

THE PARENT COUNCIL OF ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT COUNCIL MEETING

30th JANUARY 2023

Present: J. Stewart (Joint Chair) ("JS")
S. Reid (Joint Chair) ("SR")
A. Wilmott (Vice-Chair) ("AW")
Mo Wright
Michela Pagliocca
Katrina Adams
Joanne Logan
Christopher McLaughlin
Dougie Wilson
Samantha MacConnell

Apologies: Chimeze Umeh
Pauline Hessett
Julie Flaherty
Lynsey O'Dwyer
Mairead Brophy

School: G. O'Neil (Head Teacher) ("Mr O'Neil")
J. Cumming ("JC")
T. Creighton
M. Gallagher

1. Welcome

The Office-Bearers ("OB") welcomed the Parent Council ("PC") Members in attendance. JS led the meeting in an opening prayer.

2. Apologies

A note was taken of the PC Members in attendance and of intimated apologies.

3. Adjustment/Approval of Previous Minutes

Draft Minutes of the PC meeting held on 12th December 2022 were tabled for adjustment/approval. No adjustments were intimated. The Minutes were approved. The OB undertook to publish the approved Minutes on the PC website.

4. Update on Action Point from Previous Meeting

Mr O'Neil reported that, in response to parental concerns expressed at the previous PC meeting, and following enquiries undertaken by him, the school bus contractors have moved the Greenfarm Loan and Westacres bus timetables forward by 8 minutes to ensure that children are not arriving late.

This adjustment has been welcomed by some parents; others feel the bus arrives too early at these collection points; but, importantly, the feedback from children is that they are arriving at school in good time. Problems in the recent pas may have been caused, in part at least, by poor weather and heavy traffic. In any event, the problem communicated to the PC appears to have been solved for the time being

5. Parental Engagement

The OB suggested a number of ways in which parental engagement in the work of the PC and the life of the School might be enhanced:

- (i) PC Presence at SNHS Open Forum Parent Evenings - The OB asked Mr O'Neil whether representatives of the PC might be allowed to attend some "open forum" days (such as P7 Transition Evenings), in order to promote the PC's work and solicit volunteers. One option may be for a PC representative to attend to distribute leaflets publicising the PC's role and inviting parental engagement at these parent meetings.

Mr O'Neil confirmed that he was happy to make a slot/stall available for the PC at a P7 Information Evenings and S1 Parent Days.

- (ii) Informal Year Group Representatives - The OB sought to re-visit the issue of establishing informal "Year Group" representatives.

Two options were mooted by the OB.

The first option was this. Existing WhatsApp Groups for parents at feeder primary schools are generally well-established – but they tend to fall into disuse following the transition to SNHS.

The OB suggested that steps might be taken, prior to the end of P7, to "adopt" these existing WhatsApp Groups, and to re-label and re-purpose them as SNHS WhatsApp groups, corresponding to the new S1 SNHS year group.

At a stroke, this would provide an instant data-bank of parents, allowing enhanced direct communication between the PC and the incoming S1 parent group. This could then be replicated with each succeeding S1 year group.

Initially, the WhatsApp Group would not be comprehensive. But the OB suggested that it may, at least, provide an excellent start in allowing direct communication with a wider share of the Parent Forum. The existence of the Group could be advertised (perhaps through School newsletters and emails) during the School term, allowing it to grow incrementally.

The second option was this. The PC might put out a call for volunteers to act as "informal" Year Group representatives. Given the size and diversity of each School Year, it would be impossible to be truly representative. Instead, the

nominee would simply be tasked with “keeping an ear to the ground” to feedback information to the PC from the parent corps of their appointed Year Group. Their role would, effectively, be information-gathering.

In discussion between the PC Members, the first option gathered some (limited) support; the second option did not.

Even with the first option, it was agreed that stringent administrative controls would be required to avoid the Group becoming too unwieldy. For example, it was suggested that the Group would have to be set up so that only the Administrator could post to the Group. This would allow the WhatsApp Group to be a channel for communication by the PC to the parents, while preventing unrestricted and potentially unmanageable communication between the parents themselves within the Group.

No specific action point was agreed meantime.

- (iv) Updating the School Calendar of Events – Concerns were expressed by PC Members that (i) very late notifications had recently been provided to parents of various School events; (ii) that some events were missing from the Calendar; and (iii) that there is no system for the issuing of School “reminders”.

The PC Members agreed that the School Calendar was a critical mechanism by which to foster a sense of community within the School.

Therefore, it was felt to be essential that the Calendar was kept up-to-date; that it was comprehensive; and that it was actively publicised (not just once, but repeatedly).

Concern was expressed that parents were unlikely to repeatedly search for the Calendar on the School website – but would instead benefit from a more regular system of School reminders (such as “Don’t Forget” or “Save the Date” communications) in advance of upcoming event dates.

