

MINUTES

Tolsta Primary School - Bun-Sgoil Tholastaidh Parent Council

Special Meeting to Discuss Catering Provision – Thursday 23rd March 2017 6pm

In Attendance

Leigh Minion (Chair), John Maciver (Treasurer), Gavin Minion (Secretary), Kirsteen J Maclean (Headteacher), Cllr Catriona Stewart, Cllr John A Maciver, Norma Macritchie, Murdo Macritchie.

Apologies: Cllr Donald Crichton, Rachel Craig, Paula Greenstock.

Unable to Attend: Bernard Chisholm (Head of Children's Services and Resources), Louise Laing (Operations Manager)

Background

This was a special meeting called to discuss the removal of catering provision at Tolsta Primary School. In a letter dated 24th February 2017 Parents were informed that the status of the school dinner provision at Tolsta School would change from 'Catering School' to 'Dining Centre'. "All meals for Tolsta will therefore be prepared in Back and transported up to Tolsta each day".

The reason given was "...a Direct consequence of the fall in School Roll, coupled more importantly with the fact that not all parents have chosen to use the facility, thereby making it a non-viable option to have a school cook on the premises."

The decision was made without consultation of either the parent council, parent forum or parents themselves. To date the school has not indicated to parents that low uptake of school meals was an issue.

As a result of the change, Angela Mackay, (who holds the position of School Cook) will move from Tolsta School to Back. A new post of "Dining Room Supervisor" will be created at Tolsta School.

In addition to the above. After receiving a separate email from the Parent Council; Bernard Chisholm had indicated that he wished to attend to discuss the works to improve the drainage and make general safety improvements to the access paths at the school entrance.

Meeting Minutes

The Chair introduced the meeting and informed attendees that Bernard Chisholm and Louise Laing had made the decision not to attend the meeting. The reason for this is that a complaint has been made, by the parent council, regarding the lack of consultation over this decision, which clearly has a significant effect on the services provided by the school. Bernard Chisholm and Louise Laing will be involved in the investigation of the complaint and will be unable to answer many of our questions until his investigation is complete.

Drainage and School access works. In Bernard Chisholms Absence, the Headteacher clarified that, whilst the improvement works identified for the playground remain deferred. The works identified as required for safety reasons have been given the go-ahead. These works have been separated from the other improvement works and will take place within the next two months.

School Meal Provision.

The chair began by addressing a list of questions, regarding the changes to the catering provision, to the Headteacher. These questions are to be sent, in writing, to Bernard Chisholm.

The Chair also produced a document, printed from the Comhairle website which detailed a contract award for "School Meals Transport Services" dating from 2009. The Chair pointed out that many of the schools listed under the contract had later closed. The Chair noted that, however it was presented, this was 'an action which has been associated with schools which later close'

The Chair then opened up the meeting to comments from Parents.

The Treasurer began, noting that the decision was disappointing and had the appearance of being engineered to take advantage of recent events. There was no consultation made with parents. Given the reasons given for withdrawing the catering service, the council should have been supporting the school. These were the reasons that a complaint was made.

The Headteacher noted that the complaints procedure was 'Robust and Timescaled' and that senior officers have been appointed to investigate the complaint.

Cllr John A Maciver asked if there were any schools which currently have external catering provision.

The Headteacher was not able to provide a complete answer, but did believe that Breasclate school received meals from Shawbost Primary School and that, until recently Barvas Primary had also received meals from Shawbost.

Cllr John A Maciver asked if the status quo would be maintained whilst the complaint was investigated.

The Headteacher indicated that no changes had been discussed with her and that, "at the moment, Friday the 31st of March was going to be Angela's last day in Tolsta".

The Secretary asked if risk assessments had been made and could the parents council see copies of the risk assessments?

The headteacher asked for this question to be added to the list of questions sent to Bernard Chisholm.

Murdo Macritchie Joined the meeting. It was noted at this point that some parents had been unable to attend due to the timing of the meeting (one hour earlier than usual) and the date, which co-incided with scout club activities.

Murdo Macritchie pointed out that the decision had come "out of the blue" and that his own children were very disappointed. He also noted that Angela was more than just a cook, having taken part in a number of extracurricular activities at the school.

The Chair made a closing statement noting that, at a recent meeting with the Tolsta Pupil Council, when asked what the pupils would like to spend their money on, one girl replied "Can we use our money to keep Angela". The chair went on to state her hope that this could be moved as quickly as possible towards a positive outcome.

Date of next scheduled meeting of the Parent Council is the 24th of April 2017