

# **Aith Parent Council Meeting**

**Wednesday 29th September 2021 at 7 pm**

**via Webex**

Present: Duncan McWhannell, Frances Moffat, Jacqueline Johnston, Michael Spence, James Garrick, Ingrid Smith, Kirsty Smith, Sarah Quinnell, Angela Leask, Inga Irvine

Guests: Shona Thompson (Executive Manager - Schools), James Johnston (Quality Improvement Officer for Aith School) and Steven Coutts (Councillor Shetland West)

Apologies: Jimmy Mercer, Martin Dodd, Emily Jamieson, Erica Gadsby

Matters Arising: New Piano for music, Library books before holidays

## **AGM**

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

Stated above.

### **2. Chair's Annual Report**

Since our last AGM on 15th September 2020: We have had 3 full online meetings over another eventful school year. So I would like to start by taking this opportunity to thank all the staff at the school for managing the ever-changing rules and regulations that have been imposed over the last school year. We are all very aware that this has added to an already high workload that the school has to deal with. So thank you for all your hard work and extra time that you have put in.

One benefit that may have arisen from the online meetings is that it is easier for people out with the Aith School community to attend. We had insight into the current educational policies from MSP Beatrice Wishart last November and the latest council discussions from Councillor Catherine Hughson in June. The opportunity to ask and answer questions directly is I'm sure beneficial to both parties and I hope we can continue this open relationship with our MSP's and Councillors in the year to come.

Although the ability to meet in person or gather in groups has been limited over the last year, this has certainly not impeded our ability to fundraise:

We have received just over £4,000 from the Community Council Distribution Grant for coping with the COVID restrictions. This was spent on outdoor toys and classroom technology to better enable virtual teaching.

Through Voluntary Action Shetland the Parent Council secured another £4,000 to provide weekly food vouchers over a 3 month period.

And a special thanks to Jimmy Mercer who applied and received a total of £7,500 from Scottish Seafarms and Rearo Supplies to purchase 16 laptops and a charging trolley for the school.

Otherwise, we raised £1,300 with the Online Auction that has gone towards primary toys and hopefully some gardening equipment.

This leaves the balance at £6,167 so we are certainly open to more suggestions from the school, parents and carers on how this could be allocated.

We are still however continuing to apply for funds all the time and hope to access the Shetland Community Benefit fund set up by Viking Energy to help improve accessibility throughout the school.

### **3. Selection and confirmation of 2021-2022 Parent Council officers and members**

Duncan stated he was happy to continue as Chair of the Parent Council for another year and Kirsty has agreed also to stay on as Clerk. Although our Vice-Chair Jimmy Mercer has decided to step down from his role. As no one in the meeting offered to take up the position so Duncan decided the position would be actively advertised and re-selected for the next meeting

### **4. Discussion of issues the parent council would like to raise**

Duncan offered the Parent Council to bring up any issues though none were raised.

### **5. Action Plan 2021/2022**

The action plan was shared in the meeting for members to view, this will be emailed out for the next meeting and confirmed then.

### **Parent Council Meeting**

### **6. Approval of minutes, 01.06.21**

1st Ingrid 2nd Frances

### **7. School Update**

Michael Spence:

Micheal began by thanking the Parent Council for its fundraising efforts this year. Highlighting the food vouchers supplied by VAS.

Since August Hannah Chapman a newly qualified primary teacher has started teaching P 2/3, Hannah worked did her teacher training at Aith school and we are happy to have her back. Next year we will have more student teachers join the school.

On Friday (25/09/21) the school received news of two positive pupils in P1/2 and P5/6. Only a confirmed positive test, a PCR not only a lateral flow, can confirm Covid. Michael told the Parent Council there are a few families keeping pupils off school - due to sitting close to the positive cases or vulnerable families. The school is using a zero-tolerance policy of covid symptoms and encouraging hand washing and social distancing when necessary - however the there is a calmness in the school.

2 electronic car charging points will be installed next to Duncans shed at the top of the car park, these will be used by visitors to the school as well as the wider community.

The public holiday usually on Up-Helly-Aa Wednesday has been moved to the Queens Platinum Jubilee - Friday 3rd June.

In the upcoming weeks, Secondary 3 will receive monitoring sheets, Secondary 2 will receive reports and Secondary 1s will receive both. In November the Aith school will hold parents nights for Secondary pupils and Early Years - although the school has to decide whether to hold these in person on via video call.

The Early Help Team will be coming to the school to liaise with families needing support, such as food parcels. Sandra Summers will be organising this on Friday (01/10/21).

James Garrick:

The Gardening Club expenditure invoice is on the way to the Parent Council.

