

Minutes of Trinity Academy Parent Council 26th January 2022

1. Introduction

Mike Nicholson (Chair) opened the meeting by welcoming all, with a reminder that all PC meetings are open to anyone in the Parent/Carer forum¹ to attend.

Mike noted a few initial points:

- That the S4 consultation bookings were also occurring this evening so some people may join the meeting later
- That for the time being we would continue to hold PC meetings online using Teams. Attendance has been upwards of 30 on average.

2. Headteacher update:

Staffing: Although staff absence has been high, there are signs this might be stabilising. Staff absences to date have been for a mix of reasons, mainly COVID-related – illness, need to isolate because of close contacts, caring responsibilities

Pupil COVID cases and attendance: there has been a small increase in pupil cases since Christmas. At the moment this has been spread across year groups but is being closely monitored as appropriate action can be taken if particular year groups are affected.

As there are 9 teaching weeks until the exams, there is a need to direct more support towards the senior pupils at this stage, although pupils in S1-S3 will also be supported.

3. Q&A

A number of questions had been submitted prior to the meeting. Mike noted in future, receiving questions a few days before would enable fuller answers to be given.

3a) School trips - *As restrictions ease, and Primary school residentials give the first signs that school trips are happening again, are there any plans for school trips, for example the S1 residential that would historically have happened this term?*

There are no immediate plans but it is hoped that opportunities outwith school will return to the school calendar in due course. Primary schools operate under looser restrictions so are able to begin these trips sooner.

It's important to note that the future of trips can be expected to look different from previous years where there have been some high cost trips. With increased focus on the 'cost of the school day' and on equality the aim will be to provide affordable opportunities and support where need to access these.

3b) Mobile phone policy - *Mike noted that through a network of Parent Council chairs, some schools were interested in sharing and learning from Portobello High's recent policy on removing mobile phones from classrooms. What is TA's view on this example and any future policy?*

¹ [the Parent/Carer Forum = all parents/carers with a child at Trinity Academy]

[the Parent Council = a group of parents/carers elected each year at the October AGM to act as representatives of the Parent Forum]

Mr Burge welcomed a future conversation about this for TA and noted that there have been mobile phone issues and misuse during school time. He also noted that the action taken at Portobello had been driven largely by parental interest.

A policy has recently been implemented in TA whereby pupils can only use their mobile phone in class with teacher permission. This has been helpful, although other issues (relating to mobile use during break times) are still to be resolved. Parent feedback on the mobile phones issues and policy is needed (possibly facilitated by the PC), although any change in policy would need to wait until the school ipads were in place (start of next academic year in Aug/Sept).

3c) Numbers of taught periods/self led learning / Business/Economics - *Because of recent staff recruitment issues, the Higher Business and Higher Economics courses will now have 5 taught period and 1 period of self-led learning. Mike asked Mr Burge to give the context about the number of periods for Higher courses.*

Most schools teach Higher courses over 5 periods, but TA has a history of this being 6. Therefore, TA give more teaching time than many other schools, so a reduction to 5 is not putting pupils at a disadvantage.

The concern was noted that communicating to pupils clearly about how this change in teaching time was also important so that they do not think they are being disadvantaged.

The question was also raised about self-led learning, where this style of learning does not suit a learner and whether there were creative ways to tackle this, for example rather than worksheets.

Mr Burge pointed out that all courses will have an element of self-study and that this was a common approach used by 5th year in schools and an important skill to learn. For the self-study sessions, he added that worksheets will be provided for pupils (as would be used in a taught class). For pupils who need additional learning support, parents are asked to contact Pupil Support if they feel that some further assistance is needed.

3d) Curriculum structure and review - The previous discussion led to some further questions around the curriculum review which is underway – phase 1 of this being almost complete. The aim of the curriculum review is to take stock of what is currently offered and how appropriate it is across the breadth of pupils at TA.

Proposals for the review will be shared with parents and pupils in early February and changes will be made at the start of June, as pupils change year group.

Some caution is needed of making too many changes given that the SQA is currently being reviewed, so we don't want to make lots of changes which then need to be further revised because of national changes.

Some parental concern was expressed about recent staffing shortages affecting NAT 5 pupils in some subject areas. Without playing down issues experienced at TA, Mr Burge noted that from his contact with fellow headteachers and the CEC's SQA contact, that TA's experience of disruption is very similar to other schools. As a result of this national issue, the SQA is currently developing an 'exceptional circumstances' policy to consider issues arising for senior pupils. TA is focussed on trying to get the best outcome for these pupils and would present any evidence necessary where there had been disruption to learning in particular subject areas.

Mr Burge noted that the school are now offering 41 after-school classes (for senior pupils) on a weekly basis across many subject areas, as part of the Trinity Achieves initiative – a timetable of these will be shared later this week - and that staffing issues are being closely monitored where any particular subject or class has been affected.

Will NAT 5s/Highers/Advanced Highers will go ahead this year? Mr Burge outlined that there were three options currently being discussed. More information on these options will be available before March but at the moment these are:

- Option 1: exams as normal but with some content removed from each course
- Option 2: exams as normal but with some changes (to be set out in exam guidance to be issued in March)
- Option 3: an alternative model as used last year

What happens if a child misses an exam due to COVID? Guidance is expected soon on this, and there is likely to be an appeals process in such cases.

