

**St Thomas of Aquin's High School**  
**Minutes of the Parent Council Meeting**  
**16 February 2021**

<b>Present:</b>	<b>35 in attendance</b>  Lesley Broadwood (LB) Chair, Andrew Gillies (AG) Vice-Chair, Alan Seywright (AS) Secretary.  <b>Parents:</b> Simon Manning, Josephine Beech-Brandt, Lesley Broadwood, Dee Armstrong, Jonathon Midgley, Michael Gray, Lisi Black, Keira Mooney, Clare Mackay (CM), Alasdair Proudfoot, Jo Phillips (JP), Tamasin Evans, Shona O'Brien, Colin Broadwood, Fiona Bradley, Charo Tamayo, James Boardman, Alexander Black, Dorcas Owen, Deborah Hoyle, Maire Kilgallon, Julie Slater, Sue Widdicombe, Louise McSorley (LMc), Finlay McCrone, Tim Licata.  <b>School staff:</b> Christopher Santini (CS), Stefania Mariani (SM), Isabelle Jean-Pierre (IJP), Joanne Ritchie (JR).  <b>Guests</b> Councillor (Cllr) Claire Miller	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Jo Kennedy, Gaye Cleary and Shona O'Brien	
<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 Josephine Beech-Brandt (JBB) and seconded by Louise McSorley (LMc).	
<b>Matters arising:</b>	1. Cllr Claire Miller (CM) 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>CM to send an update to Alan Seywright (Secretary) after the meeting.</u>	CM
	2. PC to write a letter of support regarding the zebra crossing. <u>Josephine Beech Brandt to action and write to Mark Symonds at the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC).</u> <u>Josephine Beech Brandt to action.</u>	JBB
	3. LB has met with reps from the PC to discuss alternative means to improve communications. The outcome is that a new Communications Sub-Group will be set up to improve communication between members of the PC; between the PC and the school; and to support communications between the school and parent forum.	Closed
	4. Concern had been expressed regarding the pupils' high levels of stress given the number of assessments they	Closed

	are being asked to undertake. Isabelle Jean-Pierre has sent out details of the Health & Wellbeing survey results to Andrew Gillies on 1 December. The survey results are very positive.	
	5. School Activities. 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. CS has and continues to update parents on activities in his regular HT briefings.	Closed
	6. Music, brass and singing. 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. CS to investigate practicality and cost. Not yet actioned but provision will be made for music on phased return	Closed
	7. CS: stressed need to avoid over-testing and be open with pupils. CS issuing reminders regularly to curriculum leaders.	Closed
	8. Details of the assessment process will be made available to pupils. Details issued but will now change. CS has just received an update from SQA extending the assessment date deadline. CS will provide information on Monday in his HT briefing.	Closed
	9. Information on provision of lockers to pupils has been communicated to all pupils.	Closed
	10. CS has a paper to share on arrangements for Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) going forward.	Closed
<b>Item 3 Areas for Discussion</b>		
<b>I. What is the school's plan to return S5's and S6's to normal schooling at the end of this month?</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A timetable has been prepared with the SLT.</li> <li>2. The school is on track to bring back between 5% and 8% of the school roll. The focus on returners is focussed on small groups that require critical, practical work that can only be done in school.</li> <li>3. Social distancing between pupils must be observed. This is a key change from previous practice.</li> <li>4. The focus will be on learning, not assessment.</li> <li>5. A non-exhaustive list of subjects includes: Admin &amp; IT; Craft; Graphic Communications; Computing; Drama; HE; Modern Languages; Music; PE (must be outdoors); National Progression Award in Science.</li> <li>6. <u>CS to send out timetable on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup>. E-mails will be sent to parents and pupils contacted by Teams.</u></li> </ol>	CS
<b>II. Feedback from the school's parent survey and discussion on remote learning</b>	<p>SM gave a power-point presentation <u>(to be made available to parents)</u> on the parent and pupil survey. The survey results are proving to be useful in identifying areas to support the continuous improvement of home learning.</p> <p>161 (40%) parents and 271 (35%) pupils responded. The feedback suggests that there has been a significant improvement from lockdown 1 and areas of improvement have been identified.</p> <p><b>ACTION POINTS</b></p>	SM

