**Firrhill High School Parent Council**

**Monday 17th May, 7pm online via Microsoft Teams**

**Confirmed minute**

**In attendance:**

Parent Council Members: Tim Wallace (Chair), Stuart Barlow (Vice-Chair), Jane Williams (Secretary), Margaret Hampton, Ross Isdale (Depute Head), Andrew Bright, Graham Hamilton (Headteacher), Tracey Brown, Crerar Christie, Jon Buglas (PTA Chair), Jenny Orr plus 10 additional Firrhill High School parents

1. **Welcome, introductions and apologies**

The Chair started the meeting by welcoming all those in attendance.

Apologies were received from Cllr Rust and Cllr Scott

1. Approval of minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting Monday 22 February 2021 were approved

1. Matters arising

All matters arising were covered by the agenda below.

1. Chair’s report

* Chair reported that they had attended the short leet interviews for the recent Depute Head post created by Ms Statham’s impending retirement.
* Also attended two local Parent Council Chair meetings where there was lots of discussion around qualifications and term dates. In relation to term dates 70% broadly satisfied with the existing dates and the draft dates were being considered at Council Committee this week.
* There was also a discussion at these meetings n whether an additional days holiday will be given in June 2022 for the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. This was waiting a Scottish Government decision.
* In relation to school estate, Robbie Crockett had reported on the plans in relation to this due to the increase in school rolls. There was nothing in the plan regarding Firrhill.
* The Chair also asked the Headteacher to pass on to all the staff at Firrhill his thanks for all their resilience and hard work over the past year. It was agreed by all that this was very much deserved and the parent body appreciated all the hard work put in by all staff at the school over this very difficult school year.

1. Headteacher Report

The Headteacher had written to parents that day and had also previously circulated to Parent Council members a written report. It was very much on a (hopefully) ‘returning to normal’ theme. He highlighted the following points.

Staffing Matters

* This week the allocation of probationers should be finalised. This is slightly later than usual. School is hopeful that they will get the probationers they are looking for.
* School currently has adverts running for a Maths and Modern Studies vacancy. It is possible they will have an additional English vacancy.
* Ms Statham retires on 4th June after almost 26 years of dedicated service to Firrhill. Mr Hamilton highlighted the tremendous service Ms Statham had given the school and that she was a very valued colleague. The Parent Council also noted that they would like to record their thanks to Ms Statham.
* Her post will be filled by Mr Else who starts on May 31st to allow for a hand-over period. He has big shoes to fill.
* School have appointed Ms Davidson as the new Curriculum Leader for Modern Studies and RE. Ms Davidson was an outstanding candidate and the Headteacher highlighted the growth in modern studies teaching that has taken place at Firrhill lead by Ms Davidson. Only a few years ago modern studies was only offered to S6 students. In 2022/23 there will be 5 higher classes running and 2 Advanced Higher classes and even more National 5 classes. Mr Edwards will continue to be CL for History & Geography.
* Ms Kinane will join us a new permanent French & Spanish teacher in August.
* Mr Charman, Maths, will leave at the end of term for a new post as Headteacher of Hamilton College.

Covid update

* From February to Easter the school had continued to provide a combination of high-quality online experience for pupils as well as the in-school experience for key worker and vulnerable pupils. The Headteacher highlighted in particular the fantastic work done by Pupil Support Assistants in delivering the in-school experience. The in-school teaching had also been staffed by supply staff with support from Pupil Support Leaders and the senior team leaving Firrhill staff to focus on the online learning. Overall it was an incredible team effort by all concerned.
* Firrhill continued with the wellbeing afternoons and this culminated in a wellbeing weekend challenge just before the Easter holiday that raised £1413 for SAMH. There had been some parents who had raised concerns about the wellbeing afternoons but it seemed to work well in practice and the idea had been adopted by other schools.
* In general engagement levels across all years was very good with our seniors particularly well engaged. Indeed, a number of subjects reported pupils being further ahead in course coverage by the time lockdown ended than might have been expected.
* Throughout the closure Pupil Support Leaders and Support for Learning Tutors maintained very good contact with pupils and families and this has helped to keep the number of pupils struggling with the return to school to a minimum.
* Cases continue to be very low with only one positive pupil test since Easter.
* Face coverings and hygiene mitigations continue as before and the expectation is that these will continue until the summer. Compliance with face coverings in particular has been excellent.
* Arrangements for August remain, at this time, unknown.

SQA

* SQA released an update to parents and to candidates at the start of last week which, in essence, appeared to indicate that the replication of an exam diet was unnecessary and that schools were not using the flexibility that SQA had given to schools to avoid having to replicate the exam diet.
* The Headteacher indicated that virtually every other school is doing the same thing as Firrhill, with minor differences, to fulfil what they see are the requirements of the SQA in regard to quality assessment and robust evidence.
* It seems unlikely that it is the schools and staff in them who are all wrong and misunderstanding the SQA guidelines. The guidance for Maths and Sciences for example both use the word “exam.” There has also been lots of media coverage supporting the position schools have taken.
* At Firrhill they have ensured for the vast majority of pupils, assessments do not take place on consecutive day after day and that pupils have only one set assessment on any given day. Thanks go to Mr Isdale for producing this programme.
* Four subjects were selected by SQA for verification and those materials will go to SQA on Monday 17th May. This consists of selecting 5 candidates at national 4, 5, 6 and Advanced Higher. The Headteacher was confident in both the quality of the assessment and moderation processes that have been used to ensure consistency and accuracy
* Candidates will be advised of provisional grades before the end of term and likely to be 24 / 25 June.
* Schools and parents are still waiting to hear what the appeals system will look like for 2021. This is very late to receive this information.

