

# St Ninian's Parent Council



5<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Ms Lorraine McMillan  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Council Offices  
Main Street  
Barrhead  
G78 1SY

Dear Ms McMillan,

## **ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL PARENT COUNCIL RESPONSE TO EAST RENFREWSHIRE CONSULTATION ON "SHAPING OUR FUTURE 2015-2018"**

For and on behalf on the Parent Council of St Ninian's High School ("the Parent Council"), I would like to respond to the consultation on East Renfrewshire Council's proposals contained within the document "Shaping Our Future 2015-2018" ("the Budget Proposals").

### **1. Background**

- 1.1. The Parent Council has had the opportunity to review the Budget Proposals and have discussed them at its meetings on both 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014.
- 1.2. The chair of the Parent Council, Mr Michael Ward, attended the presentations on the Budget Proposals made by Cllr Jim Fletcher, Ms Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive of ERC and Mrs Mhairi Shaw, Director of Education. Mr Ward took the opportunity to express the Parent Council's concerns regarding some of the proposals and also to make enquiries and suggestions regarding other areas of potential savings within the education budget. Mr. Ward subsequently fed back to the Parent Council notes he had taken at the meeting.
- 1.3. Two senior pupils from the school, Fraser Cameron and Katie Dunn also attended the presentations and the questions asked by them at the meeting have been noted.
- 1.4. The Parent Council distributed a letter to all parents during the week commencing 24<sup>th</sup> November 2014 detailing its understanding of the Budget Proposals.
- 1.5. A letter of representation was made by the Maths teachers at St Ninian's who expressed concern at the impact of the proposals on both attainment and educational experience and highlighted this to the Parent Council.

1.6. The Parent Council understands that the Budget Proposals were contained within the ER magazine distributed to all home in East Renfrewshire.

## **2. Current Position at St Ninian's High School**

- 2.1. St Ninian's High School is an outstanding school which has achieved a consistently high record of education achievement both in absolute terms against other high performing high schools but also against SIMD indicators which demonstrates that the school works with pupils from all social backgrounds and ability levels to maximise their potential. The hard work and commitment of the head teacher, senior management team, teaching and support staff are significant factors in this success.
- 2.2. The support of East Renfrewshire Council through its elected members and officials has also contributed to the continued success of St Ninian's High School in both the provision of financial resources and management support to facilitate the work carried out within the school.
- 2.3. Indeed as recently as Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2014 the Sunday Times identified the high levels of education that are achieved by St. Ninian's and other schools within East Renfrewshire.
- 2.4. That said, St Ninian's High School has been operating at an actual roll in excess of its capacity level and this has impacted on the educational experience which can be provided. Examples of this include limited changing areas for PE, science lessons not taking place in rooms designed for that purpose and recreation areas which are overcrowded with pupils unable to find areas to sit down during breaks. Recently a large number of pupils had to take time to travel into central Glasgow to sit music examinations causing them to miss a half day of school for a short period of examination. Given the number of pupils presented by St Ninian's it could justify the examiner attending at the school but there is insufficient capacity to host this.
- 2.5. East Renfrewshire Council has placed education at that forefront of its service provision and the standards achieved by St Ninian's and other schools within the council area attract numerous families to move to the area to access this education.
- 2.6. The Parent Council understands that St Ninian's has a lower cost per pupil than other high schools in East Renfrewshire which may in part be due to the high utilisation factor.

## **3. Consideration of Proposals**

- 3.1. The Parent Council has considered the Budget Proposals and their impact on the educational experience of current and future pupils and the level of attainment currently being achieved by the school.

### **3.2. Increase in class sizes for S1 & S2 English & Maths from 20 to 30 pupils.**

- 3.2.1. This proposal was identified by Mrs Shaw under the heading of “Re-design and removal of services.” The Parent Council has significant concerns regarding the impact of this proposal on the educational experience of young high school pupils and their ultimate attainment levels. This concern was articulated by St. Ninian’s Parent Council chair Mr Ward and representatives from other parent councils at the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November. Mrs Shaw advised that there was evidence to suggest that larger class sizes may not be detrimental to pupil attainment but the Parent Council believes that there must be a body of evidence to counter this. The reduction in class size was a Scottish Government heralded initiative and the Parent Council believes that this was based on evidence and not a speculative decision. In addition the Parent Council has received a letter from staff in the Maths department of St Ninian’s outlining educational benefits of the reduction in class sizes and demonstrating improved attainment since its introduction. We note that the Budget Proposals refer to “we” but it would appear that the view of front line teaching staff does not support this proposal.
- 3.2.2. It is suggested that the effect on St Ninian’s of this proposal would be a reduction of 4 FTE teaching positions
- 3.2.3. In summary the Parent Council is deeply concerned at the imposition of this proposed budget cut and its effect on educational experience and long term pupil attainment. It would appear that the decision has been made without fully investigating the short and long term effect and without taking account of the views of frontline teaching staff.