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The approach to the Broad General Education (BGE) S1-3 phase will be amended and will be launched on 1 March.</li> <li>• Ensure that progression in learning continues in the Senior Phase as well as support for the 5-8% essential, practical work timetable.</li> <li>• Continue to provide a Hub support for key workers and vulnerable pupils.</li> <li>• CS to ask Curricular Leaders to self-evaluate their remote learning offering and to identify areas that require support.</li> </ul> <p>Questions and Discussion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What benchmarking is being done and is best practice being shared? CS reported that no benchmarking is being done but that weekly meetings of head teachers across Edinburgh, together with meetings with local schools are being carried out to share good practice. Within the school there is an increased focus on sharing and adopting good practice across faculties.</li> <li>2. Surprise was expressed about the feedback that pupils are receiving too much work. SM explained that this feedback related to the BGE phase. Because of this group's broad curriculum, pupils were finding difficulty with establishing time limits on each assignment to make the overall workload manageable. This is driving the school's plan to better streamline the work of the BGE cohort and to give clear guidance on time limits. CS added that the structure prepared by SM and IJP is also designed to encourage more engagement and live interactions.</li> <li>3. Are there faculties which are not performing as well as others? CS explained that live sessions are not mandatory, and teachers cannot be forced to do them. However, it is reasonable to set expectations across the piece and measure individual departments against these. Curricular leaders are submitting papers to the HT this week in relation to learners' entitlements together with examples of good practices and areas for improvement. This will help identify how any necessary levelling up can be managed. <u>Fiona Bradley (FB) and CS agreed to discuss this in a follow up session.</u></li> <li>4. Why can't contact times be benchmarked? Education Scotland's paper is used as the benchmark here. Under Edinburgh Learns, the 22 Edinburgh schools work together to agree what can be delivered in a consistent manner across the city.</li> <li>5. What do teachers think? There has been a lot of learning from lockdown 1, building on the new skills learned in utilising Microsoft Teams. The MS Teams best practice forum was invaluable to them. There is now a broader array of tools and support available to them. They do have limiting constraints. Some teachers are, themselves, parenting children at home whilst working.</li> </ol>	CS and FB
--	--	-----------

	They also support a rota for the Hub which can impact on their other teaching duties.	
<b>III. Remote learning and FAQs</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SM collaborated with three parents to build a set of frequently asked questions (FAQ) regarding remote learning. These were consolidated into a table with responses provided by SM, after discussion with the school's SLT.</li> <li>2. The FAQs have been placed on the school's website at the address below: <a href="https://www.st-thomas-of-aquins.org.uk/online-learning-opportunities/faq/">https://www.st-thomas-of-aquins.org.uk/online-learning-opportunities/faq/</a></li> <li>3. The FAQs will be added to and updated as required.</li> <li>4. SM together with Gaye Cleary, Louise McSorley and AS were thanked for their efforts and collaboration in pulling this information together.</li> <li>5. On the subject of assessments, a question was asked on how we can address the understandable gaps in the current guidance. This was a cause of uncertainty and stress for pupils. <u>CS offered to meet with Clare Mackay following the meeting to provide advice on this issue.</u></li> </ol>	CS & CM
<b>IV. Plan for a possible blended learning approach</b>	CS commented that the First Minister is talking about a phased return to school rather than blended learning. One of the biggest challenges is the introduction of 2m social distancing between pupils. This restricts the capacity of the school to 33% of its roll. This issue will therefore dictate a gradual build up to full-time learning unless additional capacity can be made available to the school and/or restrictions are relaxed. There will be no return before 15 <sup>th</sup> March at the earliest.	
<b>V. IT Access</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. CS reported that the school does not currently have a 1 to 1 (1 device per pupil) policy at present. Nor could one be afforded.</li> <li>2. An audit is being undertaken at present to establish who has no access to a suitable device. The school is looking to identify 1 – 1.5% of its budget into a collective fund.</li> <li>3. It was asked if the Parent Council could help with funding. CS was enthusiastic. <u>It was agreed that CS and JR would meet with Louise McSorley (LMc) to discuss.</u></li> </ol>	CS, JR, LMc
<b>VI. Are there any plans for live interactions with S1 to S3 students?</b>	See Remote Learning and FAQs.	
<b>VII. On-line check- ins with pupils across the school</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. IJP acknowledged the importance of check-ins and explained how they could become more targeted and individualised. There is good practice within the school to build on.</li> <li>2. There is a facility for private questions to teachers (either by e-mail or via Teams). The use of Teams for small group meetings online is also proving to be useful and could be developed. The Pupil Support Leaders are</li> </ol>	