ICT Matters

* Plans continue to move forward for the 1:1 rollout across all Edinburgh schools.
* The timeline indicates that Firrhill will receive their iPads before Christmas with the intention for staff to receive their iPads prior to pupils to give time for familiarisation and training.
* Ms Campbell, D&T, is taking on a development role to ensure that staff are well prepared to make best use of this new technology.

End of term / moving on

* 11 June will be the last day for the S6 pupils. It is another year when the end is not what it had hoped as there will again be no prom due to Covid but the school and pupils were looking to mark the event and were working with the S6 Senior Pupil Council to organise this.
* The school will be having an online Commemoration Evening on Thursday June 10th and it will follow the successful model used for last year’s evening.
* The rest of the school will be moving to the new timetable on 14 June
* P7-S1 transition activities will take place online too and are scheduled to run across the three days of 15th-17th June. The activities are essentially primary-school based and delivered by P7 teachers.
* The Headteacher recognised this was disappointing for those parents with primary school children who were hoping to have included an opportunity to visit Firrhill.
* Firrhill plan to run an online new S1 parents’ information evening on the evening of Tuesday 15th June. Again, we will follow the same basic format as we used successfully last session. A representative of the Parent Council was asked to attend.

# August 2021

* School is well placed to start the New Year. Timetable is ready, staffing (with caveats above) is in place.
* School will be putting in place a revised programme in S1 and S2 to improve and consolidate literacy and numeracy skills to the standards as they know pupils need to succeed in the senior phase.
* Schools will be embracing the move to face to face teaching and building on the highly successful online learning that was developed over the course of the 20-21 school year with a skilled and knowledgeable teacher leading on development of those approaches.
* Staff and pupil morale remains high and the Headteacher was confident of a much more normal feel to school from August assuming that the Covid situation in the community both locally and nationally continues to be under control.

# School League Tables 2020

* The Headteacher notes the publication of these unofficial school League Tables in the previous week. Schools across the country are ranked according to the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more Higher passes by the time they leave school.
* However flawed any examination system might be, examination performance continues to be a significant factor in determining the opportunities and options that pupils can take advantage of when they leave school.
* Firrhill was ranked 32nd in Scotland, placing us in the top 10% of schools nationally. In terms of the city Firrhill were ranked third, with Gillespie’s and Boroughmuir ahead of us. Firrhill have sent congratulations to both those schools and told them we are working hard to overtake them.
* He also highlighted that while Firrhill have raised the attainment of our highest attaining pupils we are also closing the gap between them and the lowest attaining. That is also the product of hard work by pupils, staff and parents.

The Headteacher was asked whether Teachers were receiving any additional payments for all the additional work in relation to marking the assessments – work that was normally undertaken by SQA examiners. He advised that teachers received an additional payment of £400 gross from the Scottish Government which worked out about £240 after tax etc

He was also asked whether double periods were staying. Feedback on double periods was that they were more productive and were generally liked by pupils and staff. They were not liked by all subjects e.g. modern languages where a little and often approach worked well. They will be staying for S5 and 6 and their timetable will run the same. For S1 – 4 there are some logistical problems but as many of them as possible will be double periods. The timetable may need to run for these years on a week 1 / week 2 basis.

He was also asked about lunchtimes and he indicated that after the summer they hoped to go back to one break time and one lunch time.

**Working groups**

* The working groups indicated that they had not met and that many of them did not have sufficient numbers to run at the moment. It was agreed that there would be a push on recruitment early in the new school year and their leads were asked to prepare some information that could be circulated to parents.

**Parent Teacher Association (PTA). – Name in future to be Fundraising and Social Group**

* This group continues to be very active. In order to better reflect what the group is about they proposed the name to be changed to the Fundraising and Social Group which was agreed
* The Vice Chair highlighted that they had a couple of members stepping down. First, he wanted to thank Dawn Alsop for all her hard work. Dawn has been a member of a PTA for the past 15 years - first at her primary school PTA and then for Firrhill.
* He also thanked Jon Buglas who was stepping down as Chair of the PTA after 4 years of service and 5 years on the Parent Council.
* The Headteacher also asked for his thanks to be passed on both to Dawn and Jon and to the PTA more generally on behalf of the school for all the work they do.
* Stuart Barlow was taking over as Chair of the PTA. He reported that the PTA have raised funds just over£4k this year. Their next fundraising activity would be the Step Challenge

Firrhill Futures

* SB then highlighted a proposal to create a Firrhill Futures Fund
* This would mean that parents of leaving and past pupils could support the learning and activities of both current and future generations of Firrhill pupils.
* This could be either a one off or ongoing small commitment. In return for a regular report on what your funding supported.
* Firrhill fundraising haven't done this before and we don't know how successful or quite how this proposal will be received so were looking for feedback.
* They had thought it important not to go to parents of current pupils. Firrhill is not a gated community. It is open to all regardless of income or any other criteria. Open schooling is an important principle. With that in mind we do not want current parents to feel any pressure to take part.
* The Parent Council welcomed this development and were keen to see it taken forward. There was feedback that,while noting the need to make sure that there was no obligation to contribute, that it could be something that current parents would also be keen to contribute too.
* The Headteacher thanked the Fundraising and Social group for all their hard work on this proposal.

AOB

* The Headteacher thanked the parent body more widely as he knew it had been again a difficult year for everyone. He noted that there had been an improvement in the nature of communication and he continued to welcome feedback.
* A number of parents highlighted how the online teaching in 2021 had been excellent at Firrhill and that they really appreciated the effort the teachers had put in.
* It was also noted that it had been a very tough year for our young people again and they also deserved to be congratulated for the way they had handled themselves.

No further business was raised so the meeting closed.