

Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce

Parent Council Meeting

16th March 2015

Meeting Minutes

Welcome

Ed and Fiona introduced themselves as the new chair of the Parent Council and expressed their thanks to the previous Office Bearers. The plan is to continue the work that has been started by the previous officers and find ways to always improve and find out what we can build now that the school is past the settlement stage.

Secretary Report

Nothing much to report except to make people aware that the Parent Council now has a Twitter account (@parantantnp) which is being used to pass on announcements and generally relay messages put out by email or passing on other relevant announcements by other groups on Twitter. This follows from the existence of the Facebook group and a call was made for anyone who has any further ideas on how to improve communication, whether via social media or otherwise.

Eco Schools

Alistair Davidson, Education and Learning Co-ordinator for Keep Scotland Beautiful made a presentation about Eco Schools and what is involved in the scheme. Keep Scotland Beautiful is the organisation that manages the Eco Schools program in Scotland.

The first thing was an assessment around the room to try and find out what people know about Eco Schools and what the program is all about. Many parents came back with a variety of relevant answers showing a good awareness of the scheme.

To introduce the purpose of Eco Schools Alistair showed a short video presentation put together by Stop Climate Chaos on Climate Change and its consequences on everyday life and everyday expectations (<https://youtu.be/h7O989zLyzg> for those interested).

Eco Schools is about involving everybody to take a bit of action to tackle Climate Change. It's about pupils taking action but also ourselves, teachers and parents. Studies have shown that things can really happen if parents are involved.

Keep Scotland Beautiful is also involved in the green flag award for parks. The Challenge fund is money from the Scottish Government that they give out to community groups and schools that embark in projects that combat the effects of Climate Change. The Sustainable Scotland Network is a cross-local authorities network which allows people to be put in touch with the right people to take the right type of action for example to reduce energy.

Learning for Sustainability is a whole-school approach which enables schools and the wider community to build the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence needed to develop practices and take decisions which are compatible with a sustainable and equitable world. It's an entitlement that all children should have. It covers outdoor learning, global citizenship and education for sustainable development and teachers now have to prove that they are working towards Learning for Sustainability in their practice (note: For more information you can refer to the General Teaching Council for Scotland at <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/learning-for-sustainability.aspx> or the Scottish Government at <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools/LearningforSustainabilityReport>)

Note from Head Teacher: every school in Edinburgh has been offered a place at a conference in May on sustainability and Kirsty McKinnon is going along to represent the school.

Eco schools is one of the ways that schools can achieve Learning for Sustainability. Eco Schools is one of the largest programmes in the world connecting around 50 million children. It's the biggest learning network in the world. It's an international initiative of the FEE (Foundation for Environmental Education) designed to encourage whole-school action on sustainable development education issues. It's an environmental management tool which can be used to tackle waste, energy use, improve transport etc but it's also about learning.

The Eco Schools programme can be an integral part of children's learning.

Facts and figures: 59 countries participate worldwide. The first school in Scotland to join the programme was in 1995. There are 3 level of awards: Bronze award, Silver award and Green Flag. 98.5% of local authority schools are registered as an eco school. Recently handed over the 1800th flag

How it works?

There are 7 elements to becoming an eco-school, it's a framework with criteria but it's up to the school to decide how they fit within that framework as long as these steps are followed:

1. Eco Committee

Committee made up of pupils across the school, even nursery pupils can contribute and teachers and parents. The committee starts by doing an environmental review.

2. Environmental Review

Walk around and check whether eg. the school has a system for waste paper. The review can be divided across classes. From the review you get an idea on the areas the school needs to improve or where it's doing well already. From the review the committee decides on an action plan.

3. Action Plan

Simple, achievable goals. The action plan is then monitored.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

For example a campaign to tackle excessive litter. Monitor the problem before the campaign and after the campaign and decide if the campaign was successful in tackling the problem.

5. Linking to the curriculum

For example learning about energy in correlation with an action plan to make sure the lights are being switched off systematically.

6. Involving the whole school and the wider community

Reaching out to the wider community and see if they can help. For example Friends of Pilrig Park

7. Eco Code

Could be pupils coming up with a song or chant that shows everyone what they're all about as an eco school.

