

Interim Shared Head Teacher of Holy Cross and St Patrick's Primary Discussion
Tuesday 19th April at 18:00 via Teams

Attendance:

Holy Cross Primary

Anne Jackson (Chair), Catherine Green (Secretary), Nadine Killiard, Lorna Lalley

St Patrick's Primary

Claire Walters (Chair), Elaine McLernon (Secretary), Jennifer Toft, Nicola Lawler

North Lanarkshire Council

Provost Jones, Cllr Heather Brannan-McVey, Gerard McLaughlin, Head of Education (North), Michelle O'Halloran, Education and Families Manager (North), Margaret Hunter, Education and Families Manager (North)

Also in Attendance:

Marie Murphy, HT Holy Cross Primary School and Acting HT St Patrick's Primary School, Martin McKenna, Teacher Representative, Holy Cross Primary School

- 1.1 Gerard started the meeting with an update of what is happening at Chryston as this is the pilot. As of this week pupil questionnaires have been sent out. The process so far has been:
 - spoken with the respective parent councils;
 - completed a SWOT analysis with a small group of children and young people;
 - engaged with the staff in person and online;
 - sent out questionnaires to parents and now children and young people;
 - conducted wider community stakeholder engagement;
 - engaged with the parent councils of the other schools in the cluster.
- 1.2 The consultation ends on 28th April, after which this will all get pulled together then a decision will be made on next steps, based on the business cases outlined last time. Have been clear with the trade unions that if a decision is made, these will not all be implemented across the council at the same time. Gerard also stated that he wished to be clear on the reason why as he has been honest, open and upfront around the reasons why NLC is looking at this approach, is because of the savings that have to be made. The council have had to make some very difficult funding decisions as there are significant savings that have to be made, over the next two years the council have to save £40m and over the next 3 years £70m.
- 1.3 To clarify, these savings have to be made on top of all other savings that have already been identified. The MELM structure is a savings proposal that was approved at numerous committees.
- 1.4 To be clear tonight, no decision has been made about our two schools because NLC are still working towards the date of 28 April for Chryston and then a full review will take place about that particular situation, the policy more generally and future models. Working on dates on when a definitive answer can be given, it will likely be the middle of May. Once the Chryston consultation concludes, Gerard, Margaret and Michelle have to produce a paper which will be presented to the Senior Leadership Team and the Corporate Management Team with recommendations and then decisions will be made, not only on Chryston and our communities but other communities across North Lanarkshire.

Gerard then welcomed questions.

- 1.5a Q. Claire said she has been told by representatives from St Patrick's Archdiocese (St Andrews and Edinburgh) that the current situation our schools are in is in fact a pilot, can you clarify if this has even been discussed as pilot and has it been identified by the council as a potential MELM opportunity.**
- 1.5b A. Gerard asked Margaret or Michelle to answer the question but reiterated that our situation can't constitute a pilot as Chryston is the pilot and that because Chryston is going through a consultation process. As Holy Cross and St Patrick's have not been consulted with, we are not a pilot. Gerard added that his team will visit both schools to make sure that staff are up to speed on the current position. Gerard reiterated again that neither the meeting tonight, nor their visit to speak to staff in the schools, is part of any consultation. Gerard also said that the word pilot may be lost in translation because there has been so much information, and misinformation, put out there. This is not the pilot, because then there would have been consultation, and if NLC is going to look at this as a model going forward, we will have to go through the same consultation process as at Chryston.**
- 1.5c A. Margaret said this came about because Mrs Rae retired and through that there became that availability. The post lay vacant for a while and rather than putting it out to advert, Mrs Murphy was asked if she would step in and look after both schools with an addition of the Acting DHT in both of the schools.**
- 1.6a Q. Claire made a point of clarification in response to Margaret's comments - Mrs Murphy took up the interim post in mid-October and the 0.5 DHT positions in both schools did not become available till near the end of the year and that was prompted by pressure from both parent councils for information on what was happening. Also both meetings we've had you have spent quite a lot of time discussing the pilot so we are sure you can see our concern, speaking on behalf of the wider community we are in this process because that's what has been presented to us yet there has been nothing to both parent forums. This is what we want to clarify if this has just been an opportunity when did you or do you intend to update parents as there hasn't really been anything.**
- 1.6b Q. Anne added, with regards to Mrs Rae's retirement, when Mrs Murphy spoke to her as the chair of Holy Cross in October her understanding was Mrs Rae had given notice of her retirement 3 months prior. She has no knowledge of what had been done prior to this to fill the vacancy; however her understanding in the first week of October was that Mrs Murphy was being asked to stand in at the last minute as an interim measure until at the latest the end of the year. This was then extended to the end of January and now we are at the following April. What she is hearing now is that it was actually seen as an opportunity to try out having one head teacher for both schools and that sounds like a pilot, whatever you want to call it. Was this an active decision not to fill the vacancy and instead try out this model?**
- 1.6c Q. Nadine added, this sounds like a conscious decision has been made and we are only discovering it six months later and she is appalled at this.**
- 1.6d Q. Elaine also challenged Margaret's comment about the post lying vacant for "a wee while" - Mrs Rae gave more than three months' notice before the school broke up for the summer and it was left until the week of her retirement before Mrs Murphy was asked to step in, which is completely unacceptable.**

