

MINUTE OF MEETING OF TRA PARENT COUNCIL

HELD ON THURSDAY 29th May 2014 AT 6.45PM

PRESENT	Iain Morrison (Chair) Fiona Robertson (Vice Chair) Donald Beaton (Treasurer) Peter McIntyre (Secretary) Brian Sinclair (Deputy Rector) Wim Chalmet (Deputy Rector) Ann Allan David Borland Rosslyn Borland Colm Farrell Amanda Fulton Nigel Jones Alastair Kennedy Angela Main Angela Marwick Ella McIntyre Dave Mercer Roy Munro Jane Ross Alison Scott Nina Westwater
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ITEM	ACTION
1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES	
MC welcomed everyone to the meeting and all present introduced themselves and their connections to the school. Apologies were received from the Rector Donnie Macleod, Eileen Cockburn (staff), Dan Smith and Iseabail Moffat (school captains) and the following community members: Myra Campbell, Karen Denoon, Kirsty Gordon, Alison Holden, Ros Jones, John Macleod, Rebecca Nankivell, Alasdair Rhind	
2 GUEST SPEAKER	
IM introduced our guest speaker, Mr. Steve Walker, Managing Director, Stagecoach North Scotland.	
Mr Walker listened to concerns from parents and responded to questions from the floor.	
The biggest concern came from the seaboard villages and the use of a single decker bus rather than double decker resulting in overcrowding.	
Mr Walker confirmed that, if there is a problem with a bus, the Nigg single decker bus is diverted to pick up students.	
Parents were concerned that there have been a number of issues since January resulting in students starting on their bus, having to disembark for the relief bus but missing it and not arriving at school.	
However, there is not a problem when a double deck bus is used.	
Another issue is that the school bus is also a service bus. Some children (number not known) were told to get off the bus to give way to paying passengers.	

Mr. Walker confirmed that should not happen and promised to investigate.

Mr Walker did commend TRA students for their standard of behaviour on the bus and there was rarely any problem.

IM thanked Mr Walker for answering our questions and efforts in improving our bus service.

3 **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON March 20th 2014**

Accuracy / Approval

Following scrutiny by those present, the Minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

Matters Arising / Action Points

One parent saw students smoking when they leave school and asked what the school was doing about it.

Mr Sinclair is the designated member of staff responsible for supervising the arrivals and departures of school buses. He said there were about a dozen hard core smokers at school. Unfortunately school staff cannot search students for smoking gear.

The first response by the school is to offer support to stop smoking. After two warnings the student is excluded from school.

Staff do check outside the school, and patrol the High Street at lunchtime, but Mr Sinclair emphasised that there is only a small number of students smoking.

There were no other matters arising.

4 **TREASURER'S REPORT**

DB gave the Treasurer's Report.

There was no expenditure since the last meeting.

The £18 float (cash in hand) was included as Income.

The Highland Council allocation for next year is expected to be £587.70

That will bring our Parent Council balance to approximately £1,100 in the next school year.

It was decided to purchase a gift in recognition of the retirement of caretaker William Gunn.

It was also decided to purchase a gift plate to recognise the retirement of our Rector Donnie Macleod.

Unallocated money – about £500 – will be donated by the Parent Council to the school. Staff will be asked for ideas for specific projects and invited to submit bids. These will be considered at the September meeting.

It was also suggested to have a Prizegiving fund of £75. Details to be worked out at the next meeting.

5 **OPEN FORUM Q&A**

IM led the meeting in a Q&A session in a mixture of submitted questions and open discussion. Questions were answered by both Deputy Rectors, Brian Sinclair and Wim Chalmet.

1. Buddy system for new students – the school will continue to use S6 students rather than S3/4 as it is good for their college CV.
2. Any news on a new Gaelic teacher yet (asked by 4 parents)?

There will be a supply teacher from June. Next school year from August, Gaelic will be taught by a new Probationer for the whole year for 21 periods a week.

3. The new text notification service when a child not in school – works, but if you have more than one child, text message is unclear as to which child.

This will be investigated by the school.

Improvements may be limited by the system. The system records which message is delivered. Any feedback reply by parent is also logged.

4. Dornoch and Golspie pupils get buses home from after-school activities and school socials? Is there any scope for this from TRA?

