

Minutes of Whalsay Parent Council meeting held on Tuesday 16 September 2025 at 5.30pm in Whalsay Primary School

Present: Alison Shearer – Chair
Louise Laurenson
Zoe Williamson
Debbie Murray
Tanya Arthur
Eilidh Eunson
Andrea Huntley
Valerie Anderson
Leona Sandison
Julie Reid

Staff: Niall Healy
Natalie Constable
Charlotte Hutchison

Apologies: Caroline Watt
Caroline Manson
Margaret Leask

Welcome

Alison welcome everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of last meeting

The minute of the meeting held on 6 May 2025 was approved by Andrea and seconded by Alison.

Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

Treasurers Report

Julie informed the group that the balance at the last meeting was £5124.54. Since then, £852.24 has come in and £2105.16 has been spent. Leaving a total of £3871.62. It was noted that the raffle at the Christmas concert usually takes in around £1000 and the cauliflower cards takes in around £100.

There is a feeling among some reps that the parent council pays for things that perhaps the Shetland Islands Council should be paying for. Niall advised that he has had a Building Maintenance Officer from the Council visiting the school and he has submitted 14 forms for different things to be done.

Head teachers report:

Staffing updates:

Nursery updates – Ms. Emily Robertson has moved from her role as a Learning Support worker to become our new Senior Practitioner in the ELC.

Ms. Dione Pottinger has started as our Early Years worker in the ELC

We have been unsuccessful in the latest round of recruitment for an ELC teacher. This is being covered by Lynsey at present.

Play Support Worker – Mrs. Alison Shearer is working closely with teachers in her now role as Play Support Worker.

Physical Education – Ms. Chloe Cheyne has now started in post as our Probationer teacher of PE and is teaching lessons to all Primary and Secondary classes as well as a Dance Wider Achievement group.

Business Management – Mrs. Kari Hamilton has started in post as our Business Management teacher. This is for S3 only at present but will be extended next year to allow for progression through to S4.

Art/RME - Ms. Laurie Anne Carr has re-joined the staff team following some time off in Term 4.

School's mission – Whalsay School is a Connected Community of Learners has been launched at the start of this Academic Year.

Key steps in working towards this mission include: Building individual but also collaborative partnerships with a number of different agencies.

Whalsay School is now established in the North Mainland cluster. This allows teachers and school leaders to work closely and exchange ideas and resources with colleagues at Brae HS and a number of different Primary schools and ELC's.

Lynsey has visited Whiteness ELC to learn more about their approaches to learning through play in the ELC and discuss best practices between our two schools.

Youth Work – Sadie Simpson is our Youth Worker in Secondary and has been supporting learners in S3 who are currently working towards an award with The King's Trust Achieve Programme. Sadie is also supporting learners with additional needs in some areas and will be contributing to our Wider Achievement program from Term 2 onwards.

SDS – Katie Clubb is our link SDS officer and works closely with Miss Eyvor Irvine to provide Careers guidance and coaching.

DYW – Emily van Tonder is our Developing the Young Workforce link officer and was the key driver of the recent team building and careers event with the army. Emily is heavily involved in developing the logistics connected with the careers fair in Lerwick which some Secondary classes will attend.

Psychology services – We continue to work closely with both Rhonda Simpson and Lana Smith to support pupils with additional learning needs. Both Lana and Rhonda have made recommendations of books and resources to support pupils wellbeing and books related to Additional Support Needs. These have been ordered and are on the way.

Active Schools – Mr. Eoin Leask is our link Active Schools officer and will be continuing to develop our program of events that will enhance the curriculum through projects like Bike ability, Road safety, lunchtime sports clubs and after school clubs.

Wider Achievement

After a successful trial, we have decided to continue to explore opportunities for Primary and Secondary pupils to work together. In line with our school value of Responsibility, senior pupils are taking the lead in activities such as Outdoor Sports, Dance, crochet, arts and crafts and play support.

School Improvement Priorities

For next Academic Year, we are going to have a focus on:

1) Developing the Rights Respecting Schools initiative – Developing our Personal and Social Education. Updating our PSE curriculum is well underway. Key aspects that are being added and focused upon for the Secondary curriculum are financial literacy (money management), learning about diversity and inclusion and the promotion of positive behaviours for our school ethos.

In line with this, we are making some updates to our behaviour policy and procedures. These will be shared in the coming weeks.

2) Parental Engagement:

(i) We have had our first Family Learning Engagement afternoon with pancake making, arts and crafts and archery. Thank you to Roselyn Fraser and team for coordinating the events and to all participants who came along.

(ii) We have had a whole staff meeting to establish our systems and standards for report writing. The key principles are that each report should be a balance between celebrating the achievements and progress of each young person whilst also setting out clear next steps in learning and development.

(iii) The next aspect we will be looking at is homework and what that balance looks like for pupils and families in different sectors of the school.

3) Differentiation

- Staff are currently looking at two different digital platforms called Click View and Achieve to assess which is better for Pupil learning. These platforms will provide learning materials at different academic levels to support pupils making progress.

- Having different ways to support pupils in lessons has been a key focus of our staff meetings up to this point and it will continue to be in the weeks and months ahead.

Orders

- Lynne Wilson has asked me to pass on apologies that we haven't managed to secure the storage container that was approved for purchase last year. Order was placed but was later rejected because the company don't travel to the islands. Looking at using an alternative company.