Will pupils be awarded a NAT 4 if they fail their NAT 5? Although this was the previous policy, it is not now the case. There are opportunities as courses progress and tracking reveals how pupils are performing, for pupils to move to a NAT 4 course in most cases or to consider NAT5 over 2 years in S5/6. Any suggested changes or moves for a pupil would be discussed with, and can be challenged by parents – any suggestions of change are based on pupils' performance to date and likelihood of being able to adjust this as required.

3e) Parent consultations

Some questions had been raised about online parent consultations including sign up rates (compared with in-person events), access issues, advance sight of S4 reports, and what the future approach for parent consultations should be.

Sign up rates are good but it's difficult to compare with previous in-person events as historically the school didn't hold data on this. In addition, the online events log a meeting of parent/teacher as having happened even if there was a 'no show' or connection problems. Feedback to date from staff and parents revealed a 50/50 split on whether these sessions should remain virtual. There were some positives including convenience for parents who did not have to arrange childcare/travel and creating boundaries for staff from some subjects who in face-to-face events often put in significant additional time.

Regarding the S4 parent consultation, tracking reports will be sent to parents in advance (the day before the consultation meeting) and anyone unable to secure a session may contact the Pupil Support Leader to discuss their concerns.

S5/6 parents night will be on 8th Feb.

S4/5/6 'Live and Learn' sessions will be available (Feb 3rd) to pupils which will support forthcoming study, exam preparation and reflect on issues which may be discussed at parent consultations.

4. Extra-curricular sports/other club activities at TA

Mr. Burge raised the issue of delivering the wide range of extra-curricular sports and the need for more support for this in coming months and years – this is due to increased numbers of pupils taking part, teams across different sports and year groups and limited capacity of PE staff to support this outside of school hours. Whilst parents volunteer their time to help with some of these activities, more volunteer support is needed to keep these activities going.

Looking ahead, with an £11 million sports facility opening at Bangholm in the summer there is a call for a group of parents to explore the best future model for extra-curricular sport and for the involvement of the right number of volunteers.

Some parents volunteered immediately to be involved in this discussion and a sign-up form would be issued with the next headteacher update.

One parent asked whether other clubs (not sports) might be considered as COVID restrictions ease. Mr Burge replied that this would depend on capacity - the short-term focus will be on classroom teaching. Historically there has been drama, music, chess, film and STEM club amongst others but that many had been restricted during recent times. However, it is hoped that in the medium term there will be a return to similar opportunities.

Mike noted that he would work with the school to ensure all current extra-curricular activities were clear to all families.

5. School building development

Phase 1 - Bangholm Sports Facility

Work continues well, with the only issue being a delay caused by the siting of an electricity substation. Mr Burge expected the work to be completed by summer.

Phase 2 – the main school building

The design phase is reaching the point where designs can be shared and there will be some consultation both in-school and with parent representatives. More information to follow on this.

There was some discussion about CO2 monitoring and ventilation and on how this will work in the proposed building and any issues in the current building. Mr Burge noted that ventilation protocols for classrooms, linking in with single or double periods, and also described some potential design principles of the proposed building at Trinity (which will be a combination of new build and retrofit of the Victorian building).

Mike noted that he had spoken with Councillor Ellie Bird who had noted that the forthcoming Finance and Resources Committee meeting would be looking at future budgets and Trinity Phase 2 appeared to be high on the agenda, so continues to be the commitment necessary within CEC for this project.

6. Addressing poverty

Lynne Liddall outlined action following the last meeting where addressing poverty, cost of the school day, and PC's involvement historically in supporting the school in this had been presented. She had since met with Mr Burge to look at ways of working together - for example, pre-loved uniform scheme (now up and running), and responding to small requests for financial support. Recently the provision of some scientific calculators for some pupils who did not have their own, had been the most recent request from the school

Lynne proposed to the Parent Council that they reinstated providing the school with a £500 discretionary fund to help with costs of stationery, some small items of clothing, plus longer-term projects as they arise. This system had been in place pre-pandemic.

There is currently £2344.62 in the PC account and further funds are available from the 50/50 Club bank account and the Trinity Academy Charitable Trust. This request was approved.

The support of items at the two most recent PC meetings highlights the need to reinstate some fundraising activities, potentially more feasible as restrictions ease.

7. Impact of COVID on parental engagement with the school

City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) are conducting 3 meetings for parents in January and February on the impact of COVID on the wider school community. Parents were asked to comment on this. Issues raised included: the disadvantage of not being able to meet other parents from the same year group, the lack of opportunity to enter the school building for events, the lack of a parent consultation event for S3 parents last year.

Mike will take the comments raised and feed these back to the CEC representative collating feedback. The final meeting being organised by CEC for parents will be advertised to the parent forum.

There were currently no guidelines on how to address this issue. However meetings, will be held by the council, and parents are able to attend these.

If parents have further views on parental engagement with the school, they are invited to email the PC at trinityparentcouncil@googlemail.com

Dates of future PC meetings: Monday 7th March, Wednesday 27th April, Monday 6th June

Thanks to all – meeting closed.