Students from the Port, Balintore and Fearn can get a Stagecoach bus free on showing their school ID.

Stagecoach do not operate west to Ardgay and Bonar. There is no funding for transport for after school activities.

However most activities take place at lunchtime.

The biggest problem is sports and socials events. Problem: there are often too few riders to make hiring a bus economic. However, the use of taxis might be a better option. This will be looked into.

There is also a problem with scheduling hockey games - training is often cancelled – this will be looked into to ensure consistency of message, and keep up enthusiasm levels.

IM

Action – put out request for parent help IM

It was noted that for parents would need appropriate qualifications and PVG clearance.

5. Does TRA enter the Young Enterprise Scotland's regional awards?

Not this year. This year focused on STEM and ecological type challenges. Maybe next year.

6. Why do History pupils get a trip abroad but Geography pupils do not?

The History exam has a paper on WWI – so there is relevance in having a trip to the battlefields in Belgium.

Geography students do have two trips – the Struie and Cairngorms.

Trips are based around the curriculum.

7. Outside College courses offered to senior pupils.

Pupils on day release are not getting all the information from the college that full time students do. Sometimes lectures are cancelled or tests planned without

informing our pupils. There has been a problem with communication.

8. Will there be study leave for pupils next year?

There is a new policy from Highland Council:

All pupils will remain in school during May. Next year, students will only have the day off before their exam.

How that is implemented will be discussed and will be brought before the Parent Council for discussion / input at next meeting.

But FR pointed out that while this is the new policy at present - policies are subject to change if parents express a valid reason for change.

There are implications for future school trips with the new policy - with 6 teachers away supervising on these there is less cover at school.

9. Could a drugs awareness session be arranged for parents?

This was agreed to be a good idea. Plan to use the same people as teach students – Youth Action team and Action for Children.

It was suggested to have an evening session for parents. Wim Chalmet asked for parent input on topics / format. Email Mr Chalmet at wim.chalmet@highland.ac.uk before the summer if interested.

10. Might it be possible for year 4 pupils to opt out of RME to take an optional subject eg computer science from another institution?

This is not possible for time considerations. There are only 55 mins a week of RME and this is not enough for outside courses.

6 **SCHOOL ACTION PLAN UPDATE IM**

There was a planned support visit from Education Scotland two weeks ago at the beginning of May. They looked at the School Action Plan and interviewed a sample of staff and students.

The response was positive. There has been progress in classroom teaching and in lesson consistency.

There have also been fortnightly visits from our Highland Council Quality Improvement Officer. All teachers will be formally observed 4x by promoted staff.

An Open Evening will be planned before the end of the school year with parents - especially in Science and Art to explain progress and the plan. No date yet.

The Action Plan is running to schedule and on target in all areas with the exception of Gaelic.

7 **APPOINTMENT OF NEW RECTOR IM**

The post has been advertised twice. Highland Council have readvertised it as the initial advert was badly timed during a holiday period.

Now they will advertise for an acting head to take us into next school year.

Questions asked why this was done when we had 4 applicants. Is there a numerical trigger? Or were the candidates not suitable?

The Parent Council called for a vote to instruct Iain Morrison as Chairman to express their displeasure to the Highland Council and insist on a meeting with Maurice McIntyre with the Parent Council.

A vote was held and a majority of those eligible to vote voted in favour of the motion.

It was also requested that the Council look again at the people who have already applied.

The delay is unfortunate in that it prevents any handover with the outgoing Rector.

The lack of good communication with the school and parents was to be regretted. (and concern was expressed about the effect of morale on those candidates who have applied...)

8 3-18 CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

FR gave an update on development. From June onwards consultants will come to Tain to look for a suitable site.

There will also be a separate Gaelic primary.

Currently 3 sites are being actively considered: TRA, Craighill and Kirksheaf.

The consultants will give feedback to Highland Council Committee in September with the Capital Plan.

It was noted that the Tain proposal was competing for resources with other areas – particularly the proposed Alness / Invergordon merger.

Only one can be approved.

Currently the Tain option is more positive and the Craighill and Knockbreck schools are in the worst condition in the area. The Alness / Invergordon location is also in dispute.

