

Madras Parent Council – Parent Forum

AGM 14 September 2011 – Draft Minutes

Apologies for absence – Cllrs Morrison and Brett, H Paul, J Barnett,

Present – approx. 34 people

Callum McLeod as deputy chair of the Parent Council took the chair.

Minutes from 2010 AGM – accepted as true record.

Chair's Report – this was read out by the deputy chair, Calum McLeod.

Madras College Parent Forum AGM – 14th September 2011

Chairman's Report

The positions of Chairman and Vice Chairman had remained unfilled since the 2010 AGM, a situation which was unsatisfactory especially in light of the ongoing negotiations on realising the Langlands site for a new school building and the need for an independent parental voice on that and other issues towards Fife Council and in the media. In late 2010, I and Callum MacLeod agreed to serve in these roles for the rest of the session.

I am grateful to the Rector, Ian Jones, for having chaired previous meetings and to Callum MacLeod for taking the chair tonight in my unavoidable absence on business in Edinburgh. As Chairman, I have enjoyed an open and constructive relationship with Ian Jones (Rector), Cllr Robin Waterston (Deputy Chair of Education Committee), Ken Greer (Executive Director of Education) and John McLaughlin (Area Education Officer). Direct contact was also established with Prof. Louise Richardson (University Principal) and Prof. Alyson Tobin (Dean i/c academic collaboration project), our MP and MSPs, and local councillors of all parties.

Among the events I have attended were the Burns Supper (highly recommended), the Fashion Show in aid of Namibia, Academic Collaboration Meeting, an Open Mic Talent Show (as judge), various Parents Evenings and the Senior School Prize Giving Ceremony. Callum MacLeod deserves special thanks for running a tuck shop at the Fashion Show.

Responding to unsupportive press comment from the St Andrews Preservation Trust, the Rector and I addressed the Trustees to make the educational case for the Langlands site. Andy Primmer and I had a confidential meeting with the HMIE Inspector during his statutory visit to examine the educational case for merging and relocating Madras College. I attended the consultation exhibitions in St Andrews and Newport where I spoke to parents and community councillors about the proposal. Dawn Waddell and I recently participated in an appointment panel for Depute Rector posts. The Parent Council provided grants to support equipment required by the hockey and piping clubs.

The session has again been dominated by discussions on (lack of) progress towards the new Madras College building. In the view of many parents, this has been at the expense of other important issues with which parents are concerned, in particular current trends in academic attainment and performance.

Whilst the termination of negotiations for a new building on the Langlands site is a huge disappointment to many parents, most of whose children are now unlikely to see a new school building, I have welcomed the clarity which the University's decision has brought. Many opinions have been expressed among parents and in the wider community about the various

alternatives and a preliminary meeting with Fife Council last week explored these options and indicated a possible process and timetable leading to a new school in 2015. 2

As Chairman, mindful of the wide range of views among parents, I have been careful to restrict my public comments only to procedural rather than substantive questions, and have maintained silence regarding my own preferences. The continuing unavailability of the necessary factual information on the various options means that serious informed debate cannot take place, and I have again called for the Council to publish a policy discussion paper covering the pros and cons of all the options, and giving a reasoned, evidence-based case for its favoured proposal. Since we understand that critical decisions will be taken at Council committees in September and November, it is desirable that this information be placed in the public domain as soon as possible to enable people to evaluate the options.

Given the slipping timetable, the opinions of those parents with children at primary and nursery school, and still not in education, are now more relevant than parents of Madras College pupils in regard to future school building provision. I have been asked if our Parent Council could help convene a forum where all parents from around the catchment area could meet to discuss and agree on a common position. This idea, coupled with a possible online poll of parents, might constructively contribute to achieving a majority consensus on this important decision which will affect future as well as present generations of children.

