



ALFORD ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL
Alford Academy
Greystone Road
ALFORD
AB33 8TY
www.alfordacademy.aberdeenshire.sch.uk

Minutes of Meeting

25th January 2016

Present: Colin Turnbull, Liz Strachan, David Wyllie, Sue-Ann Grant, Tara Crooke, Sandy Innes, Maria Rossi, Kerry Bryant, Amanda Scott, Bruce Scott, Penny Fuller, Yvonne Buckingham, Joyce Mackie, Ian Findlay, Alison Beaton, Richard Stroud

In Attendance: Moira Milne, Cllr Latham, Struan Gardner

1. Welcome and Apologies

Colin Turnbull welcomed everyone to the meeting.
Apologies were received from Nicola Sedgwick and Anne Harvey.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting on 9th November 2015 were accepted as accurate.
Proposed by David Wyllie
Seconded by Tara Crooke

2.1 Communications

The Academy website is now almost ready to go live. Struan Gardner has arranged for the Parent Council to post to the school blog from today which is pulled through to the school's other social media sites. The blog site is *alfordacademyedublogs.org*. There will be a link to this once the main website goes live which should be within the next month.

ACTION: David Wyllie will liaise with Moira Milne to begin posting items to the school website. Buddy: Moira Milne

2.2 Student Council - Moira will invite Liz Strachan to a student council meeting.

ACTION: Liz Strachan will attend a student council meeting. Moira Milne will arrange.

2.3 Tara Crooke will set up a closed social media group for the Parent Council, having experience of doing this for the primary school.

ACTION: Tara Crooke to liaise with school regarding setting up closed social media group

2.4 Homework app - Moira has been looking at this and is investigating costs and benefits and getting feedback from other schools. Approximate cost £600 per year. It was suggested that the Parent Council could fund this for the first year if necessary.

ACTION: Moira Milne will continue to investigate costs and benefits of homework app.

2.5 Supporting learning – ongoing see **6.** below.

3 Treasurer's Report

- The available funds in the main account at present total £7175.35. Since the last meeting the Parent Council contribution to the 2015 awards ceremony has been paid amounting to £1,149.33 which is less than the expected amount of £1500. The May newsletter costs have also been paid of £439.54. Since the last meeting £515 has been transferred from the lottery account to the main account and clerk's fees of £50 were paid. There are no outstanding items to be paid at present however the Parent Council have agreed to help fund the awards ceremony for 2016.
- The cashbook balance of the lottery account on 01/01/16 was £889.50.
- Easy Fundraising has generated £34.22 this year and a cheque has arrived and will be paid in to the main account. Penny Fuller has now taken over the management of this from Joyce Mackie.
- The accounts for 2014-2015 have been audited. Bank mandate forms have been completed to change the treasurer from Liz Strachan to Penny Fuller. Signatories will be Colin Turnbull, David Wyllie, Penny Fuller and Liz Strachan.

4 Head Teacher's Report

- Staff changes:
Mathematics - Sam Wake has filled the vacancy left by Rory Kerr
Acting Depute Head - Shona Ogilvie will continue in this post until July 16. This additional post will support the next phase of developing the campus.
- Vacancies:
Home Economics – no applicants again for this post; Frances Talbot and Linda Park helping to cover senior classes. J Adams plans to return from maternity leave.
Acting Principal Teacher for Modern Languages until July 16 – cover for Shona Ogilvie currently Acting Depute Head
Principal teacher of Modern Studies retired in October and is not being replaced at present. This position is a legacy of the previous system when each social subject had a Principal Teacher. Mr McPhee is the Faculty Head covering all social subjects. He will assess the needs of the faculty and a part time position in Modern Studies may be created. Temporary cover is in place.
- L McLean won at the North of Scotland Solos for drumming and is playing at National level.
- U15 basketball team won the schools cup.
- YPI – Youth Philanthropist Initiative – won by a group supporting the Chest, Heart and Stroke charity.
- Children In Need Day – the S6 pupils dressed up as characters from “Grease”.
- E Wyllie has published her first novel, science fiction.
- Rotary Young Musician of the Year won by I Vickers and B Nicol.
- A presentation on Zombie Science was enjoyed by S3 pupils in the new theatre.
- The official opening ceremony was well attended. Provost Vernal officially opened the campus. Emile Sande unveiled the plaque and sang with a 200 strong choir to accompany her. Emile has kindly donated a concert level grand piano to the school.
- U15 football team had a trip to Orkney to play Kirkwall in the Scottish Cup.
- A Wyllie received an award for volunteering as an assistant coach for the U12 basketball team.
- Assemblies have been held in the new theatre with 2 year groups together comfortably. Chaplains have visited and shared moral advice with pupils.
- A woodturning demonstration and workshop was delivered by members of the community.
- Successful junior and senior dances took place in the dining area.
- L Zimmerman was selected to join the national junior netball pathway. E Bryant is an assistant netball coach.
- Church services at Christmas were held in the theatre in school this year. At Easter pupils will walk down to the church as usual (weather permitting).
- Mr McKinnie organised a lip sync competition to raise money for charity.
- U15 basketball team are through to the quarter finals for the whole of Scotland.
- SQA exams are taking place – one venue is the new theatre.
- Six pupils worked with the Princes Trust and achieved the first two modules in the Princes XL Club (i.e. Personal Development and Employability) – the first pupils in Scotland to achieve this.