9 SCHOOL CAPTAINS' REPORTS

There was no report as both Captains still have exams and were not present.

10 RECTOR'S REPORT

BS and WC gave a full and detailed account of recent and current developments at the school. These included:

- 59 exams have been sat and with 8 exams still to go only 2 pupils had not turned up due to illness.

Pupils were well organised and prepared. This was commented on by our Chief Invigilator, Catriona Gray.

Next week pupils come back to start their 4th and 5th year.

- Health and Well Being days were held for S2 with information on what's on

in Tain and opportunities with High Life.

They also heard a guest athlete speaker – Roddy Riddle.

- The Prefects buddy system will go ahead next year. A discussion will be held with S5 / 6 on the prefect system.
- All events/incidents in school in S 1 / 2 /3 will be recorded - both good and bad.

The school now has evidential data to inform parents – positive referrals and also any low level disruptive behaviour.

There will be a pilot to send out information every month to relevant parents

- A new management system will come into play next month. Details to be forthcoming.
- Outings – There are several trip happening in the next few days:

A battlefields trip to Belgium
The French department trip to Paris
The Geography trip to Glen Alladale

- A Referendum debate is being organised
- The Award ceremony is next week with Roddy Riddle as the guest speaker.
- Staffing:

Donnie Macleod is retiring as Rector at the end of the school year.

Liam Sutherland (Probationer Chemistry) has successfully applied for a permanent post at Fortrose Academy. A new Probationer has been allocated to TRA and will start in August.

Eileen Cockburn will continue as Acting Head of Science next year

Rob Jackson Business Studies is leaving and emigrating to Australia. His post has been advertised but there were no applicants. The post has now been re-advertised. A temporary supply teacher may be necessary.

Greg Pumphrey has been appointed as Head Janitor

David Bremner is retiring after 42 years of service at TRA. A replacement Probationer has been allocated to TRA starting in August.

A Gaelic probationer has been allocated to TRA starting in August.

There was discussion on the best time to make a presentation by the Parent Council to Donnie Macleod on his retirement. Iain Morrison to liaise with the Administration on a suitable time.

There was a question concerning the Business Management subject – does it include computer programming? The answer is no.

There is currently no money available to appoint a computing teacher but a student in S6 could do it on their own through day release on Fridays in Inverness. But this might prove difficult to work in practice.

It was requested that there be feedback on the new report system to parents at the next meeting.

The importance of running trips was acknowledged but it may not be possible to arrange them all at the same time.

Hopefully Gaelic trips can restart – and also debates.

IM was asked if there was anything the Parent Council could do to recognise the 42 years service of David Bremner – the longest serving teacher in TRA.
Input from parents was requested.

The Parent Council commended TRA on running so many trips over the year. It is appreciated that these represent a significant investment of time and effort by the staff, but they are consistently of high value to the pupils.

11 COUNCIL BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

Councils need to make more cuts. Currently 40% of the budget is allocated to education.

Parent Councils can influence decisions by making their comments known at Council meetings. Also by submitting their thoughts online at the council website www.highland.gov.uk

Some schools (eg Golspie?) have moved to a shorter school week but are maintaining the same overall number of hours.

12 PARENT COUNCIL EMAIL PILOT

An email address list of parent was set up this year using Gmail. Initial comments have been positive and it is hoped it will be continued next year.

It also makes it easier for us to communicate with other parent councils.

In addition it provides consistency when office bearers change.

An updated data form will be sent to parents.

13 MACKENZIE AND CORMACK SUPPORT

IM illustrated this as an example of parent involvement.

Parent Nigel Jones met with school with an offer of sponsoring some prizes for not attending school.

Also to provide trophies for subjects not currently recognised:

Maths
Science
Social subjects

Nigel also produced a Handbook for S5 S6.

He also arranged through his employer Mackenzie and Cormack to provide school visits to the Scottish Courts Service and have students meet the Sherriff.

Iain posed a question to Council Members - What can YOU do?

14 **MEETINGS IN 2014-15**

It was thought to have some variety in the time of meetings and not always meet on Thursday evenings.

Specific dates will be announced later – but two will remain Thursdays and two on another night.

Holding a meeting during the day will also be considered as it works well at Craighill school and may attract a different set of parents who are unavailable in the evening.

15 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no further business.