	<p>available and accessible. Individual meetings are being set up for pupils in transition (e.g. in S3 to S4).</p> <p>3. A systematic process to track pupil engagement has been developed. This will detail: who is connecting; who is responding; who is doing well; who is struggling. Data is being provided to teachers.</p> <p>4. It is important to provide feedback to all pupils: positive feedback to those who are doing well; encouragement to the many that are meeting their commitments; and focussed attention on those who may be struggling.</p> <p>5. There are also plans to set up group assemblies.</p>	
<b>Item 4: Parent Council Sub-Groups</b>		
	<p>1. LB noted that work was ongoing to refresh the existing Sub-Groups (SG) into the following: SG1: Curriculum, SQA results, and Pathways group; SG2: Learning, Teaching and Assessment group; and SG3: Pupil Wellbeing and Relationships.</p> <p>2. <u>Details will be circulated by LB.</u></p> <p>3. LB is looking for interested parents to express interest in getting involved</p> <p>4. As noted earlier, a new Communications Sub-Group is being established. <u>Volunteers to work with this group are invited.</u></p> <p>5. CS expressed his thanks and thanked parents for taking the time to work in partnership with the school. He noted the added value that effective sub-groups bring to the school. Both he and James Boardman are looking to develop a way of working that will strengthen the partnership and value delivered.</p> <p>6. <u>Any parents interested in participating can get in touch with Lesley Broadwood or Alan Seywright (contact details are on the Parent Council page of the school website).</u></p>	<p>LB</p> <p>ALL</p> <p>ALL</p>
<b>Item 5: Headteacher's Report</b>		
	<p><b>1. Remote Learning and Return to School</b> All covered by earlier items.</p> <p><b>2. Staffing 2021/22</b> CS reported on the new staffing for next year: a permanent Business Education Teacher to replace Mrs Turner who is leaving; a probationary post in RE is being made permanent, and further probationers would be recruited for Computing Science, Science and English.</p> <p><b>3. Budget</b> CS and JR are managing the Financial Year End with a view to retaining a sum to support IT.</p>	
<b>Item 6: Fundraising</b>		
<b>Fundraising events</b>	<p>1. JP reported a very positive result in 2020 and stated that events received enthusiastic support. These events will be repeated in 2021.</p> <p>2. The lockdown was presenting challenges in planning for new events.</p> <p>3. Also to note the successful fundraising co-ordinated by Louise McSorley which raised funds in only four</p>	

	<p>days - to provide a Christmas thank-you gift from parents to all school staff. There was an excess in donations of £225 which has been donated to school funds.</p> <p><b>4. PC fundraising subgroup</b>  The Parent Council fundraising subgroup would like to welcome anyone interested in joining the team to bring some enthusiasm and fresh ideas for fundraising activities. Fellow parents, Catherine Gray, Colleen McCrone, Denise Simpson and Kitty Bruce-Gardyne have stepped down from the group having contributed enormously over the last few years. If parents are interested in finding out what is involved, please contact <u>Lesley Broadwood</u> or <u>Alan Seywright</u> (contact details are on the Parent Council page of the school website).</p>	ALL
<b>Item 7: AOB</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are plans to address delayed inoculations? JR reported that dates were being arranged. <u>She will find out and get the information circulated.</u></li> <li>2. Are there any plans to use Teams for parent consultations? CS responded that the school will carry on using phones for the time being and commented on the success of recent parents evenings. Other schools' experiences with video platforms is mixed. There are issues of equity in access. CS will continue to look at other systems.</li> <li>3. LB closed the meeting with thanks to CS and his staff for all their extra work in managing the challenges of the latest lockdown. She also expressed thanks for the excellent work carried out by members of the Parent Council and parents from across the school.</li> </ol>	JR
<b>Item 8: Date of next meeting</b>	29 <sup>th</sup> April 2021, at 6.30pm on MS Teams.	