

Firrhill High School - Parent Council Meeting

School Library, 28 November 2022, 6:45pm

Minutes

Abbreviations:

CEC – City of Edinburgh Council

PC – Parent Council

Present:

Tim Wallace (Chair), Stuart Barlow (Vice Chair), Jenny Orr (Treasurer), Crerar Christie (Secretary), Graham Hamilton (Headteacher), Ross Isdale (Depute Head), Nicola Dow, Martin Newcombe, Zibby Kwecka, plus 6 additional Firrhill High parents/ carers

Apologies

Jenny Orr (Treasurer), Karen McShane

1) Welcome, introductions and apologies

The Chair started the meeting by welcoming all those in attendance and invited everyone to briefly introduce themselves.

2) Approval of minutes

The minute of the previous meeting Monday 3rd October 2022 were approved.

3) Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

4) Chair's report

The Chair indicated that there had been one recent locality meeting, which he was unfortunately unable to attend. The Chair indicated that the nature of the recent locality meeting was to discuss parent representation on the CEC Education Committee.

The Chair indicated that the diet of locality meetings was not particularly well set out this year. The Chair explained that locality meetings were arranged by the CEC for PC Chairs to discuss issues affecting schools in the wider locality.

5) Treasurer's report

The Treasurer was unable to attend, and the Chair presented her apologies. The Treasurer also indicated through the Chair that the current balance of the Parent Council account was: £4771.59.

The Chair clarified that there are two accounts under the Parent Council stewardship: the Parent Council account, which is funded by CEC, and the Fundraising subgroup's account, which is funded through parent led activity.

The Chair suggested to the Head that, given the amount of money available, it was perhaps a good time for the school to identify activities in need of funding and to bring any such to the next PC meeting. The Head agreed.

6) Headteacher's report

Staffing update

The Head indicated that the school was in a good position, staffing wise, with only one PSA position vacant, and that this position was actively being recruited for (under a modified process).

The Head also indicated that a teaching position was likely to come up shortly, but that a replacement for this position had already been found.

The Head indicated that the review for the staffing window had taken place. The Head indicated that the purpose of the staffing window is for curriculum leaders to indicate to Mr Isdale what teaching resource they require to achieve their goals in the coming year. Mr Isdale & the Head then review the requirements and submit a staffing return to CEC.

The Head then gave a review of how the school, together with CEC, fills teaching places with probationary and permanent teachers, depending upon requirements.

Finances

The Head indicated that, by good planning and use of resources, the school finances were in a healthy position.

The Head also indicated that, by building good relationships with cover teachers, disruption caused by pulling permanent teaching staff away from their work has been minimized.

The Head indicated that, given the prevailing economic conditions, further education cuts will likely be on the horizon. Also, that though the good housekeeping at Firrhill is likely to lessen the impact of a year of cuts, further cuts will likely result in a reduction in the number of low-demand classes being run, and/or, ultimately, staffing cuts. The Head indicated that any such decisions will follow education budget outcomes, which have yet to be announced.

ICT/ Edinburgh Learns/ Empowered Learning

The Head indicated that the roll-out of I-Pads to pupils went spectacularly well after significant and well thought through planning. Approx. 1300 I-Pads were given out over 3 days, with every pupil receiving an induction on reception of a device.

The Head noted particular thanks to Ms Campbell in ICT, and to Ms Ewen, the school business manager, without whom, the roll-out would have been significantly more difficult.

The Head noted that the devices would be gradually introduced as a teaching aid, and, were intended to enhance rather than replace any teaching activity.

SQA

The Head indicated that the SQA adopted a less stringent approach to appeals during the Covid disruption, and that this approach was still in place. At Firrhill, of the 188 appeals submitted over approx. 2,500 exam entries, 34 were successful, most shifting a result by one band, where such a change in band also changed the grade. Of the 34 successful appeals, 7 were at Nat 5 level, 22 at Higher, and 5 at Advanced Higher.

The Head then gave an overview of the significant impact that Firrhill staff commitment has in realizing the potential of every pupil.

Industrial Action

The Head noted that industrial action was, by nature, disruptive. The Head noted that these actions were lawful and legitimate and staff had to make very personal decisions, which are not taken lightly. The Head noted there was likely to be further action on the 10th and 11th January, and again on the 25th January.

The Head noted that the best way forward was for an amicable agreement to be reached by both sides.

Scottish Education Consultations

The Head gave a review of the five consultations currently taking place by the Scottish Government to discern the future needs of Education. The Head also indicated the "Big Ticket" nature of these consultations and an overview of the prevailing views that have, and will, shape the outcomes of education, and how those outcomes are achieved and certified.

Wider discussion

A wider discussion broke out amongst the attendees concerning the future and delivery of education, and what value there was in Scottish Education and what value there should and could be. This discussion also involved consideration of budget cuts.

7) Working groups update

Business and enterprise group

There was no report for this group.

Environmental group

There were no updates for this group.

Fundraising Group

Stuart Barlow updated the meeting.

The Christmas raffle was the only current activity; attendees were encouraged to support this activity, and get other parents to also participate. Thanks went to Lorna Ewen for her invaluable help in making this happen.

Upcoming events include a Disco for parents in March 23; date, time and venue to be arranged.

Funds had been received from [easyfundraising.com](https://www.easyfundraising.com), and parents were encouraged to sign up to this scheme when buying or booking things through affiliated companies such as [booking.com](https://www.booking.com). [Easyfunding.com](https://www.easyfunding.com) give a generous return to support the school's fundraising activities.

The head suggested that parents should be made aware of such activities and Mr Barlow indicated that a notice would be made in an upcoming newsletter. It was also suggested creating a static web-page on the parent section of the school website to indicate activities and schemes which parents could take part in to support the school.

A brief discussion broke out concerning the school email list, its governance and its use for parent activities.

Health and Well-being group

There was no direct update for this group, however, the Head indicated that the "Raising teens with confidence" meetings were up and running on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and that both were well attended.

There was also a Dyslexia group meeting in the previous week.

8) Any other business.

The Head indicated that no secondary school business manager in Edinburgh is fully funded. The Head also emphasized the regular and committed - beyond the call of duty – effort put in by the school's current business manager, Lorna Ewen. Given that Firrhill has approx. 1300 pupils, 140 staff, with health and safety responsibilities linked to Amey as custodial providers and requires business manager input on many significant decisions, the Head left open the question to the PC as to whether 4 days a week funding was appropriate for a person, of such experience, taking on such responsibility, especially with retention being a significant problem. The Chair indicated that the PC will make representation to Lorna French, Acting Head of Schools and Lifelong learning at CEC.

9) Date of next meeting

The date for the next meeting is 27th February 2023 in the Firrhill School Library.