5 Campus developments

- 5.1 The water quality is still not suitable for drinking having failed the latest bacteriological tests though the chlorine and temperature are now fine. Bottled water is being provided.
- 5.2 Parents evening for S3 pupils – feedback was that it was a bit cramped at busy times. The theatre and drama studio were used. Guidance teachers were in their own rooms which worked very well.
- 5.3 School dances took place successfully in the dining area, with enough space for the band and for dancing.
- 5.4 Awards ceremony – this was previously held in the games hall, with 700 people usually attending. The theatre is too small to use but the new games hall has special flooring that is not suitable for use with shoes with heels as it may be damaged. Moira is investigating temporary floor coverings and other solutions such as splitting the ceremony in two. Sandy Innes suggested covering the floor with plywood sheets which is a possible low cost solution.
- 5.5 Wi-Fi should be in place soon and the school has purchased another set of laptops and some iPads.
- 5.6 Parking – drop off times can be difficult especially if delivery lorries park in the drop off bay.
- 5.7 Moira is going to nominate the New Campus team for an award from Inspiring Scotland.
- 5.8 In the recent heavy rain and strong wind there were a few leaks around windows but these were minor. The access road flooded for a while during the heaviest rain and the campus was closed for one day.

6 Supporting learning

Struan Gardner asked for ideas of ways to help parents learn how to help their children with learning. He appreciates that most parents have come through 7 years of primary education and asked what parents would like to know.

Ideas to communicate effectively with parents to enable them to help their children included information on social media, sessions during parents evenings and short video clips. Meetings can be useful but parents need to have a reason to come along. Previously successful evenings were held with pupils telling their own stories of what worked or didn't work for them. This will be repeated. Ian Findlay suggested a "Question Time" format could be interesting with parents in the audience and pupils on the panel.

Some parents were concerned that their child wouldn't tell them what homework they had or if they had completed it. Struan reassured parents that individual teachers will flag up any problems with homework and the subject head will then contact parents by letter after discussing the problem with the pupil. There was some concern that these letters might be viewed as disciplinary rather than as alerting that support may be necessary. Struan will look at the wording of the letters. There may be an issue with timing of the letters as one parent reported that the letter arrived after the issue had been resolved. As well as school reports once a year there are monitoring slips with a brief summary of progress sent home once a term.

Struan gave example of useful tips for parents including asking their child to "teach me" about whatever they have done that day or asking them in general what is going on at school. Concern was raised over pupils having split teaching in a subject for example mathematics, where there is a difference in teaching style and methods. Some pupils have told their parents not to help with maths as they may do it differently but the school wishes to encourage parents to help.

Some parents felt that the information available on the SQA website was confusing and contained too much jargon. Struan recommended Nationals in a Nutshell documents that will be available on the school website once it goes live.

A subgroup has been set up and will meet soon – Colin Turnbull, David Wyllie, Sue Ann Grant, Penny Fuller, Nicola Sedgwick, Liz Strachan, Yvonne Buckingham (reserve).

ACTION: a subgroup will meet to develop ways to share resources and ideas with parents to support their child's learning. Colin Turnbull and Moira Milne

7 Bids for funding

The school has purchased some Christmas decorations and will ask for a donation from the Parent Council at the next meeting after discussion with the primary school. It was suggested that the Alford Christmas Lights Group may be able to help with future years but at present they have enough to do in the village itself. Alford Community Council may be able to help. A Christmas tree was donated by the Innes family from the Forbes estate.

8 ASHOKA – Changemaker Schools Programme

This group works worldwide and the aim of its Changemaker Schools programme is to build up sufficient young people with the ability to make things better and change their world. It has been funded by many large companies and has elected fellows from varied backgrounds. Alford Academy may be the first school in Scotland to become a Changemaker School, if it is selected to join. For further information please visit the website ashoka.org and look under Focus Areas at Changemaker Schools.

9 Character and Values Education

Ian Findlay provided those at the meeting with a summary of the draft Framework for National Improvement in Scotland. Ian is involved in the development of the framework. The 6 areas identified for improvement are

- 1.School improvement
- 2.School leadership
- 3.Teacher professionalism
- 4.Assessment of children's progress
- 5.Parental involvement
- 6.Performance information

Ian Findlay asked for feedback on this draft, and in particular regarding overuse of jargon. An important area is parental involvement. It was felt that new ways to encourage parental involvement were needed, which will be discussed further by the sub group for "supporting learning". (see 6) It is not possible to predict the context within which our young people will live their adult lives and they need skills that reflect this such as adaptability, resilience and other so-called "soft" skills. Moira explained how these other skills are developed through the teaching of other subjects as part of the curriculum for excellence rather than being taught separately.

The use of IT in school was discussed – pupils need to learn how to use IT safely, and use it in positive ways to help with learning. A question was raised that not all pupils may have access to computers at home – Struan reported that after a recent survey only a small number of pupils did not have access at home. The school has laptops and iPads that can be used during school time.

Moira informed us that work is underway to revisit the school's values in the new campus. Values of Alford Academy are currently wisdom, integrity, compassion, justice and respect. The school wishes to improve the language and methods used to communicate these values to pupils and parents. The National Parent Forum has lots of information on its website and produces literature, some of which has recently been sent out.

10 AOB

10.1 A query was raised regarding the finish times of SQA exams on the days that the school finishes early. Moira said that this will be looked into and parents advised.

10.2 Parents gave very positive feedback about the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme that is being provided by the school and commended the staff involved.

Close 9.10 pm

Date of next meeting

Wednesday 30th March 2016 at 7pm – meet at reception

ACTION POINTS

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Buddy: Moira Milne

ACTION: Liz Strachan will attend a student council meeting. Moira Milne will arrange.

ACTION: Tara Crooke to liaise with school regarding setting up closed social media group.

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