As you may be aware, I am not standing for election as Chairman, a decision which I took some time ago for various reasons. However, if nominated, I am ready to serve as a member of the Parent Council for the new session. I hope that tonight's meeting will elect a new Chair to act as our essential voice in discussions with the Council and to represent parents in the media and in the communities in which we live. I was encouraged to hear the Leader of the Council offer to engage more with parents on all our areas of concern. I have been advised that in the past the Executive Director of Education convened regular meetings with the chairs of all Parent Councils in Fife to exchange news and views. The reinstatement of such meetings – perhaps on a school cluster basis as well as Fife-wide – would be a worthwhile approach to increasing parental engagement.

Going forward, it is the view of most members that the Parent Council should reduce the time spent on discussing the new building to enable it to concentrate on how parents might constructively support the school in raising overall levels of attainment and raising funds to enhance our children's overall learning, cultural and recreational experience.

A sub-group is already working towards delivering a major fundraising event in September 2012, and I would wish to congratulate them on taking forward this exciting project. Similar sub-groups might also be formed to address both the delivery of a new building and improvements in learning outcomes.

Finally, may I thank all members of the Parent Council - parents, councillors, Rector and school staff, and especially Callum MacLeod, Dawn Waddell and Bruce Sinclair – for their regular attendance and contributions to our discussions, and for their guidance, advice and support.

John Barnett, Chairman, Madras College Parent Council/12.9.11

Treasurer's Report – The 50/50 Club brought in useful income, thanks to Debbie and members of the Club. Money was spent on donations to the school hockey club to buy protective clothing, on donations to fund bag covers for the Madras Pipe band, on additional insurance for the fashion show, and on paying for hosting the PC website by an internet service provider. Thanks were expressed to Euan Sparks for auditing the accounts.

Rector's Report

Development priorities were identified a year ago; the current situation is summarised as:-

- 1) Attainment – initial raw data for 2010-11 looks encouraging. More analysis is to be done.
- 2) Inclusion Policy – came into effect in February
- 3) Reward Systems – S3/4 reward system reviewed, and more consistent through the school.
- 4) Restorative Approaches – Some inappropriate behaviour is now being addressed by helping offenders see the problems that their behaviour is causing. Staff are getting CPD to help them in this work.
- 5) Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) - This is making its way through the school, and is now in place up to S2. A new admin system is to be produced by Christmas to help map the curriculum, and align reporting and assessment. Senior teachers will review the map looking for overlaps, and hope to demystify CfE. A seminar will be provided for parents on one evening before Christmas.
- 6) Assessment is for Learning – The school is identifying good practice. Teaching and learning strategies are being developed. Staff are making classroom visits for peer observation of teaching. Better strategies are being developed for self evaluation.
- 7) Quality Assurance Calendar – Lots of data, the school will focus on what needs to be found out, and where and when they can engage with pupils, staff, and parents.

The focus for next session will be

- 1) Completing the activities listed above
- 2) Attainment
- 3) Curriculum for Excellence
- 4) Improvement through self-evaluation

The Rector took a number of questions:-

Some parents have concern about attainment levels in Madras that according to published data show a fall over the last five years. The Rector considers it dangerous to take raw data and look at trends without taking into account circumstances such as the doubling of free school meal provision over the same timescale, now being at 10%. More detailed analysis needs to be done. He suggested that the Madras attainment is often the best in Fife, and that 2011 results will show an improvement over 2010. He requested that results in any one subject should not be discussed. A parent suggested that the state of the current buildings may not be helping attainment, but Cllr Waterston suggested that it would be difficult to show a causal link. A parent disagreed that it was inappropriate to discuss performance in individual subjects. The Rector stated he was keen to celebrate success of departments, and will only release information he regards as appropriate. A request was made for the report to the Area Committee that looked at the school's performance to be made public, and this will happen in due course.

A parent asked about the Curriculum for Excellence, and in particular how was achievement to be measured and successful learning judged. Associated with this, on what criteria were Kilrymont Road children chosen to be award winners at the recent ceremony. Where is the support literature on CfE that parents can access? The Rector commented that schools in Scotland do not yet know

what is to happen to certificate courses once CfE reaches up to that level. He reported that he plans a meeting on CfE with parents in due course, and wishes to work with parents on this topic. Setting will occur within the current CfE only in maths, and maybe also in language. There are particular difficulties in trying to allow pupils to carry on the same foreign language from primary school to Madras, but this is done where possible.