Trips

Natalie is forming a working group to look into the development of school trips. If any parents of Secondary school pupils would like to join, please let me know.

We are looking into arranging inclusive trips/activities to provide options for all pupils across the school year. Our basic principle is that we are creating a Trip A and Trip B format. Trip A will be the ski trip which was so well received last year. Trip B will be to Edinburgh with a variety of different learning options under consideration. These include:

- Edinburgh Castle
- Camera Obscura
- Theatre show
- Dynamic Earth
- National Galleries
- Bowling and arcade

Zoe advised that the Anderson High School had 5-6 trips last year and they have had 3 this year. Could Whalsay pupils be offered another trip in addition to the ski trip? Natalie said that the AHS had, again this year, asked if Whalsay would like to join them on the ski trip. Further discussion will be held once the working group is formed.

Request from Mrs. Hamilton

I would love for pupils to pitch a Business idea to some members of the parent council. I would like pupils to set up our own mini dragon's den with the pupils potentially securing investment on the back of their proposal. I think this would be a great learning experience for them. At the meeting this week could you ask for a couple of volunteers from the parent council to represent the panel and be our dragons! I'm thinking Thursday 6th November period 3 (10:50).

Mixed Volleyball – End of term games

Ms. Cheyne is keen to organise a volleyball game that is a combination of staff, senior pupils and parents in Term 2. Keen to hear of any volunteers!

Art Exhibition

Senior pupils and pupils involved in Arts club will be hosting an exhibition event on the 31st October. Planning is in the early stages but the concept is for the afternoon to be a showcase of pupils work – teas, coffees and home bakes with voluntary donations requested. Monies raised would directly support the YPI initiative.

Class Rep Questions/Issues

Primary 1

It was noted that pupils had really enjoyed the dancing and thanks will be passed on.

Primary 3

Eilidh passed on that the spelling homework is a 'chore and a bore' in some households. It was felt that the grid does not always offer realistic tasks and could this be altered in any way? Niall said he will pass on the concern and as he mentioned in his report earlier in the meeting, homework in different sectors of the school is going to be looked at.

Regarding 'snacktember' a parent was annoyed about an option for lunch being pasta, beans and cheese. It was felt that parents are expected to put in more effort with snacktember than the school is with lunch. This was meant with no disrespect to the canteen staff, who do an excellent job. This is a Shetland wide system. This will be taken on board.

Primary 7

Pupils in primary 7 had also really enjoyed the dancing.

Some parents are finding the amount of homework too much. They feel that the time spent on homework should be family time. Other reps agreed that it is difficult when it's a sunny day and you have to take your bairns in to do homework. Niall took this onboard.

Alison said that she would be sad to see the spelling test go, if that was to happen, it is a great sense of pride for her children if they do well.

Secondary 1

Leona said parents had been discussing the use of mobile phones at school, with many discouraging this children from taking them to school. However, the bairns are saying they need to use them at English. This should not be the case. They are also told not to take photos of other pupils, but this still happens. As school staff are good at passing on any messages that need to get to parents, the feeling was that pupils should not need their phone.

Niall responded that this has already been looked at. He had done a survey and the results were very split. Young people are educated how to use their phone safely. He had produced a policy but this is being held back for the moment as this subject is being looked at Council wide. Niall is personally not in favour of phones in school but this needs everyone on board and proper measures in place for pupils to access everything they need to.

It was further noted that the wifi system is slow with everyone using it. The wiring system needs to be upgraded. Alison added that as a visitor to the school it could be very frustrating trying to work online.

Secondary 2

Similar concerns regarding mobile phones were raised.

Secondary 3

Zoe asked if buns could be made available along with burgers at lunch time. Niall will pass this on.

Parent Engagement

As raised in the head teacher report there are a number of upcoming events for parents to get involved with.

First off, Ms Cheyne is keen to organise a volleyball game that is a combination of staff, senior pupils and parents in Term 2. Volunteers at the meeting were Louise, Eilidh (if a pink ball is used!), Debbie and David Murray. Reps should ask their classes for further volunteers.

Alison and Zoe volunteered to be dragons for Mrs Hamilton's business management pupils' 'Dragon's Den'. This will be held on 6 November.

Natalie is forming a working group to look into the development of school trips. Anita, Zoe and Julie volunteered to be part of this.

Funding requests

It was agreed that the request for a Marimba at £2599, by Miss O'Dwyer, as too much for the parent council to fund solely. This will be funded by fundraising (perhaps a musical event), school funds and parent council. It could possibly be ordered through High Level Music. Niall will come back on this.

A request from Audrey Polson for £140 for a Make Do Invent kit was approved.

It was agreed that a list of everything the parent council has funded should be created and publicised.

School Blog

The blog needs refreshing. Niall asked for volunteers to help with this so the school could be showcased as best as possible. Leona agreed to be the parent council rep responsible for this. Alison will ask James Skargill if he could help with this as he is very talented in this area. He may also be able to provide tips to pupils.

AOCB

Leona will advertise house team t-shirts for ordering again shortly.

Fundraising should be placed on the next agenda.

Traditional dancing is very popular with pupils in the lead up to Christmas. Reps wondered if perhaps Ann Marie Anderson and Vera Reid may be interested in helping with this. Charlotte will take this forward.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 11 November 2025 at 5.30pm.