- 1.6e A. Gerard responded: Last time we were on from a parent and parent council perspective, we were heard loud and clear, and there have been elected members who have raised the same concerns about the situation. Not going to use the word pilot because pilot is what Chryston is being called, will instead use 'opportunity'. The council hasn't just done this in Croy and Kilsyth, similar opportunities have arisen at a number of other schools. However, that does not mean to say that any decision at those schools will be the ones that are made going forward, because we have had to go through quite a detailed consultation process lessons have been learned so back to the point that Claire made an update will be given around the middle of May on the review that is taking place in Chryston.
- 1.6f A. Gerard then brought in Michelle, who wanted to clarify a point for Nadine and Elaine. They did try and action the recruitment but at that time there were real problems across the board, there were backfill issues and it was about consistency. The policy had been put through and it states that they could do this and Mrs Murphy's position could be called a MELM using the terminology of the policy. But that's not to say that the schools are being considered for a MELM and that's where the confusion arises. The situation in Chryston is different because both head positions were vacant, this is not the case with our schools. In terms as measuring it against Chryston it can't be as it's not the same situation, the reason to provide so much information on the MELM was to stop any misinformation, we would never change the leadership model of any school without going through a full consultation and we are correct they haven't communicated to all parents, children etc. as this is an interim measure and do not want to distress anyone. This was an interim measure and the policy states where it's an interim go with a locality or a cluster. There was no awareness of how long it would be and did not foresee how sizeable the COVID absences in general would be. Recognised the need for additional support under Mrs Murphy and that's why the additional 0.5 DHT posts were approved. But also we wanted to give other members of the schools' leadership teams opportunities; they might want to build their skills to be able to look for promotion in the future, so it was actually about providing support during this interim period. There are a number of vacancies across the board and to reassure there is no sneaky plan and perfectly honest it is an interim measure, because some of the schools had to be readvertised. We did try to go through the proper processes and within COVID recovery we took the opportunity to utilise Mrs Murphy who is an experienced head and we are speaking to Mrs Murphy regularly to get updates on what is going well and what is challenging and would ask for the same feedback from us. We appreciate balanced feedback and our parent councils are providing it and this feedback will be used in any correspondence.
- 1.7a **Claire thanked Michelle and commented that it was actually the lack of information that was causing concern, and then brought in Nadine. Q. Nadine said the more she hears the less clear it becomes, we were told at the last meeting we didn't need to wait for the Chryston consultation to end and we had specifically raised this question. It was stressed then that we were in a completely different situation to Chryston, but now we're being told there was no recruitment because there was a possibility of looking at a different leadership model. Also COVID recovery was mentioned, we have 600 children with staff covering both schools in COVID recovery and essentially any confusion and misunderstanding has come from the lack of clarity from North Lanarkshire.**
- 1.7b A. Gerard took the points on board but said this is not unique situation of our two schools, this has been happening in other schools in North Lanarkshire. However, the only one where

there has been a full consultation in Chryston and therefore it is on the outcome of that where the decision will be made as a council moving forward with all of the schools. Our two schools are not unique, there are others because of similar circumstances of someone retiring and the opportunity coming along allowing this [i.e. shared headship] to happen in the interim. However no decisions will be made about any of those schools until a decision is made about which ones meet the criteria that come out of the Chryston pilot. One of the things the council also had to do was get the agreement of the trade unions. Gerard spoke about the SNCT agreement at the last meeting and that is where there is a national agreement around MELMs (this is not North Lanarkshire's term, it comes from the national agreement). They then have to agree a joint policy between the trade unions, central government and the council. That policy has been approved; however the trade unions would want it to be made clear that they have agreed the policy but don't agree in principle. This is a change from our last meeting, at which point the policy hadn't been agreed. The councillors will have to make very difficult decisions once the Chryston consultation has been completed on what essential services will have to be cut moving forward. Have promised the trade unions that there will be no more than one per cluster. Taking on board our points, know that we're frustrated and please rest assured that it is fed back to their line management.