### **3.3. Redesign Management & Pupil Support Structures**

- 3.3.1. The Parent Council has had representation from parents & staff regarding the impact of this proposed reduction. The introduction of classroom support assistants has improved the ability to qualified teaching staff to focus on core activities improving the educational experience within the school. Further the loss of pupil support will have a knock on effect on teaching time as there will require to be a diversion of teaching time to pupil support time. The Parent Council also believes that this will have a detrimental impact on the high standard of pastoral support currently being offered as these teachers will be required to replace teaching time lost on core subjects.

### **3.4. Reduce the presence of Campus Police Officers**

- 3.4.1. The Parent Council believes that the presence of a campus police officer has been beneficial to the school and has been a positive initiative. The safety of pupils in the areas of cyber and internet security as well as the traditional areas of bullying and road safety is paramount in the welfare of pupils. The primary role of the police under the Police (Scotland) Act 1967 was the prevention of crime (albeit this priority was reduced to an equal priority to the detection of crime in the 2012 consolidation legislation) and where better to start that with early intervention at school. We note the comments made at the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November that discussions are ongoing with Police Scotland to negotiate retention of this resource but funded by Police Scotland and would encourage this option to be pursued fully.

### **3.5. Reduce the School Librarian Service from full to part time**

- 3.5.1. As eloquently espoused by St Ninian's Head Boy Fraser Cameron the Parent Council is concerned regarding the reduction in the full time librarian resource. It believes that the librarian provides an excellent service to the pupils of St Ninian's, a service which could not be replicated by senior pupils, however willing they are to assist. Pupils from other schools expressed their concern at the amount of time that they would have available to carry out this function. It is the Parent Council's view that volunteering should be a value adding activity and not the replacement of a vital service.
- 3.5.2. Should East Renfrewshire Council not accept these representations the Parent Council would ask that the school roll at St Ninian's is taken into account when area wide reductions are considered. The Parent Council understands that this service is under the direct control of the education department and would encourage full consultation with the school during considerations.

### **3.6. Reduce Behaviour Support Assistants by 20%**

- 3.6.1. The Parent Council understands that East Renfrewshire has the lowest rate of exclusions in Scotland and this must be related to the work of behaviour support assistants. In turn the higher level of attendance must improve the educational experience and attainment of particularly those pupils from deprived backgrounds and the Parent Council would be concerned at this imposition of this budget cut. Again the Parent Council notes that this proposal is suggested using "we" but its opinion which is corroborated by teaching staff when asked at the Parent Council meeting is that this is a reduction will have an adverse effect.

### **3.7. Reduce Youth Counselling (2016 onwards)**

- 3.7.1. The Parent Council notes that this budget cut is proposed to be implemented only in the final year of the budget cycle but would be concerned at the impact of this reduction on the most vulnerable pupils within the school.

### **3.8. Reduction in devolved school budgets equivalent to £20 per pupil**

- 3.8.1. Mrs Morrison advised that this represented a reduction of 30% - 40% in the devolved budget and for a school the size of St Ninian's represents a reduction in the region of approx. £35,000 - £36,000. The devolved school budget covers core items including books, the fabric of the building and the resourcing of extra-curricular activities. Given the introduction of new syllabi to address the changes to National Vocational Qualification and the new Higher there will be detrimental effect on the ability of the schools to meet the challenges that these present. In addition the ability of the school to deliver the 80+ extra-curricular activities that it offers to its pupils will be impaired.
- 3.8.2. St Ninian's is a school which has consistently operated at over planning capacity and the pressure on maintaining a suitable facility for the continued demand must not be compromised.

### **3.9. Reduce support for Quality in Education**

- 3.9.1. The Budget Proposals state that “This saving will be delivered by reducing some budgets devolved to schools and pre-five establishments to support their improvement plans including curriculum development, learning and assessment.” The Parent Council understands that this relates to the introduction of the new NVQ examinations and new Higher examinations which will not commence within St Ninian’s (along with other East Renfrewshire schools) until 2015. There will undoubtedly be a requirement for re-alignment of teaching as the requirements of the new systems are identified which could be costly in terms of non-teaching resource.
- 3.9.2. The Parent Council is concerned that this impact on attainment at a crucial transition stage.