There are 10 topics to choose from. Litter is a mandatory topic and of the remaining 9 the school then picks 2 to work on over the course of their first 2 years as an eco school. The other 9 topics are:

- Biodiversity
- Energy
- Food and the Environment
- Health and Well-Being
- School Grounds
- Sustaining our World
- Transport
- Waste Minimisation
- Water

For bronze and silver awards, the school registers on-line and self-assesses (there are application forms in Gaelic too). Once an application is received it's passed to an assessor who will make contact with the school to arrange a visit. They'll speak to the staff and the pupils, have a look around to see the actions the school has done. Awards are then renewed every 2 years through the same application process but 2 new topics are then chosen to work on.

For the first green flag they look for 1 year worth of action and for subsequent flags it's 2 years worth of action.

Good Practice

Alistair told a short story of a local community of kids who decided to tackle dog poo problem by creating a musical, putting on a show and inviting the community to see the show. The musical was very successful and had a real impact on the amount of dog poo littering their community. Kids can be as creative as they like to engage their local community to tackle such problems.

Parents can get involved with eco schools via social media if they're unable to come to committees in person. They can also join the eco committee, help fundraise for projects. Each school is required to do a day of action, eg Earth Hour and parents can come and help organise that. It's likely that some parents have skills among the 10 topic areas they can use to help the school.

Contact details:

website: <http://www.ecoschoolsscotland.org>

Facebook: facebook.com/EcoSchoolsScotland

Twitter: @EcoSchoolsScot

Parents can use the hash tags #ESSparents and #ecoschools to discuss eco schools on social media.

Q&A summary:

Pupils decide what topics are most important to prioritise. There's a need for balance between eco committee decisions and the actions taken by pupils within the school and outdoors.

Litter is very important, the assessment used is similar to that of the council.

Tip on how to keep it going: think of it as small steps rather than one massive undertaking, come up with smart action plan points that can be achieved and involve as many people as possible.

Composition of an eco committee: ideally a representative from each class across the school.

Try to link in with other schools or high schools to bounce ideas off other eco committees.

Parents involvement depends on their skills and interests, they can help with the day of action and also bring action into the home too.

Head Teacher summary of where the school is at at the present:

Ms Pyper and other teachers have started an eco committee and classes are in the process of selecting a rep or already have a rep (including the nursery). The challenge is finding a time that works within the school day to have meeting that does not conflict with classes of the staff involved and inviting interested parents who are able to come to the meetings too. The input of the parents in the Health Committee at Tollcross was crucial, there was 3 or 4 parents who were able to come to committee meetings once a fortnight.

Ms Pyper: The committee is working towards bronze self assessment. The review is ongoing but it's a long process. The first meeting was around 8.30am. Alistair advises that as a minimum there should be a couple of meetings per term, there could be a permanent agenda item on each Parent Council meeting.

To conclude Alistair asked from feedback as they haven't had much dealing with Parent Councils and they are looking to improve on that.

Head Teacher Report

Much has happened since the last meeting which was about 5 weeks of school.

1. Sharing and Learning morning

It was a big success at the open doors morning and there was an average turnout of 44% of families, which was very positive and encouraging as this took place during a work day. Asking the children in the afternoon about why they thought parents were visiting they said it was so that they would see how hard they were working, and how good their Gaelic was

Lots of helpful and positive feedback from parents. The strong message was for this to happen again. Some suggested to turn it into a special event. One nice idea was to have some of the children teach parents something when they come in to the class.

2. Parent Consultation meeting

Consultations are for all children P1-P7 and pre-schoolers. ParentMail was used for the first time to set the appointment which seems to have worked. Expected topics of discussion are targets that the children have had and the progress they made.

Some people have asked how do we know where children should be with their learning, which is quite a complex question. There is guidance from the Curriculum for Excellence and the Significant Aspects of Learning which is a summarised version of that. The message that is being passed on to parents is that what the teachers are looking for from all children is to see that they are making progress. If parents feel that their child(ren) aren't making progress or if they are not challenged enough they should approach the teachers about it. The aim is to find that balance between making progress, being challenged and achieving success.

3. Staff Training Summary

A Friday afternoon where staff worked on language games with one of the development officers for modern languages, Anne Robertson. Although she mainly works with the delivery

of French, Spanish etc so many of the methods she uses are very transferable to the work done at the school.

The staff continued with Science which is a priority across the cluster. There was an in-service on “dark skies” and one is coming up on “owls” and another on “water”. There has been some money from the Edina Trust which has enabled the school to order some science resources and there is a plan to visit Sciennes to visit their science room to help organise how things are done here. Mrs MacPhail extends her thanks to Mairi Thompson who has spent a lot of time organising this.