- 1.8a Q. Claire stated we were previously told that the current arrangements would remain in place until at least the end of June, we also fed back to you that this was unlikely to be well received, also the point was raised that if it was to be extended which is likely to happen. With this there could be a backlash, St Patricks have had a meeting as has Holy Cross and we are having a joint meeting next week. Question is when do you intend to update parents. We need a clear timeline and some definite answers.**
- 1.8b A. Gerard said if an interim communication was issued it may not help but add more questions. With regards to the meetings the council have heard loud and clear your feelings – these were all the similar points made by Chryston. If we were to go ahead with a MELM for your schools there would be a full consultation to allow parents to express their concerns and feelings. Gerard stated again that the council had to make significant savings. If a decision is made at a council level as an officer of the council he has to take it forward. With regards to communication Gerard admitted they have got it wrong and again apologised. If a decision is made for the council to look at Holy Cross and St Pat's as a model/pilot it will be brought to us as a formal consultation. No decision has been made on what will happen on our communities.
- 1.9a Q. Anne asked to revisit Gerard's answer about the joint negotiation document and the policy as she did not understand his answer. Anne asked "are you saying everyone has agreed it, trade unions, central government and local authority are now in agreement over a policy or are the trade unions not in agreement"**
- 1.9b A. Gerard answered, to be clear there is an SNCT agreement which is a national agreement about MELMs across Scotland.
- 1.9c Anne asked is this a document that we can look at.**
- 1.9d Gerard said yes we can email the link to the SNCT agreement. Then you have the joint negotiating agreement and that has to be agreed at a local level; this is where the trade unions are involved in the policy. If there is a national agreement, at a local level it is

incumbent on the joint groups to agree and develop a policy together and this has now been formally agreed by the trade unions and the council. However, to be clear “the trade unions have agreed the policy but don’t agree with it in principle”. Gerard stated that this is exactly the terminology has been used.

1.9e Anne: I’m not sure I am understanding this: so they have agreed the policy but don’t agree with it in principle?

1.9f Gerard confirmed: They don’t agree with Multi Establishment Head teachers in principle.

Gerard said from a mechanism point of view if there is a national agreement you would find it hard for any JNCT across the country to not be able to agree a policy. If the trade unions were looking at it they would have to say well there is national agreement in place, so we have to work it out at the local level, and that it has now been agreed. If there’s a national agreement you would find it very hard for them not to agree to it at a local level.

1.10a Q. Cllr Heather Brannan-McVey said what we have heard today is interesting but we aren’t hearing any new information, the crux of the question is why not just advertise the post and why aren’t we advertising the post.

1.10b Gerard said we are not advertising the post or posts until we make a decision about what it is we are doing about Chryston consultation. If they let this one go and advertise it now and then decide in a year’s time that this does fit the model, they’d have appointed two head teachers and would then have to deal with the redeployment of that head teacher. That’s the reason why no decision is being made until the decision has been taken about how they are moving forward around all of their posts. The other aspect is that agreement has been given to the trade unions because they were looking for a specific number [of MELMs] and we have heard this mentioned before that it would be one per cluster.

1.11a Cllr Heather Brannan-McVey said as a way of a supplementary nobody here is interested in a year’s time we are interested in the here and now and if the department has a headache they have to manage in a year’s time then so be it, what we want is settled school communities where children thrive so my view is just advertise the post.

1.11b Gerard said to be clear in case the wrong impression has been given by him saying a year, the decision will be made in the middle of May with a decision. That is the intention of the council, not Gerard himself, it will be agreed at a council level.

1.12a Claire asked can you confirm that there has never been a discussion to advertise the post of head teacher for St Patrick’s as this is now one year down the line for us

1.12b Gerard said it would be a lie to say there hasn’t been a discussion there has and for many of the posts in North Lanarkshire there has been discussion about what could be done and said we are not advertising at the moment because we have to look and say depending on situation what we are going to do.

1.13a Elaine said as discussed it was said the post wouldn’t be advertised until a decision was made about Chryston, when was the decision made to start the consultation process in Chryston and when did the consultation actually start.

