>
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<p>to PC members and others present for the collection of responses or they can be emailed to the PC email address stthomasofaquinpc@gmail.com.</p>	
<p>8. Sub-groups</p> <p>A number of PC sub groups are being set up to work on (1) the PC constitution - to discuss how we should work together (2) the curriculum – this group has already met and needs to reconvene for the new school year (3) fundraising (4) school finances. Both PC members and other parents are invited to join these groups to help with this work. Anyone who is interested should contact the PC on stthomasofaquinpc@gmail.com. DA will send an email out inviting participation.</p>	<p>FB/DA</p>
<p>9 Diocese meeting</p> <p>JK and FB fed back from a meeting they had attended at the diocesan office. The diocese wants to make a change so that the diocesan representative on the PC is a parent from now on, rather than the school chaplain. It is proposed that a PC faith sub group is set up, the remit of which would be to be the link between the school and the diocese and to deal with other faith matters that come up from time to time. This group can link in with the chaplaincy team also. Parents who are interested in being a member of the faith subgroup are invited to come forward and make contact with the PC on stthomasofaquinpc@gmail.com.</p>	
<p>10 Any other business</p> <p>10.1 It was suggested that it would good to start using the school foyer again as a gallery space for some of the great art work that pupils produce. CS would meet with the CL for art to discuss this. He pointed out that it was important to ensure that the important symbolism of the school’s Catholic ethos at the entrance remains.</p> <p>10.2 FB reported that pupils would be taking part in an exhibition at the Fruitmarket Gallery on 28th October.</p>	<p>CS</p>
<p>11 Date of next meeting</p> <p>The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 26th October 2016 at 6:45pm.</p>	