A Friday afternoon was spent learning about Big Writing. The concept is new to most of the staff. It’s about focusing on using interesting vocabulary, interesting sentences through openings and the way we join sentences together and good use of punctuation to make writing very effective. Children are assessed individually so they and their teacher know where they are and know what steps they need to take in order to improve and take their writing forward to a higher standard.

4. Early Years Conference

Members of staff have been attending the early years conference at Hibs stadium, pre-schoolers went along and handed leaflets over in Gaelic which went very well and was very well received. 3 members of staff attended and the big focus was on building the ambition, which is new guidance on early learning and childcare (note: more information at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/earlylearningandchildcare/buildingtheambition/index.asp>)

5. Modern Languages

The Comenius project is coming to a close now. Thanks are extended to Mrs Cunniffe who has been a key person for this project. There was a visit from some Spanish teachers which was the final part of the project.

Modern languages will be a focus at the cluster. Ryan Irvine, head of modern languages has come up with several different models we can look at as a way forward.

Anne passed on to Mr MacDonald the names of 2 parent volunteers who have expressed an interest in looking at modern languages and Gaelic and how this is being planned for for secondary education

6. Local Mòd

This is happening at the end of April (24, 25). Part of it is happening at the school part of it in other places within Leith. Sgoil-àraich as well as P1 and P2 classes will all be involved as

classes. Mrs McLuskey and Mrs Collin are working with individuals and small groups and the choir.

There won't be any national Mòd excursion from the school in October this year this is because both Mrs Collin and Mrs McLuskey are unable to attend due to family commitments.

Mrs McLeod clarifies some points about the financial aspect of such excursions:

Last year the total cost for the outing was £6,700. Income was £7,000. Fundraising was done ourselves, the children raised about £1,000 between the sponsored walk and the tuck shop and then we got some donations from the letters that the fundraising committee sent out. Pre-mòd concert and donations from Comann na Pàrant gave us £900. Each family paid £170 per head. Looking at the funding, families could have been charged £20 less but we had to pay the hostel, payment, bus and food upfront and these had to be paid before we knew what the fundraising reached. Each venue is different as costs vary depending on the distance to travel and the catering. Last year the hostel provided the food which was far easier than relying on parents cooking for 30 or 40 children and that incurred higher costs but they were also able to cater for special dietary requirements.

fundraising: tuck shop every day for about 10 weeks. Lots of work but a good way to put maths into practice so very worthwhile. Last year only P6 and P7 who were going to the event were running this. They also did a sponsored walk like every other class but while other classes chose to spend their money differently, P6 and P7s used that to fund the trip to the Mòd. No meeting has been set up yet to decide what the way forward is for this year. Some of the children who were at the Mòd are going to Ben Mòr at the beginning of May which is another £200. Usually the children going the Mòd are also involved in the Ben Mòr trip which means the same families are being asked for money. Both trips are so different you can't really choose between one or the other.

A wider conversation needs to be had at some point about the way forward with regards to the Mòd and Mrs McPhail asked for some parent volunteers, so far 2 have come forward (Jean-Loup Rebourts-Smith, and Marion Thompson), to form a working group. In a few years there will be 60 children in P6 and P7 (120 children altogether) which will be logistically more complex. The choir can only have 26 children.

It took Mrs McLeod months to find the right accommodation. Youth hostels weren't initially an option due to having to share with other groups which raises issues related to child protection but as there was nowhere else, that's where they had to stay.

What some schools do is let children go individually (with their parents) and only meet with the choir leader up to half an hour before the competition starts. That means the staff only goes to the event for one or two days but are not in charge of the children. The drawback of children going individually is that they miss out on the group camp part of the trip, which is important for them

7. Playground Project

The project is going forward. the drain survey was carried out which enables Martin and his team to move forward. A meeting is scheduled with Martin, the designer. We've agreed with parents and children and staff that the focus will be on the Pilrig Park side of the school. We need a bigger plan so as to know what to fundraise for and have a better idea on how the different parts of the school are going to be linked in together.

Alistair points out that the more children are involved with that the better for green flag accreditation.

8. Classing for 2015/2016

60 children, including 3 out of catchment are enrolled to start in P1 in August, which means all children who registered got a place. Of the 60, 50 are currently at Sgoil-àraich, which is about 83%. The 12-class organisation can go forward, however that's subject to change all the way up to August if there are changes in the numbers of enrolled pupils.

9. Staffing

Starting from August there will be vacancies for 5 full time teachers, that includes Mrs Wight's maternity leave which is not a permanent vacancy.