1.13b Gerard said when the decision was made to start a consultation in Chryston, parents were saying what about the wider community. But we were in a different place then because of COVID and that’s why an online questionnaire was decided on. Gerard passed the question

onto Michelle for dates. Michelle said she would go back and check dates but could say it was when the two positions became available because up until then it was interim. When Mr Mitchell resigned, the policy then says (not exact terminology, this can be provided) that when two positions become available you then must explore the possibility and begin to consult around it. Because the two positions became available, then in line with the policy, they had to begin a consultation – but not make a decision. Michelle confirmed it was February 2022.

1.14a Provost Jones said as Cllr Brannan-McVey said you have a list of head teachers that are potentially retiring in June so why not advertise all the vacant head teachers posts, and ones you don't get suitable candidates for, put those into the mix. Because of the location of Kilsyth, you may find it is in fact a desirable school to many as it boundaries two other local authorities, you may find you get a better pool in that situation. If you advertise on that basis you can then make a decision on what schools are then best for a MELM. Provost also made the point that Whitelees Primary is as close to Abronhill Primary as Holy Cross is to St Patrick's, so really need to advertise all the posts and see what's left at the end.

1.14b Gerard said the decision has been taken that they won't be advertising all the posts. Correct that there is information on who is retiring and still to give official notice, after consultation has taken place we will go out to advert on the vacant posts and I hope when I come back to you in May I can give that information.

Michelle added that it is worth noting that some experienced head teachers have noted an interest that if the MELM model did go ahead that this is something they would be interested in, so in terms of equity as well some people see it as a leadership development opportunity.

1.15a Claire, you mentioned 'a number' of schools, can you tell us how many schools are in a similar situation.

1.15b Gerard said this information would be sent.

1.16a Claire, with St Patrick's in particular St Patrick's have had in the last 8 years 6 head teachers, that is a lot and that impacts the view the parents have on St Pat's the upheaval, no continuity. Parents are really frustrated with this situation, clarity is needed, are you confident you will be able to give us a proper update in May.

1.16b Anne said Mrs Murphy said she would do this until the end of June and you have described yourself the challenges around recruitment and we all feel there are challenges with filling the vacancy by August. As Michelle said there is only one vacancy so we aren't like Chryston but what we are hearing now is you can come back and say to us actually we do want to proceed with consulting with you as considering your situation as a MELM. If Mrs Murphy didn't want to put herself forward for that job are we looking at losing our head teacher as you would then replace her, would we then loose our very high valued, well regarded head teacher that knows all our children, parents and is embedded in our community for the sake of this. I am very concerned about this process, it has been repeatedly said it's not the same as Chryston, it's very different, that our head teacher has stepped in to help in a situation and then the goal posts could change that potentially she could no longer be the head teacher of our school.

- 1.16.c Nadine added to Claire's comment that children are only at primary school for 7 years, Nadine's child is in P4, two of those years have been affected by COVID for one year of her education her head teacher has been doing two jobs, bottom line for half of her child's primary education there has been an education impact, this needs sorted because bottom line children's education is being affected.**
- 1.16.d Gerard said Claire I hear loud and clear your concerns, it ties into Nadine's point at the beginning about COVID recovery and also the points that have been made and the number of interim and long term arrangements in your establishment. It's very similar to the points that were raised by the parents at Chryston. It reflects the points that children are only in primary for 7 years. Reiterated that the newly elected members will have to make very difficult decisions after the election as the council have been asked to start thinking creatively on how to save £40million.
- 1.16e Nadine stopped Gerard to bring his attention to the SNCT document specifically says that the decision about a MELM should NOT be based on budgetary considerations, so can you confirm if the report that I have referenced in the chat is the report you are referring to.**
- 1.16f Gerard said he was not looking at the chat and his colleagues could confirm but what he would say is that a decision was made from a council perspective and the position we are in at the moment was a budget saving consideration, that is in reports and is out there. What we have to do is look at it from an educational perspective to ensure our children, young people and communities are not impacted by this approach being used going forward. In response to Claire and whether Gerard is confident that he can come back to us by mid-May, yes he has to be. Does not want to come on again and give us this interim position yet again.
- 1.17a Q. Catherine pointed out Anne's question had not been answered (paragraph 1.16b)**
- 1.17b Gerard said that would have to be a conversation with Mrs Murphy first before we would do anything and that is all he would be comfortable in commenting on this point at this time, we are not at that stage at all and we would only come to that stage and have that conversation given the decision that is made in May and would not be comfortable commenting further on this specific point.
- 1.18. Gerard said he is confident the next time we speak he is confident there will be a significant update. In the meantime if there is any questions in the interim please let us know.
- Again, Gerard confirmed that this is not a consultation and thanked everyone for their time.