## **4. Other Potential Budget Cuts**

- 4.1. The Parent Council notes the comments made by Cllr Fletcher at both its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November and the presentation on 19<sup>th</sup> November that ERC is legally required to present a balanced budget based on its grant settlement from the Scottish Government and the comments by Ms McMillan that there is a financial penalty for failing to do so. It further notes the comment by Cllr Fletcher that any reduction in proposed budget cuts in one area would require to be offset by budget cuts in other areas. Whilst the Parent Council believes that its primary function in this matter is the protection of educational experience within St Ninian’s and that it is for councillors and senior council officials to balance the budget based on the representations of the various interested parties, the Parent Council would make the following suggestions regarding other potential budget savings.
- 4.2. **East Renfrewshire School Estate.**
- 4.2.1. During the consultation on entry to St Ninian’s in 2011 it transpired that there was a large number of non-East Renfrewshire resident pupils being educated in ERC schools. At that time much emphasis was placed on the obligation of ERC only to educate East Renfrewshire pupils (to the detriment of pupils of pupils with a historic right of access to St Ninian’s).
- 4.2.2. At the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November, Mr Ward suggested to Mrs Shaw that the number of non-East Renfrewshire resident pupils being educated in East Renfrewshire schools and the under capacity at some ERC schools were potential areas for investigation and asked if an overall review had been undertaken of the school estate.
- 4.2.3. Mrs Shaw responded that this was a “blind alley” which had been investigated by council officials and that no budget savings were identified and / or offered to elected members. Mrs Shaw also stated that reduction in school capacity would result in a corresponding proportionate reduction in government grant to ERC and that therefore there was no merit in pursuing this option.
- 4.2.4. The Parent Council now understands that pupil numbers are only one factor in how funding is apportioned through the system of Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) where, based on returns submitted by schools to the Scottish

Government, the number of pupils and teachers is captured and only an element of the global funding the council receives is based on the number of pupils.

- 4.2.5. Mr Ratter added that any reduction in school capacity would impact on the future ability of ERC to provide education to residents based on projected house building. By deduction of this response it would appear that there is therefore current excess capacity within the ERC school estate to meet the requirements of its resident pupil population.
- 4.2.6. Subsequent analysis of information available on ERC's website shows that as at 2013 there was a utilisation of only 69.6% of high school capacity by East Renfrewshire resident pupils and that this was as low as 47.3% at one high school (see Appendix 1).
- 4.2.7. Based on the same information source in the primary school sector there is an average utilisation by East Renfrewshire resident pupils of 74.6%, which reduces to 70.8% excluding the St Ninian's cluster primaries with the lowest utilised school by East Renfrewshire resident pupils being 37.6%. To present this analysis in another way 1 in 4 of East Renfrewshire Council provided school capacity is either unused or used by non-East Renfrewshire resident pupils (see Appendix 2).
- 4.2.8. The Parent Council accepts that its analysis is high level and there may be some statistical anomalies (for example pupils formerly from St Vincent's & St Angela's with a first right of access to St Ninian's) but would suggest that ERC re-visits this area to identify if there are any potential savings, even if these are only short term (for the period of the current budget 2015-18).

### **4.3. Administrative Staffing**

- 4.3.1. The Parent Council suggests that ERC reviews its central services and support services. It notes that the Chief Executive's office still has a budget of £3.3million which still represents a significant budget in times of austerity.
- 4.3.2. The Parent Council also notes that there is no specific mention within the Budget Proposals of reductions within the education department's non-school staff and would suggest that this is considered as a source of budget savings.
- 4.3.3. The Parent Council believes that a reduction in teaching resource should be a last resort and not undertaken until it is the last resort.

### **4.4. Alternative Model of education provision**

- 4.4.1. The Parent Council suggests that ERC consider reviewing the reduction in devolved budgets and considers a reduction in centralised budgets with the responsibility for expenditure being devolved to the schools themselves.
- 4.4.2. This would give the opportunity for further rationalisation of administrative & support costs for non-school staff.

### **4.5. Outsourcing of Council Services**

- 4.5.1. East Renfrewshire Council should consider benchmarking how they deliver services with other outstanding but more efficient councils such as Wandsworth in London which has had the lowest council tax in the UK for many years, but still comes within the top 10 rated councils for quality of services in England and Wales. In particular the use of outsourcing services and even entire departments should be considered; all councillors should prioritise the retention of valuable

services such as our top performing Education, over a desire to deliver services in-house, regardless of political background. Other efficiency methods such as sharing services, directors and even Chief Executives with neighbouring councils have proven savings in other areas of the UK, and this should also be considered by the ERC.