The OBs specifically requested that certain key spiritual dates (such as the Mass for Vocations, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception) be included in the Calendar.

The OB also requested that charitable events such as the annual “Tea for Life” fund-raising event be included.

Mr O’Neil agreed that the Calendar was a living document that should continue to be updated; that he would look to do so; and that he would arrange to re-circulate the updated Calendar (perhaps by quarterly emails).

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action points were as follows:

- 1. Mr O’Neil will make available to the PC a slot/stall P7 Information Evenings and S1 Parent Days for promotion of PC work/soliciting parental engagement.**
- 2. Mr O’Neil shall update the School Calendar and arrange to re-circulate it to the Parent Forum on a more regular basis (perhaps by quarterly emails).**

6. **Education Budget Cuts**

The OBs reported that they had coordinated the sending of a Joint Letter to all 18 ERC Councillors expressing PC opposition to the proposed cuts to the Education Budget.

The Joint Letter was co-signed by 11 Parent Councils (that is, the PCs of SNHS, Williamwood, Woodfarm, Barrhead & Eastwood High Schools; and Crookfur, St Joseph's, Thornliebank, St Cadoc's, St Clare's & Netherlee Primary Schools)

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Owen O'Donnell) issued a detailed reply by letter dated 17 January 2023.

Copies of both letters are attached (Annex 1).

The OB reported that there was some appetite within other PCs to follow matters up with a joint approach to the Scottish Education Minister.

The views of the PC Members were sought. It was observed that the Leader of the Council had suggested, in his reply, that we lobby the Scottish Government and MSPs.

It was agreed that the OB should draft a Joint Letter to the relevant Scottish Minister and MSPs, for revisal/approval.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action points were as follows:

- 1. The OBs shall draft a Joint Letter to the Scottish Education Minister and MSPs for revisal/approval by PC Members.**

7. **Strikes**

The OB reported to the Meeting that further strikes by the largest Teachers' Union (EIS) had been announced (on 28 February and 1 March 2023). The School will be closed on those dates.

Further rolling strikes are anticipated.

The OB asked Mr O'Neil what contingency plans were in place to safeguard the education of SNHS pupils.

Mr O'Neil confirmed that no plans are in place to provide any remote learning on the strike days. Children in senior years should treat the strike days as revision days. For children in S1-S3, all efforts would be made to catch up. Decisions may have to be taken as to what is important. Plenty of teachers will make themselves available to help at the Easter schools.

There was discussion as to whether ERC was obliged to take steps to "make up" the days lost so far (and to be lost) by the strike action, in order to comply with its statutory duty to provide a minimum of 190 school days within East Renfrewshire.

There was also discussion as to what ERC could and should do with the money saved (on teacher salaries) as a result of the strike action.

No specific action point was agreed meantime.

5. **Friends of St Ninian's: Update**

Mr Cumming reported that, unfortunately, the School's planned Burns Supper had to be cancelled.

The OBs repeated its offer to support Mr Cumming (and his colleagues in the organising FOSN group), if they so wished, by seeking to generate ideas, promoting planned events, promoting attendance, promoting fund-raising activities, recruiting parent volunteers to staff events, or the like.

The OB also mentioned that a St Patrick's Ceilidh was planned within St Cadoc's Church Hall, Newton Mearns, on 17 March 2023. A similar event might usefully be considered by FOSN, to capitalise on the recent highly-successful ceilidh dance lessons within the School.

No specific action point was agreed.

8. **Head Teacher's Report**

Mr O'Neill reported the following to the PC Meeting:

- (i) The Prelim Exams have started
- (ii) Lots of successful events took place in the run-up to Christmas, including Advent Retreats, an S1 Santa Dash, Movie Night, the S6 Masquerade Ball, the Christmas Carol Service
- (iii) This month (January) P7 Cluster visits have been arranged.
- (iv) Holocaust Memorial Day will be recognised (with the theme this year being "Ordinary People".
- (v) Various sporting successes were noted (especially in running)
- (vi) S2 pupils are presently skiing in the French Alps
- (vii) A trip to Salamanca has been offered o S6 pupils (in addition to the trip to Rome)
- (viii) S6 physics students are planning for a trip to Cerne, Switzerland.
- (ix) Mr O'Neil noted that School trips are becoming increasingly expensive, with costs having rocketed by 30% in some cases.

9. **AOCB**

Three issues were noted:

- (i) Attendance - Mr O'Neil observed that attendance has deteriorated (from 95% to 91%). A number of factors are thought to be at play. Some pupils have disengaged; others have reduced their attendance; children may be less inclined to attend if parents are working from home; the deterioration generally may be a consequence of pandemic disruption.

Mr O'Neil is currently investigating a bespoke curriculum to try to encourage these children back to school.

He views it as a priority because poorer attendance undoubtedly translates to poorer performance.