A parent felt that the achievements of the Latin department should be celebrated. However, perhaps due to few pupils being exposed to any Latin in school, this year a class did not run. Would it be possible to run some Latin alongside Classics in S1? The Rector agreed to look at this, and committed to keep Latin teaching going. The Latin Friday lunchtime club looks interesting, and S5 and S6 can take Mandarin lessons.

A parent requested a report and/or parent evening rather earlier in the year than currently in order to help parents and pupils consider where strengths lay for choice of courses. The Rector reported the difficulties that the school has in running the old and new systems side by side. He will look at again. A tracking and monitoring system is being established, and if necessary parents will be contacted earlier in the year. It had been hoped that the new online systems would allow parents to access academic records, but this is not close to being made to work.

Update on New Madras

The meeting was reminded of the meeting one week previously with senior members of Fife Council where the meeting was told that Fife Council remains committed to building a New Madras, despite the failure of the plans to build on the Langlands site. Fife Council also committed to have greater engagement with parents as choices are being made. There will be two meetings open to parents, one in the Bridgehead area and one in St Andrews. The Design team is revving up again. The hope was that with a fair wind June 2015 entry to the new school may be possible. The Langlands site option was taken off the table by the University, and Fife Council believes that compulsory purchase is not an option.

Later in the meeting a formal motion to ask Fife Council to consider a Compulsory Purchase Order was defeated by a large majority.

Cllr Waterston stated that the money remains available to build a first class school. It is hoped that things can move quickly enough for a decision to be made at the 10 November meeting of the Education and Children's Services committee.

The meeting noted that exciting though the prospect of the New Madras is, the Parent Council needs to keep under consideration the maintenance of the current buildings. The Rector offered to put on tours of the buildings for parents. The Parent Council is keen to assist the Rector in his efforts to ensure that the existing buildings are fit for purpose.

There was a discussion about the desirability of the Kilrymont Road site. No parent expressed a positive view of a school being built in and around the KR shell, and many spoke of the difficulties associated with decanting children to alternative accommodation and the design restrictions (including an assembly hall that would have to maintain a 1960s character) that would come with

the constraints put on by the listing of the building by Historic Scotland. The Rector and Cllr Waterston were more positive about the redevelopment of the KR site, and felt that discussions with Historic Scotland had been helpful in letting them know what had to be kept and what could be changed. Several parents asked how hard Fife Council had tried to get the building de-listed. A new build on the KR playing fields seems much more attractive than a refurbished building with new extension, not least because this would not force pupils to spend two years in decant huts.

Parents asked for a SWOT analysis of the possible sites.

Elections

The Rector took the chair, and thanked Callum McLeod for chairing the main part of the meeting.

Calum McLeod was nominated and seconded for the position of Deputy Chair, and was elected unopposed.

Dawn Waddell was nominated and seconded as treasurer, and was elected unopposed.

There being fewer parents present than the maximum number permitted on the Parent Council, all those willing to stand were duly elected.

These are:- Rebecca Trengove, Sam Byers, Rhona Froid, Florence Tannion, Linda Hardie, Debbie Cumming, Rachel Naismith, Jo Secker Walker, David Rickman, Karen Barnett, John Barnett, Jayne Fraser, Paul Brown, Rebecca Brown, Henry Paul, Jackie Himpson, Andy Primmer, Bruce Sinclair, Charlotte Kirby, Jane Pettegree, Scott Wilson

The Parent Council also has members from the School Staff and local councilors. Hugh Watson (teacher rep), Cllr Ron Caird noted their wish to remain on the Parent Council

Meeting of Madras Parent Council

14 September 2011

The Rector referred to a consultation document which asked for parental input. The meeting was of the opinion that whatever was best educationally is what should be done.

It was suggested that as the New Madras is discussed further it would be useful to have a forum where there was a representative from each of the feeder primary schools.

Other business was held over to the next meeting.