

THE PARENT COUNCIL OF ST NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT COUNCIL MEETING

16th MAY 2023

Present: J. Stewart (Joint Chair) ("JS")
S. Reid (Joint Chair) ("SR")
A. Wilmott (Vice-Chair) ("AW")
Mo Wright
Michela Pagliocca
Katrina Adams
Chris McLaughlin
Dougie Wilson
Gerard McLaughlin (Church Representative)

Apologies: Samantha MacConnell
Joanne Logan
Chimeze Umeh
Julie Flaherty
Mairead Brophy
Lynsey O'Dwyer

School: G. O'Neil (Head Teacher) ("Mr O'Neil")
J. Cumming
T. Creighton
C. McCrea
C. Boyle

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 & School staff in attendance, and of intimated apologies.

3. Adjustment/Approval of Previous Minutes

Belated adjustments were proposed and approved to the previously-approved Minutes of the 30 January 2023 PC Meeting. Separately, the draft Minutes of the 13 March 2023 PC Meeting were proposed and approved, without adjustment.

4. Updates on Agreed Action Points from January & March 2023 Meetings

The following updates were noted on Action Points from the previous meetings:

- (1) P7 Information Evening – Mr O’Neil confirmed that the PC could send a representative to the P7 Information Evening to promote parental engagement with the PC. AW agreed to attend on behalf of the PC.

Mr O’Neil also agreed to add a slide to his presentation to parents, incorporating links to the PC Twitter & FB accounts.

- (2) School Calendar Updates – PC members requested that the School calendar be updated more frequently. A request was made that greater advance notice (i.e. several weeks in advance) be given to the Parent Forum of School/faith events. It was observed that reminders for forthcoming events tend to be issued only erratically by the School, often giving very little advance notice of an event.

The PC members requested that a more regular system be instituted of parental “reminders” of School events – with, perhaps, a notification being sent each month to the Parent Forum of the forthcoming month’s events.

Mr O’Neil agreed to consider the proposal.

- (3) Advance publication of PC Agenda to Parent Form – PC members renewed a request for PC Agendas to be publicised to the Parent Forum in advance of PC Meetings. The OB reported that this had been done (on social media) in recent months, and would continue.

- (4) Hayward Review – Mr Gallagher is maintaining a watching brief of developments with the Hayward Review, and had previously agreed to feedback updates.

- (5) Education Budget Cuts – Mr O’Neil confirmed that the annual subscription for CONNECT membership would be met by the School.

Separately, it was observed that CONNECT public liability insurance cover can only competently extend to the activities of a “parent council” (not those of a discrete non-statutory association such as “Friends of St Ninian’s”).

Mr O’Neil advised that FOSN and the School run in conjunction, so that any FOSN events are automatically covered by the local authority public liability insurance.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action points were:

1. Mr O’Neil will consider whether a more formal system can be instituted of parental “reminders” of School events – with, perhaps, a notification being sent each month to the Parent Forum of the forthcoming month’s events.
2. Mr Gallagher will maintain a watching brief of the Hayward Review and provide an update.

5. **The new Learning Base**

At the PC Meeting in March 2023, Mr O'Neil gave a presentation to the PC on a proposed new "Learning Centre" within the School to facilitate the re-integration of pupils who have erratic attendance (or chronic non-attendance). The proposal is that this new Centre would accommodate and support the phased return of those children to the rigour of a full School week by providing a flexible and nurturing learning environment, supported by appropriate staff. The space would be flexible enough to accommodate other children with additional special needs, again on a phased basis only and as a transition into mainstream.

Whole-hearted and enthusiastic PC support was given to Mr O'Neil's proposal.

As at March 2023, it was anticipated that funding would quickly be released to allow building work to commence on the new Centre, ideally with a view to completion in August 2023.

At this evening's meeting, Mr O'Neil reported that the construction of the new Centre was progressing to plan. Certain adaptations had been made; a colour scheme had been considered; and building work was scheduled to commence over the summer months.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

1. **Mr O'Neil will update the PC on progress with the completion of the new Learning Centre.**

6. **Exam Performance**

Mr O'Neil reported that the exams were progressing smoothly. No data is yet available on performance. He will provide feedback once this is available.

He advised that SQA had published a plan for next year, in which it proposed to re-introduce "assignments" for Nat 5s and Highers - in English, two folio pieces will be re-introduced – which would count towards results. Mr O'Neil observed that this all seemed valid if we were moving to a system of greater "internal assessment".

A concern was expressed by a PC member as to how to safeguard against the illicit use of artificial intelligence in such assignments. It was observed that some University academics had suggested that the only reliable method to protect against such cheating was to return to a 100% exam-based system. Mr O'Neil advised that plagiarism checks were in place.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

1. **Mr O'Neil will update the PC on exam performance once results are available.**

7. **Restrictions on University Access**

The OBs raised again the issue of restrictions on University access.