He will report to the next meeting on further plans to address the issue.

- (ii) Vaping – Mr O’Neil reported that vaping seems to be increasing among pupils. He and the School staff are wholly opposed to it. Staff are keenly alert to the issue. Parents are notified if a pupil is found to be involved in vaping.

PC Members expressed their whole-hearted support to Mr O’Neil and his staff in their efforts to clamp down on the problem – and added stories of particular difficulties reported to have been experienced (including a reluctance among some girls to visiting the toilets due to gangs of vaping pupils in the toilets).

- (iii) University Access – The OBs asked Mr O’Neil whether “personal statements” had been abandoned as part of the University applications process. Mr O’Neil was not aware of the current position, but agreed to check.

This led to a discussion as to whether University access to certain courses (such as Law at Edinburgh University) was now precluded to pupils at, for example, SNHS, due to a (presently opaque) policy of favouring pupils who were categorised as satisfying certain “widening access” criteria.

Details of the criteria to qualify for “widening access” status were not presently known to the PC Members – but were understood to operate in such a way as to effectively preclude access to Edinburgh University’s School of Law for many SNHS pupils who would otherwise attain (and exceed) the published academic entrance qualifications.

Mr O’Neil reported that he was unaware of any such issue.

The OBs agreed to make further enquiries.

- (iv) PC Members reiterated a request that the Agenda for each PC meeting might usefully be made available to the wider Parent Forum (on social media and the School website) in advance of the PC Meeting. This was felt to be more likely to prompt engagement.

The suggestion met with general approval.

The OB agreed to try to do so as far as possible (explaining that occasionally it was prudent to restrict the circulation of certain papers/documents to the PC Members first, for discussion and decision, before publishing them more widely to the Parent Forum. Aside from that caveat, the proposal was agreed.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action points were as follows:

1. Mr O'Neil will report at the next meeting on his proposals to tackle the deterioration in pupil attendance.
2. The OB shall make further enquiries into the existence of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may affect SNHS pupils.
3. The OB shall aim to publish the Agenda to the wider Parent Forum in advance of each meeting (subject to redaction/restriction in appropriate cases)

The business of the Parent Council Meeting was then concluded.

The next PC Meeting is on **Monday 13 March 2023 at 7pm** in St Ninian's High School.

**SUMMARY
OF
AGREED ACTION POINTS**

<i>Pupil Attendance</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
1. Mr O'Neil shall report at the next meeting on his proposals to tackle the deterioration in pupil attendance.	HT	13 Mar 23
<i>Education Budget Cuts</i>		
1. The OB shall engage with other PCs to seek to agree a collective response for opposition.	OB	Ongoing
2. The OB shall continue to monitor and oppose the proposed Education Budget Cuts.	OB	Ongoing
3. The OB shall draft a Joint Letter to the Scottish Education Minister and MSPs for revisal/approval by PC Members.	OB	14 days
<i>University Access for SNHS Pupils</i>		
1. The OB shall make further enquiries into the detail and operation of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may affecting SNHS pupils.	OB	Ongoing
<i>Parental Engagement</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will make available to the PC a slot/stall P7 Information Evenings and S1 Parent Days for promotion of PC work/soliciting parental engagement.	HT	Ongoing
2. Mr O'Neil shall update the School Calendar and arrange to re-circulate it to the Parent Forum on a more regular basis (perhaps by quarterly emails).	HT	Ongoing
3. The OB shall seek to publicise the Agenda for PC Meetings in advance of the Meeting (subject to redaction/restriction as appropriate)	OB	Ongoing

ANNEX 1

1. Copy (sample) Joint Letter dated 9 January 2023 from Forum of Parent Councils issued to all 18 ERC Councillors
2. Copy reply letter dated 17 January 2023 from Councillor Owen O'Donnell (leader of the Council)

THE PARENT COUNCIL FORUM
OF
EAST RENFREWSHIRE

c/o St Ninian's High School
Eastwood Park
Rouken Glen Road
Giffnock

Email: pestiniansgiffnock@gmail.com

c/o Williamwood High School
Eaglesham Road
Clarkston
Glasgow

Email: williamwoodpc@gmail.com

Councillor Owen O'Donnell
East Renfrewshire Council
Eastwood Park
Rouken Glen Road
Giffnock
G46 6UG

9th January 2023

Dear Councillor O'Donnell,

Education! Education! Education!

We represent the Parent Councils of the undernoted Secondary and Primary schools within East Renfrewshire.

We understand that East Renfrewshire Council ("ERC") has proposed cuts to education services totalling £19.9 million, in an effort to fill a £30 million funding gap over the next three years.

There is no dispute that these proposed cuts will significantly reduce and worsen the educational provision for all children of all abilities within ERC's schools.

Please note our vigorous opposition to all and any cuts to ERC's Education Budget.

