**Firrhill High School - Parent Council 2021**

**Approved minutes**

**6.45pm 29 November via Microsoft Teams**

**Present:**

Stuart Barlow (Vice Chair) Jane Williams (Secretary), Jenny Orr (Treasurer), Margaret Hampton, Crerar Christie, Cllr Arthur, Ross Isdale (Depute Head) Alice Clegg (Depute Head), Jonny Else (Depute Head), plus 4 additional Firrhill High parents/ carers

**Apologies**

Tim Wallace (Chair), Graham Hamilton (Headteacher), Cllr Rust, Louise Wilson

1. **Welcome, introductions and apologies**

The Vice Chair started the meeting by welcoming all those in attendance and explaining that the Chair and the Headteacher were unable to attend. Stuart, the Vice Chair would therefore be chairing this evening’s meeting. In the Headteacher’s absence he was also pleased to welcome to the meeting for the first time two new Deputes, Ms Clegg and Mr Else .

1. **Approval of minutes**

The minute of the previous meeting Monday 13 Sept 2021 were approved

1. **Matters arising**

All matters arising were covered by the agenda below.

1. **Chair’s report**

The Chair was unable to attend and had provided a written update. The Vice Chair reported that the Chair had attended the Locality Meeting last week for PC Chairs.  They discussed the current Education Reform Review by Ken Muir, Edinburgh's Vision for Play (Nursery/P1), Pupil Placement Appeals Process (for incoming P1 and S1 pupils), COVID schools guidance, Virtual Parent Consultation Meetings (there are some schools that don't limit the number of teachers that each parent can see which means that for some, they find there are no slots left) and Wi-Fi issues at a particular high school (not Firrhill HS).

The Chair asked that we discussed at the AGM about getting a letter out to parents and carers about our working groups.  At the moment only the fundraising and social group were running due to lack of numbers. He suggested that we should discuss exactly which sub groups are viable this session and are needed by the school along with having school staff representation.

A general discussion then took place on what the working groups.

**Fundraising and Social Group**

* The Vice-Chair (who leads this group) indicated that this group meets regularly. It had been very helpful having teacher input to this group but the current teacher members had now left the school so they were looking to the school for new nominations. New parent members would also be helpful.

**Health and Wellbeing group**

* The working group lead, Margaret Hampton, indicated they too were very keen to get some new members. She advised that she would provide some information to go out to parents / carers looking for new volunteers.
* Mr Isdale advised that a number of teachers were keen to be involved in this group and that this had worked very well in the past led my Ms Carmichael. Mr Isdale advised that Ms Neilson from PE was taken over the schools wellbeing role so may be keen to be involved.

**Business and Enterprise group**

* There was no representative from this group at the meeting and the meeting noted that membership of this group was low.
* Mr Isdale advised that that the way careers advice is being delivered in schools has changed and that there was a new relationship with Careers Development Scotland. Firrhill had a new schools Careers Adviser Ms Nichols who worked across the local schools cluster coordinating careers advice.
* Employer engagement was an important part of her role and he thought she would be keen to be involved in this group and to speak to the Parent Council more generally. Mr Isdale suggested that we invite her to our next Parent Council meeting so that we could find out more about this new approach. .
* The meeting agreed that this would be a good idea and asked Mr Isdale to do this.

It was agreed that the Health and Wellbeing group and the Business and Enterprise group had both provided very helpful support to the school in the past and it would be good to see these groups running again.

The lead for Business and Enterprise was not at the meeting so it was agreed that contact would be made via email to get some text to go out to parents from the lead for Health and Wellbeing and for Business Enterprise and that this would be sent out in the New Year.

**5) Depute Heads**

Before moving to the Headteacher report the two new Depute Heads introduced themselves to the Parent Council.

Ms Clegg joined Firrhill in March 2020 from Boroughmuir High School. She leads on maths and science, is the head of Caerketton and leads wellbeing, staff development and developing pupil voice. She is passionate about staff development and believes that nothing has more impact than personal and professional development of teachers. In terms of training and development so far they have had 14 expert twilight sessions on a range of issues ranging from peer mentoring, coaching, dyslexia and ADHD. In terms of developing pupil voice this year they were trialling ‘year councils’. Feedback was that pupils felt more comfortable with feeding back when they are with their own year rather than the previous system of house councils where pupils from all 6 years were represented.

Mr Else joined Firrhill in June 2021. He was previously been on secondment as a Depute in a school in East Lothian. He had been blown away the welcome he has received since arriving. Mr Else has been leading on new enrolments. From June to October he had administered 52 new enrolments. This was significantly more than other schools receive. He is lead for Pupil Support and for Armed Forces Liaison. He is lead for expressive, arts, English and modern languages. He sees the distributed leadership across pupil support as a real strength at Firrhill.

A discussion took place regarding one of the distinctive features at Firrhill is the relationship the school has with the Armed Forces due to being located adjacent to the two barracks.

Since the other Deputes had introduced themselves Mr Isdale also updated the meeting on his own areas of responsibility. Mr Isdale has worked at Firrhill for 14 years and was previously curriculum leader for maths. He currently is Head of two houses Braidlaw and Darroch and is the lead for the social sciences faculties (history and geography and modern studies and RMPS). He is responsible for tracking and monitoring, timetabling and course choices.

