

Calderwood Parent Council

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 12th September 2023



Chair Report September 2023

Building on the achievements and learnings of the previous year, the Parent Council's second year was one of significant growth. We grew the membership of the PC from six members to over 20, giving us the opportunity to expand our areas of focus. This has resulted in greater engagement with the Parent Forum, more interaction with the local authority and its representatives, and more opportunities to support the School with various activities.

Depute Head Recruitment

A number of parents from the Parent Council and wider Parent Forum carried out our formal duties in the shortlisting and interviewing process for the role of Depute Head. Without exaggeration, it was a large field of extremely strong candidates, which is a great indicator of the talent and quality of teaching professionals for children across the region. It also highlights the attraction to the Calderwood School and community – growing in both reputation and size. At the end of the process, we were delighted to welcome Miss Sarah Stark as the first Depute Head for Calderwood Primary.

Treasury and Equity

During the year we appointed Katie Guinan to the role of Treasurer for the Parent Council. Katie's professional experience of leadership within logistics, coupled with her ownership and management of a local business, has added another dimension to PC activities. In partnership with the School, Katie has led the development of multiple equity and eco-initiatives, including the Sustainability Station clothing exchange, and the Calderwood Cupboard, which provides a range of food and household products.

These facilities epitomise the Parent Council's values and reinforce the School's principles too: Our children's learning isn't just limited to what happens in the classroom – it's heavily influenced by *how* they enter the school environment. The PC's commitment to equity means that we'll do what we can to reduce the pressure on those who feel it most, giving children and their families the best chance of a positive school experience.

Fundraising

A key part of PC activities is fundraising. This helps us to support the School with additional purchases that enhance the children's experience at school. For the first time, our contributions have also been used to subsidise the cost of school trips. The fundraising process itself depends heavily on the commitment and energy of PC members and the wider Parent Forum, and we are lucky to have lots of both.

Katie Guinan organised our first ambitious and brilliantly successful Christmas Fayre, which gave local businesses the chance to offer their various products and services and add some seasonal spirit. This was followed by the Christmas Raffle, coordinated by Niamh Barton-Maynard and once again featured a host of prizes, generously donated by local businesses and the community.

The Magic Miles, organised by Jenni Bell, was once again really well supported by participants. As well as the fantastic individual efforts, there was also a group walk made up of children, their families and teachers, starting and ending at the school and braving windy conditions.

Spending

Our published accounts provide the specific details of our spending, but in summary our main areas of spending have included donations to the school and nursery for additional outdoor learning equipment and technology.

Communication

We have given additional focus to "communication" over the past year – covering both our own Parent Council channels and supporting the School with feedback on the Parent Forum's experience of school messages. Member Jo Ferguson kindly volunteered to take a lead role for the PC in this area. Jo has been invaluable in her co-ordination of our brilliant "Clan Reps", as well as contributing to multiple meetings with the School to identify improvements to school communications.

"Communication" is a notoriously difficult subject to navigate; there is SO much that happens during the school year which needs to be shared with the Parent Forum. Understandably, parents and carers have their own busy schedules to manage, and naturally we won't all treat the same messages with the same priority.

Thanks to Jo's contributions, working alongside Miss Burton, the School's Calderwood Chronicle email notification now contains a summary of the

contents, which helps readers to scan for relevant information before diving into the full update. For those who might have missed a time-critical piece of information, the informal Clan messaging groups are a great aid – and we're very grateful to all the Clan Reps who help to administrate those chats.

Engagement

The Parent Council's approach to engagement took a significant step forward in Term 3, by conducting the "After-School Clubs and Services" survey. Our aim was to collate the views and experiences of the Parent Forum with regard to the various after-school clubs, activities and care services on offer. Lucy Wright and Lindsay Haines have done some outstanding work in the initial analysis and report writing respectively, and I can't thank them enough for their effort and the high quality of their output.

The predominant theme of the responses is that the families of Calderwood place huge value in having regular and reliable after-school options for their children. Whether those options are activities-based, or more of a supervised care setting, working families in Calderwood have a critical need for their children to be occupied in a safe setting during the after-school hours.