It had been reported in the national press that access to certain University courses (notably Law at Edinburgh University) may be precluded to many pupils (including pupils from SNHS), despite those pupils achieving (and exceeding) published academic entrance qualifications, due to a (presently opaque) policy of favouring applicants who are categorised as satisfying certain “widening access” criteria.

At the last PC meeting, the PC had asked Mr O’Neil whether he was aware of any such restrictions (or policy); whether it was restricted to Edinburgh University; and whether it was a matter of concern to the School and/or ERC.

Mr O’Neil reported that he had no data yet on the issue. Anecdotally, there appeared to be no such restrictions adversely affecting SNHS University applicants.

The OB agreed to continue with their own enquiries into the issue, to ascertain whether any SNHS pupils were likely to be adversely affected by any such policy.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

1. **The OB will make further enquiries to ascertain the existence of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may potentially affect SNHS pupils.**

8. **RSHP Survey**

The OB asked Mr O’Neil whether last year’s RSHP Survey was likely to be rolled out again in the forthcoming School year (2023-2024).

Mr O’Neil did not know, but suspected that it may be repeated, though probably with adjustments.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action point was:

1. **Mr O’Neil will advise the PC if the RSHP Survey is to be re-introduced within the School in the forthcoming School year (2023-2024), amended or otherwise.**

9. **Diocesan Parent Forum**

The OB reminded the PC of the valuable role of the Diocesan Parent Forum. It was recently established by the Bishop of the Diocese of Paisley to discuss issues affecting the faith life of Catholic schools within the Diocese. (The Diocese straddles three separate education authorities.)

JS reported on the matters discussed at the last Forum Meeting.

The Carlo Acutis Encounter was highlighted, a series of talks relating to the late Carlo Acutis (who has now been beatified and may yet be canonised). Carlo's story ought to have particular resonance and potency for Catholic school children. (SNHS is unique in having a relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis in the Oratory.) The OB supported the publication of the event within the School, and more widely. Mr O'Neil confirmed that two sessions within the School were being widely advertised on the School's Twitter account.

The Forum had also discussed the procedure whereby applicants for teaching positions in Catholic schools require to obtain Church approval. Parents were encouraged to enquire as to the catholicity of candidates for senior teaching appointments

The next meeting of the Diocesan Parent Forum is on **Monday 30 October 2023**.

The OB will attend to represent the PC. PC members are encouraged to submit any issues for discussion, or comments, in advance of that meeting.

AGREED ACTION

The agreed action points were as follows:

- 1. The OB will attend the next Diocesan Parent Forum meeting to represent the PC.**
- 2. PC Members are invited to submit any questions/comments in advance of that meeting.**

10. Head Teacher's Report

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

- (i) School trips – There are several trips running at the moment. Reference was made to a trip to Paris and an S1 visit to "Refuweege" (a local refugee charity).
- (ii) The staff are fully engaged at present in preparations for the School Prom and Graduation.
- (iii) Mr O'Neil observed that the School Graduation has grown over the years, creating some cause for concern. While it remains one of the highlights of the School year, Mr O'Neil advised that the format and capacity may have to be re-assessed. Should the number of guests be reduced? Should the event be live-streamed (perhaps up to the Forum area, to increase capacity within the School itself)? Should the Graduation be hosted elsewhere – for example at St Joseph's Church (which has a capacity of 1,000)?
- (iv) The Shirley Roberts Memorial Football Tournament – The School team participated, played well, but didn't win on this occasion.
- (v) The S5/S6 last day of school was extended over two days. All went well though going forward, Mr O'Neil has expressed concerns about the "Champagne Breakfast", a recent development which appears somewhat incongruous in a school environment.) Mr O'Neil thanked Michela Pagliocca for again kindly procuring the availability of "The Shed" for celebrations. Pupil behaviour was reported to have been fantastic.
- (vi) The Spring Concert was reported to have been a big success.
- (vii) Easter School was very busy and well-attended.
- (viii) The School participated in a national Mandarin Competition, S1 participants won an award, and some children have qualified for a trip to London. A phenomenal result.

- (ix) Mr O'Neil reported that reduced pupil attendance at school is "definitely an issue".

Across the School, average attendance currently sits at around 90%. (That equates to a month off school.) That figure is regarded as unacceptable. Steps are being taken to increase this figure to 95% attendance.

Mr O'Neil reported that School staff are monitoring and tracking low-level absenteeism (including late-comings, repeat absence, excessive toilet visits) as these are recognised as classic symptoms of school avoidance. A structure is in place to address it in escalating stages.

A Pupil Support Assistant has been moved into the Base. This move is already showing some signs of success in re-engaging with absent or disengaged pupils. Senior pupils have also been deployed to "mentor" younger pupils, in an effort to address a perceived lack of resilience among the younger cohort.