If savings or further income require to be found, they should be found elsewhere, from other sources (including by amalgamation of non-education support services; rationalisation of surplus Council real estate; postponement of non-priority, non-education capital expenditure; the diversion of reserves; the lobbying of central government for the emergency relaxation of capital budget rules to release targeted funding for education).

Education is the jewel in the crown of East Renfrewshire.

The exemplary education of our children is our most valuable asset.

We urge ERC's Councillors to be courageous in taking a stand to RING-FENCE and PROTECT the Education Budget, in order that the enviable standards of education in East Renfrewshire are sustained. This is particularly essential after the ravages inflicted upon the education of our children during the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns.

Cuts to education expenditure are entirely short-sighted and misconceived. They will inflict damage on educational standards for a generation – and will blight the opportunities of our children for a lifetime.

In 2015, the First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon MSP) asked that she be “judged” on her record on education.

There is little doubt our local Councillors will likewise be judged by that vocal and influential constituency that comprises the parents of school children in East Renfrewshire.

If you take the brave decision now to ring-fence the Education Budget, you will be investing in our most valuable capital asset and protecting the reputation of East Renfrewshire Council for years to come.

Yours sincerely,

S. Cunningham (Chair), J. Stewart (Joint Chair), A. Steele (Chair), N. Winning (Chair), A. Thomson (Chair), D. Henderson (Chair), S. MacConnell (Acting Chair), A. Shaarani (Chair), L. Moffat (Chair), H. Ferry (Joint Chair), A. Capek (Chair)

On behalf of

The Parent Council of Williamwood High School

The Parent Council of St Ninian's High School

The Parent Council of Woodfarm High School

The Parent Council of Barrhead High School

The Parent Council of Eastwood High School

The Parent Council of Crookfur Primary School

The Parent Council of St Joseph's Primary School

The Parent Council of Thornliebank Primary School

The Parent Council of St Cadoc's Primary School

The Parent Council of St Clare's Primary School

The Parent Council of Netherlee Primary School

Councillor Owen O'Donnell

Ward No. 2 Newton Mearns North & Neilston

East Renfrewshire Council Headquarters,
Eastwood Park, Rouken Glen Road, Giffnock G46 6UG
Phone: 0141 577 3107

Mobile: 07435 735692
e-mail: owen.odonnell@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

Councillor Owen O'Donnell
Leader of the Council

Date: 17 January 2023

To The Parent Council Forum of East Renfrewshire

Thank you for the letter sent to me on 9 Jan 2023 regarding the consultation on £30m of Council budget cuts being proposed for the next three years and in particular the consultation on £19.9m of cuts to Education.

I note your vigorous opposition to such cuts in Education and your letter is helpful for Council members when considering what measures should be taken to balance the budget.

I completely agree with you that Education is indeed the jewel in the crown of East Renfrewshire. This Council has a proud history of delivering the best schools in Scotland and that will remain a Council priority. Indeed, we look forward to opening the new shared primary school campus in Neilston in 2023 and have submitted bids to the Scottish Government to help fund two new replacement primary schools for Carolside and Cross Arthurlie and await the Scottish Government's decision on these which should be imminent.

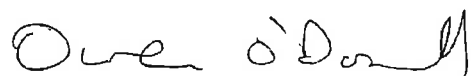
With respect to ring fencing to protect Education, this Council has consistently protected our Education services from the ravages of 15 years of Scottish Government underfunding of local government. With inflation now at over 10% this level of ring-fenced protection is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve particularly when the Scottish Government budget settlement means that we have no more cash over the next three years. However, this council is committed to mitigate the impacts of these cuts but given the scale of the challenge we face it is unlikely that we will be in a position to eliminate them completely. We will look at how we can utilise our reserves, as we do each year, but reserves only defer decisions rather than completely remove the budget challenge. We are in the process of reviewing all other departmental spending and cuts in these departments will be severe. I also note that we have already made decisions to defer some expenditure most notably the deferral of the new Eastwood Leisure Centre and Theatre by two years and we have scrutinised and deferred more expenditure from our existing capital plan - whilst still protecting urgent capital spend for some of our schools.

I note your concerns on the impact of the pandemic on our children's education. We are acutely aware of this issue and that is why in September we agreed to invest in additional teaching staff funded from non-recurring Covid recovery funding to specifically address this issue.

I will continue to lobby the Scottish Government for increased funding for local government and indeed I have signed a letter alongside all 32 council leaders in Scotland requesting the Government to look again at their budget spending priorities. I would urge each Parent Council and their members to similarly lobby their local and regional MSPs to ensure that there is fair budget funding for local government and in particular for our vital Education Services.

Thanks again for sharing your concerns with me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Owen O'Donnell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'O' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'l'.

**COUNCILLOR OWEN O'DONNELL
WARD 2 - NEWTON MEARNNS NORTH & NEILSTON**