1. Headteacher’s report

Mr Hamilton had provided a written report to the meeting which Mr Isdale went through.

# Covid-19 Update

* This term has continued to pose challenges through both staff and pupil positive test results. An additional challenge has been the time where staff have had to stay home pending the result of a PCR test. Many of these have been negative and the staff member has been able to return to work but the days of absence have placed additional strain on staffing and cover.
* School has retained the services of several cover teachers on an almost daily basis to ensure that sufficient cover is available to cover both Covid and the normal autumn/winter absences. This has allowed the school to keep cover demands on permanent staff as low as possible but even with this level of supply cover there have been weeks where the school have needed staff to pick up additional cover lessons and gone to promoted staff more than would be normal.
* Pupils continue to wear face coverings when in school but the number of face coverings being issued to pupils each morning is becoming unsustainable at c. 250-300 per day. It is clear that there is an element of fatigue amongst pupils and families to ensure pupils arrive with their own face covering to use.
* Although test and protect demands have been reduced the bureaucracy around positive cases remains a significant burden for the Business Manager. Indeed, the additional demands placed on the Business Manager throughout the pandemic have been significant and the unsustainable demands on the Business Manager role has been a consistent concern voiced by Headteachers over many months.
* The schools continue to see very little evidence of in-school transmission between pupils and/or staff. Indeed, it seems to be only contact outside of school that is the source of infections
* The removal of staggered starts, finishes, breaks and lunchtimes has made for a smoother running day and a greater feeling of normality across the school. The lack of any significant rise in cases would indicate this decision to have been appropriate. The school has retained the two-week timetable and it would seem likely this will continue for some time.

# Assessment Fortnight (s4 – 6)

* This is currently taking place and so far things have gone very well with assessments proceeding as planned, very few pupils missing assessments and Firrhill’s team of invigilators doing a great job and gaining valuable experience for the summer and the SQA diet.
* Firrhill were required to provide a justification for study leave to be granted to pupils for the assessment fortnight this year. Mr Hamilton submitted a detailed rationale which referenced not only the significant improvements in pupil attainment over the last several years but also how study leave for these assessments provides an experience for pupils much more analogous to the summer diet. It also described how not only that our organisation of the assessment fortnight is an integral aspect of our school ethos and culture and that study leave was strongly supported by both parents and pupils as recently as last spring.
* These assessments provide important mid-course progression information to pupils and to their teachers. The running of assessment fortnight also sends a strong message of us doing ‘business as usual’ whenever the school can. The sense of normality (even if a bit stressful) of this process also helps to focus senior pupils on the fact that it is nigh on certain that the normal SQA diet will take place this coming summer.

**Staffing Matters**

* There have been a small number of staffing changes since my last HT report:

Departures

* There have been a small number of departures namely Mrs Read (Drama) Mr Simpson (Maths) and Mr Latif (Business)
* The school hope to have appointed a new drama teacher by the end of this week. The advert for the maths post should go live any day. Despite two adverts we have been unable to fill the Business vacancy. Timetables have been reorganised and senior classes prioritised in terms of teaching time.

Arrivals

* There has been only one new arrival since the October update of Ms Duncan a new Pupil Support Assistant.

# ICT Update

* Schools continue to experience issues with network bandwidth and speeds. Teams continues to be unpredictable if a bit better recently. Firrhill, while being impacted, is less severely impacted than many other schools. In large part due to the sterling work of Firrhill’s IT Technician,
* Headteachers continue to raise our concerns as to these ongoing problems.
* Unfortunately, the timeline for 1:1 device roll-out has slipped.   
  The school anticipate teachers receiving their iPads on, or after, January 31st 2022. Pupils will not receive their iPads until August 2022, at the earliest.
* This delay is frustrating for everyone and we have had to reorganise the professional learning programme to support staff in learning how to use their devices to improve their pedagogy. Despite the changing timeline we have an exciting PL programme through the spring and summer terms to support teaching staff in developing their new digital pedagogical skills.

# Examination Results

* As Mr Hamilton was unable to attend the meeting he will provide an overview of the 2021 results at the February meeting

1. **Treasures report**

The Treasurer reported that current funds stood at £2567.20

1. **Working groups update**

**Fundraising and Social Group**

* The Vice Chair who leads this group advised the raffle was about to launch. Tickets can be bought through parent pay
* He once again wanted to thank the school’s Business Manager who had been very supportive of the group once again.
* He was delighted that the group were going to be able to fund a ‘pop up sensory room’ and after receiving a great detailed proposal for support for nurture were funding this to tune of £1800.
* The group is still keen to receive requests for funding from the school.
* Firrhill Futures is also up and running and the group will continue to advertise this scheme.

**Health and wellbeing group**

* . Nothing to report as this group has not met

**Business and Enterprise group**

* . Nothing to report as this group has not met

1. **School website**

The Secretary advised that the school we relooking for some assistance to update the Parent Council information on the website. No volunteer was received so this will be taken forward by email.

**9. Any other business**

The Secretary advised she had received a request to attend the meeting from the Colinton Community Council to discuss a proposal to gather the views of young people in the area. They will attend the next meeting to present on this issue.

No further business was raised so the meeting closed.

**Dates of future meetings**

The following dates were agreed for future meetings with a start time of 6.45pm and on Microsoft Teams for the time being

* 28th February 2022
* 16th May 2022