

CALDERWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL PARENT COUNCIL

Chair's Report – AGM 2022

The New School

The first year of Calderwood Primary School and Nursery has been unlike any other “first year” that our children, parents, and staff have ever experienced in a schooling environment. Starting a school from scratch is a rare opportunity. But doing so in the wake of a global health crisis brought brand new challenges from the outset; specifically the School's opening being delayed. This was a great disappointment for all, but the interim transition period (via classes at Mid Calder) showed the high levels of dedication and care from Miss Burton, Miss Miller and all the teaching staff, towards our children and their wellbeing.

The amount of effort required for a body of teaching staff to manage a curriculum for excited and apprehensive children in new classes, in a temporary setting, *while* planning and setting up for the move into their eventual school building is an incredible achievement. As difficult as some of the logistics seemed for adults and children at the time, it was (hopefully for most) a bit like a jab at the doctors: quite sore, but necessary and hopefully soon forgotten about.

The celebrations that welcomed the children into their new school and nursery buildings were worth the wait – even if parents and carers had to remain at a distance due to continuing government restrictions. Thanks to some impressive Sway presentations, we saw that the induction activities and recognition of the children as “Pioneers” were lovely initiatives, and a thoughtful continuation of the “Invisible Strings” values that supported the children through the earlier days of the term.

Introducing the Parent Council (PC)

The current membership of the Parent Council, and its respective office bearer roles, was established at our first meeting in October. We were fortunate to have enough

volunteers to create two Chair positions, two Vice Chair positions, and to fill the Secretary and Treasurer posts, each with their own supporting “Vice” roles.

As a voluntary group, the workload of the Parent Council is effectively what we make it. Naturally there is a core level of responsibility and commitment which is still very demanding. Due to a variety of other commitments, Jenn Fitzpatrick stood down from her position as Chair in February. Her significant experience in education and professional approach were very important in the formative months. Thank you Jenn, for your contributions and support to the Parent Council during your tenure – we would welcome, and be lucky to have, your support again in any capacity in the future.

All of us were new to the dealings of a Parent Council, and there was no structure or rhythm to inherit, and unfortunately no bank account either. Starting with a blank canvas is both an amazing and daunting opportunity so it really has been a steep learning curve. Thankfully we have access to the excellent resources at www.connect.scot, which is an independent charity that supports and promotes parental involvement in education. I wholeheartedly encourage you to visit the site and explore its content. For context, that’s where the templates for our Constitution and Code of Code have come from, as well as various other ways of working that we have adopted.

For us, this year has inevitably been about getting the basics right for Calderwood Primary School Parent Council. As a parent body, our role has two main parts: Firstly, to represent the views of parents and carers of children at the School and Nursery. Secondly, to support the advancement of education for our children.

Our Clan Representatives (Reps)

Fortunately, the various social media and messaging apps, leveraged by the strong sense of community in the Calderwood and East Calder neighbourhoods, means that there is a constant source of conversation, questions, ideas and sharing of views for us to tap into. The challenge is being able to channel these effectively so that we can help the School, and ourselves, to focus on the most important areas with the right amount of effort. On this, I believe we have made a huge step in the right direction thanks to the efforts of the “Clan Reps”.

Each Clan within the School, and covering the Nursery as well, has at least one parent or carer acting as a Clan Rep. Since they signed up to this role, they have generously given their time and effort to maintain a regular, but less formal, two-way flow of communication between parents and the school. The Clan Reps have been invaluable in helping to canvas views from parents in their Clans; jumping in to volunteer to help with fundraising activities, as well as acting as a sounding board for the School's initial transition plan for children going into the 2022/23 academic year. On behalf of the Parent Council, and the School, thank you so much to each of the Clan Reps who have kept themselves up-to-date with important information and ensured that other parents and carers have been involved in messaging chat groups, and for your contributions to the Parent Council meetings.

The Advancement of Education

If you explore the School's blog site or have clicked through links in the regular email newsletters, checked into your child's online learning journals, or listened to Miss Burton and Miss Miller's updates in Parent Council meetings, you'll know just how broad and deep the curriculum is. Hopefully all parents and carers have had the opportunity to visit the School and take a look around the classrooms as well, and really build a sense of the variety of learning that's taking place. As a parent body, we have the opportunity to enrich that learning experience in multiple ways. The obvious one is by raising money to supplement school resources and enhance the children's experience within the school environment.

Our Treasurer's Report highlights a really successful year of fundraising. This is largely thanks to efforts of our Vice Chair Jenni Bell who has been instrumental in coordinating the Christmas Raffle and the Magic Miles sponsorship event and ensuring their success. Thank you Jenni for your hard work! We are also extremely grateful to the businesses and individuals who generously donated prizes for the raffle, and to the volunteer ticket sellers as well. Additional thanks should go to the community for their generosity in supporting the Christmas Raffle. And that extends to their support for the Magic Miles campaign. The children did an incredible job with their sponsorships, and it was great to see their enthusiasm for the cause – and the support of the parents who did the laps of Calderwood with them! Huge thanks are due to our Treasurer, Stacey Webster, who was responsible for the counting and

banking of the collected funds – a massive effort in itself. We are also very grateful to Stacey for setting up the bank account for the Parent Council and her management of it.