The school's online presence includes a Facebook page that is updated regularly and a Glow website for references, new documents, forms, contacts and will include a page for the Parent Council: <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/sh/aithjuniorhighschool/parent-council/>

SQA results are very good this year. The percentage of candidates taking 5 or more NAT 5 is more than 75%. This upcoming year

## **8. Learning Estate Strategy**

Shona Thompson continued from our last meeting by explaining the initial stages of the Learning Estate Strategy; finding key projects, investments and bids for funding. Any new build will be funded by the council when they revisit sustainability and changes in pupils have ASN/early years. The current condition of Aith Junior High School makes it eligible for enhanced provision. In the past, the rise in pupils has not been accounted for, meaning the needs of new pupils often go unmet. Shona emphasised the need for refurbishment and repurposed space, noting It is clear considerable work needs to be carried out to modernise the school with flexible working spaces that work well with modern practises, accessible toilets, space for agencies visiting the school and a core ASN space.

Duncan asked for a list of priorities for the refurbishment. Shona emphasised the list is long, no entry system for the school being a priority.

Michael then inquired further on the refurbished space, noting Aith is the only school with a lack of all spaces. A comparison with Brae High School was made, as they were built at the same time though Brae has had a lot of recent refurbishments. Duncan responded the case for Brae was backed up by the parent council raising these issues. Duncan then turned to the councillors present asking why renovations at the Brae happened first.

Catherine replied the choice to put Brae at the top of the list was made with the Estates and Shona's help. Steven added the council has followed the Learning Estate Strategy Document's ratings. Theo Smith stressed his support of the school, mentioning the Scottish Government sets the agenda for education making it hard for the council to voice an opinion.

Duncan completed the conversation, it is assuring to recognise Aith on the list to get done. He then emphasised the need for the parent council to be loud and clear in support of the school.

Francis Moffat asked what exactly does refurbished mean for the school? Shona replied moving rooms around, reworking the flow of the school and adding facilities to the school, keeping an open mind for change and planning carefully will see greater use of space.

Ingrid thanked Shona for her comments. Showing concern for the refurbishment Ingrid noted the problems with the out of date class rooms; rooms are small (full classrooms in both primary and secondary) and not appropriate for modern practises. The classrooms are in good condition due to the care taken by pupils, teachers and support staff throughout the years but this does not excuse the need for refurbishment. Ingrid then expressed the need for better space than portacabins, emphasising the weather in the winter.

Duncan continued the portacabins have accessibility issues as the council decided not to put a ramp in. Michael replied the recently installed portacabins have added wider steps for accessibility and can install a ramp when needed. At the moment there is no need for a ramp as no wheelchair users are using the portacabins.

Duncan expressed the contradiction of inaccessible space for the ASN department. Shona replied the portacabins are a quick solution, needed regardless of the pupil's cohort. Duncan responded highlighting the strict housing regulations to be accessible. Shona emphasised the need for a quick solution.

Duncan then ended the discussion on school space and Learning Estate Strategy and thanked the council and visitors for their comments.

## **9. School catchment areas**

Angela Leask brought up the topic of school catchment areas, an issue recently arose from local parents and guardians who had thought their children would go to one school and have been placed in another. The placement of the catchment areas is seemingly a 'line drawn across a map', that splits neighbours and local areas.

Angela stated these families had written to the council to enquire and had been told families could request a place at a different school than their catchment area but would not be given transport. This would mean extra cars on the road and the help of the wider family and community. Michael replied pupils can apply for a vacant seats on the bus every year, emphasising the history of the Gruting area is complicated as in years past pupils had the choice. Shona stated the school catchment areas are laid out in the school admissions policy. She then noted the hard work of the transport department to transport over 2000 barins all over Shetland.

## **10.ACOB**

### **a. New piano for music**

The council voted on spending £500+ on a new moveable keyboard with weighted keys for the music classroom - Approval: 1st Angela, 2nd Duncan.

### **b. Library books**

Duncan spoke to the school representatives to ask why the pupils have no library books two weeks before the holiday, often resulting in four weeks without a book to read. Michael replied he would ask the library staff directly.

Later in the week Michael emailed a reply that was sent out to the parent who inquired;

*I spoke to Jane Spall this morning to discuss the lending of library books over the holidays. Pupils in Mrs Smith's, Mr Balfour's and all Secondary pupils can keep books over the holidays, although they are asked to return them before Summer. Other classes are asked to return their books and as far as Jane is aware this is what all Junior High School Librarians ask for.*

*The reason that the school libraries introduced this was due to the high numbers of books that go missing during the holidays. Jane gave an example where 30 books were lost during an October holidays. The library has a limited budget to replace these books.*

## **11.Date of Next Meeting**

Duncan would like to wait until October to set a date for the next meeting.