It's important to recognise that neither the School, nor the local services, has an obligation to provide an ideal solution for all families. School clubs are operated thanks to the voluntary efforts of school staff. And private services, whether they are run as "lets" at the school, or operate elsewhere, are commercial enterprises that have to balance their cost to income ratio.

With those limitations in mind, the results of the survey are indicative of growing national trends of parental needs and political response. This was highlighted in the First Minister's "programme for government" speech earlier this month. As a very general summary, the issues are recognised by politicians and plans are underway to support parents and carers with childcare challenges. Until those promises begin to deliver, we will continue to share parent feedback with the School and other services. This dialogue gives us the best chance of seeing changes that work for everyone; parents, the School, clubs and the various other services.

Earlier this year we welcomed Greg Welsh, Head of Education (Primary), to speak to the Parent Forum about the plans for the expansion of the School. The update covered the outline of the building work, the installation of the temporary Cabins, the plans for the wider recreational space (extending north beyond the MUGA games enclosure), and the timelines. The session gave us the opportunity to ask about the planned development, and a variety of

connected matters about the School estate. Despite the scale of the change, and coming earlier than originally planned (due to an unexpected higher rate of families with more children moving into the catchment area), the work is underway now and we're adjusting to the new drop off and pick up routines.

The Parent Council took another step forward in our engagement efforts by inviting local councillors to our June meeting. The objective was to give parents and carers an opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns about matters relating to our children's development, but don't necessarily fall within the remit of the School. Building a strong connection with local politicians has two key benefits for the PC and the Parent Forum: Firstly, it gives our elected council representatives an insight into the collective priorities of the community. Secondly it gives parents a chance to better understand the reasoning or processes behind local authority activities. Having that information is a critical step if we want to effect change.

Future

The PC has previously considered the benefits of registering as a Charity organisation. There are clear financial advantages to this administrative change, but it comes with additional effort in the registration process and ongoing operational commitments. However, with the right support and expertise, it would be a significant achievement if we were to gain charity status in the future.

Another operational challenge for the PC this year has been the lack of a Secretary for the latter part of the 2022/23 session. We were fortunate to have Lisa Gibson's skills and commitment for nearly two years in the Secretary role, and she has our deep thanks for that. In the absence of a Secretary, we were also fortunate that PC Member Avril Mackay volunteered to take meeting minutes and help keep us on track with our list of actions – so we owe a huge 'thanks' to Avril too! A dedicated Secretary role is essential to the effective operation of any community group, but this commitment is difficult to come by. Although there are no nominations for the Secretary role this year, I hope that the right person will be able to support the PC with the administrative side of co-ordinating meetings and various correspondence.

I believe that our strength as a parent body comes from two key areas. The first is in our diversity. I'm so grateful that there are so many parents and carers who contribute to the conversation, either in specific roles as Members of the Parent Council or Clan Representatives, or those who selflessly chip-in throughout the year in various ways. That widespread involvement means that we get a broad level of skills and experiences to feed into the various

activities. The second element helps to drive the first, and that's more difficult to describe in a single word. "Passion" might come close, but it's more than that. This quality covers dedication, and a sense of duty-of-care too. Calderwood's parents and carers demonstrate this every day and it's incredibly important for our children to be supported in this way.

That level of commitment requires a massive effort. Against the backdrop of the After-School survey results, a nationally growing trend of unauthorised absences, and increasing numbers of diagnoses for various neurological conditions that are beginning to be better understood, the pressure on families is huge. It's important to recognise this, but also to realise that there is a potentially vast support network available through the Parent Forum. No parent, carer or guardian should feel alone. There are similar experiences all around us, and I believe that the Parent Council could help in a big way to mobilise that network over the coming years.

Those positive aspects of diversity and passion in our parent body are a great personal reassurance to me. I will be stepping back from the Parent Council at this AGM, after two years of carrying out the role of Chair. It has been a great experience, challenging at times, always interesting and definitely a privilege to work with so many brilliant people across the Parent Forum and from the School.

Thanks to all of you who started the PC journey with me, those who are continuing it, and to everyone who puts in every effort they can to make our children's learning experience the best it can be.

Tim Ozdemir
Chair, Calderwood Primary School Parent Council

September 2023