There is good hope that some permanent staff will be appointed through the recent recruitment drive that the city of Edinburgh has carried out. Among the applicants they interviewed there were Gaelic speaking teachers. There is also hope to get 2 probationers for next year.

There might be a need to advertise for one post depending on how many teachers the school gets from the Council recruitment and how many probationers the school gets.

Comann na Pàrant has been working hard on this issue both at the local and the national level and the school acknowledges and appreciates their hard work.

If the school has to recruit, there must be a member of the parent council on the interview panel to represent parents though the individual has to have training

10. Congratulations

Congratulations to Mrs Wight and Mr Eaglesfield who have both added children to their families.

11. Neighbourhood Planning application

The planning application was granted some time ago but boards have just gone up saying the work is going to start soon. The school have met with the building company and they will work together as the project goes forward to ensure the safety of the children and all work is done as should be.

Concerns were raised about access to the construction site. Staff met with Andrew May from the Transport Working Group.

A suggestion was brought forward to engage the children with the construction to keep them interested and that is something likely to happen.

Working Groups

Fundraising

School auction will be run again. Quick call to request donations from parents. Previous auctions even had offers of babysitting which proved popular. Last year raised about £1300 at the auction.

Plans for a film evening for the kids. Proposed date of 4th of September, looking to organise it as a way for new parents to get to know each other. Have a U film for the kids and later a "cheese and wine" evening for parents. Looking to put together a team of people who can offer technical skills, serving things on the night etc... Trinity school ran a similar event where they managed to raise about £1000 and the kids had fun coming along in their onesies and pillows.

Reminder for people to use <http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk>. There's currently 45 members (49 as of this writing) At the time of the meeting £144 was raised (£146.13 as I type these notes). The service also has a reminder bar which can trigger alerts when buying something from a registered service asking if you want to go through easyfundraising in case you forget (for Google Chrome install the browser extension at <http://goo.gl/6wG4dh>).

For the auction there is a suggestion to have it as a silent auction or maybe even hold it during the film night.

Events

Dates are sorted out for the spring faire.

Outdoors

Outdoors development would fit nicely with Eco Schools. An ongoing issue is to try and develop a space that will be used for learning, not just for play, and which will be designed and built in ways consistent with wider values about our environment within practical and financial constraints. As the Learning for Sustainability requirements will soon need to be dealt with and schools will have to demonstrate action towards them, a great outdoor space would facilitate this

The outdoor group now works in a subgroup to support the head teacher and her staff to finalise the 30k project with Martin Stevens. The infant side will be the site for the first phase of work. the first meeting of this working group is to be confirmed but should happen soon.

Other

Another Ladies Night is being organised. Organisers are collecting donations of ladies clothes and school uniforms. The event will be on the 12th of June, A ticketing system will be in place for school uniforms, so people who donate school uniforms can get some of the value back. £1300 was raised last year.

Concert on 25th of March

Pre-mòd concert on 29th of September.

Out of Catchment

There are a number of parents living outside the City of Edinburgh catchment area who have children at the school who face the prospect of having their children's younger siblings not given a space at Taobh na Pàirce due to the school following the same rules as every other school within Edinburgh.

Comann na Pàrant are going to discuss this at their meeting on the 23rd of March along with the future of Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh which is growing. There are large numbers of pupils getting into GME and there is a growing concern that some children won't be accepted in primary or even at nursery. The discussion will try to find a consensus among affected parents on how to continue to provide GME to parents who wish it for their children without running the risk of being turned because of capacity issues. Issues also include parents with children in primary trying to get into secondary and who wish to continue with GME and parents with children already in secondary but where GME is not meeting expectations for instance when levels of fluency are falling.

Treasurer Report

Current balance is just under £4,000. Only small value cheques are still to come off. £1700 for the christmas faire and £1200 for the library fund paid to the school. No expected expenditure for the moment.

Call to parents and working groups: Please let the Parent Council know if you have some expected expenditures or revenues.

Second Hand Items

Mike Sutherland proposes to set up a school network of trade in or exchange for items people want to pass on. The system could be a mix of Freecycle and Gumtree but restricted to the school where parents are given a space to post ads on the Parent Council website perhaps to advertise their goods.

Could be a good platform to resell school uniforms and for new parents to acquire new ones if the quality is still there.

Decide whether it's free or a voluntary donation system. Proposal to setup a PayPal account for easy payments.

A few ideas were thrown around on how this could practically work.

Conclusion

Last Meeting's minutes were approved.

No other business.