Some PC members queried the accuracy of attendance figures appearing on school reports. For example, did they include strike days? Mr O'Neil confirmed that strike days were not recorded as absences. Absences are recorded in half-day chunks. A child's attendance can be checked on the parent portal. Mr O'Neil reported that chronic absenteeism has increased, but so too has erratic or causal absenteeism across the whole pupil cohort.

PC members commented that parents had to be encouraged to be more resilient, to enforce the necessity for their children to attend school, and to discourage causal absenteeism. Resilience may have decreased with the increase in home-working arrangements, resulting in a more relaxed acceptance of children staying off school for minor self-reported ailments.

PC members asked Mr O'Neil whether the poor attendance statistics were influenced by an increasing tendency for pupils to skip school attendance towards the end of term.

Some PC members complained that their role (in ensuring their child attends school) was being undermined by a reported cessation in teaching activity in advance of the end of school terms. This reported cessation in teaching discourages children from attending school, as they feel they are missing nothing of value.

Mr Cumming insisted that teaching staff are told not to stop teaching prior to the end of the School term.

That being so, the OB suggested that this message - namely, that teaching will continue right up to the last day of the school term - ought to be publicised more widely by the School to children and parents.

It would help parents to enforce school attendance in the final week of term.

As matters currently stand, rightly or wrongly, there is a perception within the Parent Forum that much teaching stops in advance of the end of term. If true, this does not assist parents in securing full attendance to the end of term.

Mr O'Neil reported that ERC has arranged a "Collaborative Improvement Visit", during which issues surrounding attendance will be reviewed.

10. Parent Questions

The following comments/questions were raised by a PC member:

- (i) *What does the School do to promote the learning of Mandarin?*

Mr O'Neil reported that very few pupils are learning Mandarin in the School. That said, as discussed above, the School had recently participated in a national Mandarin Competition at which there had been a phenomenal success.

- (ii) *The School staff are to be congratulated on the hard work invested in this year's "transition" activities for the cluster primary schools*

Mr O'Neil reported that a huge amount of time and effort had indeed been invested in transitioning activities for the cluster primaries, including primary school visits to SNHS, Maths Challenges, Science activities, competitions.

Mr T. Creighton was commended for having resuscitated these activities post-COVID.

The PC acknowledged this hard work, and added its vote of thanks to the staff.

11. AOCB

Three issues were raised:

- (i) John Docherty – The OBs reported that Mr John Docherty, former head-teacher of SNHS, has been appointed by Pope Francis to a five-year term as a "Consultor" of the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation (First Section). The Dicastery for Evangelization is a new department of the Roman Curia formed by the merger of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of New Evangelization in 2022.

The Dicastery is responsible for the fundamental questions of evangelization in the world and, according to its Constitution, is presided over directly by the Pope.

- (ii) CONNECT Survey on School Uniforms – Earlier this year, CONNECT carried out its own survey of parental views on school uniforms. The OB will circulate a copy of the results of that survey.

- (iii) Withdrawal of Scotland from international league tables – The decision of the Scottish Government (several years ago now) to withdraw Scotland from comparative international league tables – a source of much criticism from various political and academic quarters –has been reversed.

The business of the Parent Council Meeting was then concluded.

The next PC Meeting on Monday 12 June 2023 has been **CANCELLED**.

**SUMMARY
OF
AGREED ACTION POINTS**

<i>Learning Centre</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
1. Mr O’Neil will update the PC on progress with the construction and use of the new Centre.	HT	Sept 23
<i>Learning & Teaching Plan</i>		
1. Mr O’Neil will update the PC on progress with the Learning & Teaching Plan Initiative.	HT	Ongoing
<i>The Hayward Review</i>		
1. Mr Gallagher will update the PC on progress with the Hayward Review	MG	Ongoing
<i>Restricted University Access for SNHS Pupils</i>		
1. Mr O’Neil shall make further enquiries (of ERC) into the detail and operation of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may potentially affect SNHS pupils	HT	Sept 23
2. The OB shall make further enquiries into the detail and operation of any policy-driven restrictions on University Access that may be potentially affect SNHS pupils.	OB	Sept 23
<i>Parental Engagement</i>		
1. Mr O’Neil will consider whether a more formal system can be instituted of parental “reminders” of School events – with, perhaps, a notification being sent each month to the Parent Forum of the forthcoming month’s events.	HT	Sept 23

<i>RSHP Survey</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will advise the PC if the RSHP Survey is to be re-introduced within the School in the forthcoming School year (2023-2024), amended or otherwise	HT	Ongoing
<i>Exam Performance</i>		
1. Mr O'Neil will update the PC on exam performance once results are available.	HT	Sept 23

<i>Diocesan Parent Forum</i>		
1. The OB will attend the next Diocesan Parent Forum meeting to represent the PC.	OB	Sept 23
2. PC Members are to submit any questions/comments in advance of that meeting.	PC	Sept 23