## **5. Summary & Conclusions**

- 5.1.** The Parent Council appreciates the financial constraints under which East Renfrewshire Council is required to set its budget for 2015-18.
- 5.2.** St Ninian's High School is a high performing high school which has continually improved the educational experience and attainment of its pupils
- 5.3.** The school has developed a truly outstanding ethos built of the hard work of the head teacher, senior management team, teaching and support staff as well as the commitment of pupils and their parents.
- 5.4.** St Ninian's High School is already operating in excess of its planning capacity with accommodation and logistical issues.
- 5.5.** The Parent Council feels that the Budget Proposals as currently drafted will have a detrimental impact on the educational experience of pupils attending the school.
- 5.6.** The Parent Council is concerned on the impact of already hard working staff with the continued pressure for improved performance with reduced resources.
- 5.7.** Further given the over capacity at St Ninian's imposition of the Budget Proposals would have a disproportionately adverse effect on the school.
- 5.8.** The Parent Council has made suggestions as to other areas which could be explored to identify budget reductions.
- 5.9.** In general the Parent Council is of the opinion that the Budget Proposals as currently drafted will have a significant and detrimental effect on the standard of education provided within St Ninian's and other school in East Renfrewshire.
- 5.10.** Given these facts the Parent Council would ask East Renfrewshire Council to re-consider its Budget Proposals to reduce their impact on education as a whole within East Renfrewshire, St Ninian's school, its pupils and its staff.

Yours faithfully



Michael E. Ward  
Chair

For and on behalf of St. Ninian's High School Parent Council

Copy to Mrs M Shaw, Director of Education

**Appendix 1**

School	Roll of school (nos.)	Planned capacity (nos.)	Number of pupils who live outwith East Renfrewshire	St. Ninian's High School Parent Council extrapolated figures	
				School Capacity	School Roll excl. pupils who live outwith East Renfrewshire / Capacity
Barrhead High	616	936	21	65.8%	63.6%
Eastwood High	985	1,220	240	80.7%	61.1%
Mearns Castle High	1,248	1,540	150	81.0%	71.3%
St Luke's High	636	848	29	75.0%	71.6%
St Ninian's High	1,799	1,704	466	105.6%	78.2%
Williamwood High	1,686	1,710	303	98.6%	80.9%
Woodfarm High	872	998	400	87.4%	47.3%
Total	7,842	8,956	1,609	87.6%	69.6%

Information as at 2013

Source:- <http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/article/5226/Secondary-school-roll>

St. Ninian's High School Parent Council extrapolated figures					
Total excl St Ninian's High	6,043	7,252	1,143	83.3%	67.6%

**Appendix 2**

School	Roll of school (nos.)	Planned capacity (nos.)	Number of pupils who live outwith East Renfrewshire	St. Ninian's High School Parent Council extrapolated figures	
				School Roll / Capacity	School Roll excl. pupils who live outwith East Renfrewshire / Capacity
Braidbar Primary	237	360	80	65.8%	43.6%
Busby Primary	262	294	20	89.1%	82.3%
Calderwood Lodge	144	210	92	68.6%	24.8%
Carlibar Primary	208	294	9	70.7%	67.7%
Carolside Primary	795	840	54	94.6%	88.2%
Crookfur Primary	263	360	74	73.1%	52.5%
Cross Arthurlie Primary	334	420	15	79.5%	76.0%
Eaglesham Primary	355	420	51	84.5%	72.4%
Giffnock Primary	345	420	61	82.1%	67.6%
Kirkhill Primary	624	630	42	99.0%	92.4%
Mearns Primary	800	840	48	95.2%	89.5%
Neilston Primary	278	420	6	66.2%	64.8%
Netherlee Primary	668	840	70	79.5%	71.2%
Our Lady of the Missions Pr	812	780	46	104.1%	98.2%
Robslee Primary *	50	210	27	23.8%	11.0%
Springhill and Auchenback P	242	420	7	57.6%	56.0%
St Cadoc's Primary	629	630	54	99.8%	91.3%
St John's Primary	186	294	13	63.3%	58.8%
St Joseph's Primary	363	420	35	86.4%	78.1%
St Mark's Primary	329	294	15	111.9%	106.8%
St Thomas's Primary	154	210	3	73.3%	71.9%
Thornliebank Primary	146	210	67	69.5%	37.6%
Uplawmoor Primary	57	84	7	67.9%	59.5%
Total	8281	9900	896	83.6%	74.6%

Information as at 2013

Source:- <http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/article/5225/Primary-school-roll>

St. Ninian's High School Parent Council extrapolated figures					
Total excl St Ninian's cluster	6,477	8,070	761	80.3%	70.8%