As a reminder, here are some of the highlights of how the Parent Council allocated funds this year:

- Christmas celebrations

- Protective iPad cases

- Outdoor learning materials

- Sports Day equipment

- Fischy Music learning resources

As a new school, budget management is especially challenging – the School didn't start with the inventory that other schools have accumulated over the years (right down to costumes for the Christmas plays). So, in our first year, our funding distribution has been mostly reactive, and necessarily guided by the School's requests to support its areas of focus. With the Parent Council's growing experience – and an anticipated increase to our Member numbers for 2022/23 – it would be great to see our parents and carers take a more proactive role in identifying additional funding and support opportunities.

Looking Forward

Charity Status – the opportunity to apply for charity status for the Parent Council was suggested at an early PC meeting. Initial research shows that this could be a significant benefit in terms of specific types of fundraising and preferable tariffs for online payment solutions (like PayPal). For example, sponsored events such as the Magic Miles event would be eligible for claiming 25% in Gift Aid for donations from UK taxpayers. There is additional effort and responsibility required with setting up the PC as a charity, so it has taken time to outline the various pros and cons. However, with the expected increase to the number of Members to the Parent Council, we should be able to make a well-informed decision on how to proceed in the 2023/23 academic year.

A co-ordinated fundraising calendar with the school – Fundraising opportunities for the school and community extend beyond deposits to the Parent Council's account. An important part of learning and education is building the understanding that others' needs can vary greatly outside our own experiences. In the new term, the Parent Council will work closely with the School to ensure that there is a good distribution and variety of fundraising activities for chosen causes, as well as opportunities to raise funds that will directly support our children within the school environment.

Parent Representation for Pupil Equity Funding – In our most recent Parent Council meeting, and the following newsletter update, Miss Burton announced that the School has an allocation of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). This is “designed to support children in Primary 1 to S3 who are eligible and registered for free school meals. Headteachers can also use their judgement to support other children in their school who are affected by poverty.” The Parent Council would like to offer support in this area by providing a point of contact who would work with the School on ideas for the distribution of PEF, and help to bring the views of parents and carers into the conversation as well. Increasing pressures of the cost of living may be a significant concern to some, but no child's educational experience should suffer because of that.

After-school childcare arrangements – With the increasing number of children in the local area, it has been clear that some parents and carers are struggling to arrange suitable childcare outside of school hours during the week. It will require a significant change to the current options to meet demand, and representatives of the PC have been exploring the issue. Although there is no clear way forward yet, the Parent Council will continue to work with the wider Parent Forum, the School, and childcare providers to support parents and carers in this area.

More members of the Parent Council – Inclusion and diversity is essential to ensuring proper representation of all parents and carers of the Parent Forum. At this year's AGM the Parent Council has invited all parents and carers who would like to serve on the PC to nominate themselves, with no limit to the number of applicants. Everyone who puts themselves forward this year will be welcomed as a Member upon their appointment at the AGM and hold a formal role in the decisions made in future PC meetings. As per the Constitution, the PC will discuss and decide upon any formal roles that members would like to take up at our next meeting. For those who

would like to be more involved, but without the regular commitment of being a PC Member, we are always happy to have volunteers to support in any way they can!

Additional Thanks

Before I end this report, I would like to thank Kimberly Rodrigues for her excellent creatives for the Calderwood Magic Miles posters and certificates, and the speed with which she was able to produce such high-quality designs.

Thank you also to Jonathan Mann for his support with the Highland Games element of the Sports Day, and for your expert input around future funding opportunities

And thanks to Steph Whyman and Ben Bowers for independently reviewing the PC accounts to ensure that everything has been recorded and communicated correctly.

Special thanks to our Secretary, Lisa Gibson for her excellent work with the minutes, actions and preparation for meetings, and also to Emma Gray who helped to set us on the right course in that respect. We really appreciate the amount of concentration and effort that's required for those activities, even though you've made it look easy.

Thank so much to Kate Grieve whose constant support has been so valuable in ensuring that payments are approved, chat groups were set up and bananas were properly distributed at the Sports Day – and those were just a few of the PC things that Kate was quick to volunteer for.

Finally, thank you to David Inglis, our Vice Chair, for his support by stepping-in to chair meetings and field emails when needed. And also for the invaluable balanced contributions to the PC's discussions – all while juggling the challenge of a house move at the same time, which emphasises his dedication.

This first year is not quite over yet, and there are still some exciting things to come before the end of the term – especially the ambitious “C in the Park” event! It promises to be the highlight of the year and is just one of the many examples of the school's commitment and creativity in their activities.

Miss Burton, Miss Miller, and the whole staff at the School and Nursery have set such a high standard with so much this year. Their efforts have given the children a wonderful start to their time there, and as parents and carers, this is something we can be extremely proud of.

The Parent Council is really starting to take shape but can still do plenty more. What we do, and how much of it, needs to be driven by the views of the Parent Forum and supported by our collective voluntary efforts. Initial results (not yet published) of the recent Improvement/ Parent and Carer Ethos Surveys, suggests that an early action for next year will be for us to create some working groups from the Parent Forum and Parent Council. These groups could be closely aligned to certain areas of focus within the School's activities, and enable parents and carers to share updates on those matters (from a parent's perspective) with the PC and Parent Forum. There's incredible potential here and we can really look forward to what we can achieve together, with the School, and with our children, in the coming years.

Tim Ozdemir

Chair, Calderwood Primary School Parent Council