

**Madras College Parent Council  
Minutes**

**Wednesday 31 October 2012  
Kilrymont Road, 7 pm**

**1. Chairman's opening remarks**

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, including the new pupil representative, Laura Ryan.

**2. Present** - Rory MacLeod, David Rickman, Sally Walker, Keith McCartney, Dawn Waddell, Elizabeth Smart, Hugh Watson, Barry Miller, Paul Brown, Cllr Brian Thomson, Laura Ryan, Rebecca Trengove, Jane Pettegree, Ian Jones, Rachel Naismith, Philip Williams, Charlotte Kirby, Cllr Keith McCartney

**Apologies** – Cllr Tim Brett, Sam Byers, Cllr Bill Connor, Debbie Cumming, Cllr Dorothea Morrison, Rhona Froom, Jayne Fraser, Susan Simpson, Emma Henderson, Cllr Frances Melville, Andy Primmer, Andy Herd, Calum McLeod

**3. Minutes of previous meeting**

These were accepted.

**4. Matters arising**

There were no matters arising that were not due for discussion later in the meeting.

**5. Chairman's Report**

The main issues facing the MPC are on the agenda.

**6. Treasurer's Report**

Due to the huge success of the Grand Fete there is now £6,073.28 in the bank account. Various groups in the School are discussing what they would like to request from this for the benefit of pupils. The wish list is due to be finished within the week. About 5/6 of the total will be allocated after that.

**7. Secretary/Webmaster's Report – Bruce Sinclair**

In process of handing over the reins to Sam Byers. Some communication with Fife Council re New Madras, see later item.

**8. Rector's Report – Ian Jones**

**Attainment**

Good to see lots of success in the School, and it should be noted that the inclusion policy is assisting with this matter. In most of the measures there have been improvements on last year's attainment. In three of the four SQA measures for S4 Madras is in line with the national pattern, and for the fourth is above the national pattern. For S5 all the measures are at or above the national pattern. In all of the published measures relating to S6 attainment Madras is the highest performing secondary school in Fife.

### **Accommodation**

Floor covering issues are being addressed in Kilrymont Road. WiFi was installed in part of South Street last April and it is disappointing that this is not yet functioning. The state of the accommodation has been discussed with councillors. An internal audit has been sent to the Director of Education and the Rector will meet with Ms Playford to discuss a week on Monday. The Fife Council review of accommodation standards that was last done some years ago has been redone recently. It was highlighted that there has been significant deterioration in the accommodation since the last survey, which itself did not present a particularly positive result. The Rector noted that the state of the toilets was unacceptable, including in terms of number, location, and accessibility. There is a particular need to make South Street sufficiently wheelchair accessible to address the needs of a pupil with limited mobility who should be there next session. The chairman and the MPC shared the Rector's concerns, and asked what they could do to support him in his negotiations with FC. The Rector suggested waiting until after the meeting with Ms Playford. Cllr Thomson noted that at the highly successful parent meeting the previous evening several parents had commented that they were appalled at the condition of the building. This is also a sensitive issue amongst staff. In response to a question the Rector indicated that asbestos is not an issue at South Street and is well known and under control in Kilrymont.

### **Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)**

There is an information session next week for S3 pupils and parents. After discussion with staff the school will move to a 35 period week (same length of school day) to facilitate pupils in the senior phase of CfE (corresponding to Standard Grade) being able to take up to six choices of subject. An indicative survey of pupil choices has been carried out to get data that will allow the School to design a set of choices with the broadest appeal to pupils. The School is working to a deadline of Dec 3 to launch the new course choice booklet, which will include entry requirements for all the different courses. An organisation known as the "Tree of Knowledge" will be visiting to assist pupils in making choices.

<http://www.treeof.com/education/>

This will be followed by a subject fair on what is in what course. On 21 January the S3 pupils will get their reports to take home. There will then be one-to-one interviews between pupils and guidance staff about course choices. It is possible for parents to be present if they request this. The parents evening is on 31 January and some time after that the course choice form will be due in.

### **Staffing Changes**

There have been a number of changes in staffing in recent months:-

New Teaching Staff:

Chemistry: Dr Nabi;

English Miss Bassilious & Mrs Thain

Social Subjects Mrs Ham

Art & Design - Ms Bradwell

Home Economics : Mrs Duncan PT

Probationers:

Social Subjects (History) Ms Cairia    Science (Biology) Mr Mackenzie  
Technologies (Computing):    Miss Maleki

#### Teaching Staff

PT.4 Home Economics Mrs Hill PT. 3 Support for Learning Mrs McLaren

#### Temporary Teaching Staff

Home Economics Mrs Bankhead    Support for Learning (DAS) Miss Johnson

#### Single Status

Library Mr Shively (Temp)    Business Manager: Mr Cummings  
Support for Learning: Ms McCartney

Positions being advertised at present : Social Subjects PT;  
Support for Learning Teacher & 3 Support Assistants, English Teacher

Staff Left: Mr MacMillan Chemistry, Mrs MacMillan English, Dr Boyd English,  
Staff on Secondment: Mr Waterston SfL, Mr Hynes English

After the departure of the Classics PT there has been a realignment of the faculty into social subjects. The existing timetable is fully covered by specialists.

#### **Development Plan**

This has now been completed and a summary was distributed to MPC members. This will soon be on the School website.

#### **Literacy Across Learning Policy**

This draft policy document was distributed at the meeting. Members are invited to email comments to the Rector by the end of the following week. This policy involves the cluster primary schools also.

#### **9. Reports from Working Parties and Sub-groups**

##### Fund Raising

'Easyfundraising' has raised £739.29 to date and we should remind parents to sign up.

##### School Consultations on HomeStudy and Communications

The School has consulted on homestudy and communications with some parents, producing the documents that follow this agenda. The Parent Council is invited to discuss in order to feed thoughts into further discussions. Jane Pettergree spoke to these papers, which are attached. The next meeting is on 6 November and members are invited to email Jane before then with any comments they may have.

#### **10. New Madras**

Comments are invited by Fife Council by 9 November. The acting secretary had asked if we may get before our meeting any additional information on the Petheram Bridge site that was going to be explored:-

31.10.12 From Joe Fitzpatrick Head of Education (Communities) "At this stage there are no new factors which are under consideration in relation to Petheram Bridge. The issues already in the public domain ( and covered by the Press ) are likely to remain the significant issues... physical constraints of the site, planning issues, impacts on car parking capacity etc"

*I queried what had happened about the additional work that was mentioned at the public meeting and was told* "The only update I can give is to say that work is ongoing into the feasibility of the Petheram Bridge Site. I know that our Estates people have been considering some of the fundamentals around this location eg site layouts, but are not at the stage of suggesting a further feasibility study."

*From Cllr Frances Melville:-* "Re your final point about any more information on the sites, I have no further information beyond the briefing and comments everyone was sent about the long list. However members of the North East Fife Area Committee will be having site visits to Petheram Bridge, Pipelands and Bridge Street, prior to the Area Meeting of 21st November, when officers from the Education Service and the Planning Policy section of Development Services, will provide briefings, update and we will be asked for views before this goes to the Executive. An opportunity is also being given to members to visit the new Dunfermline High School which I visited last week. This is really to allow members the chance to see what can be provided re Educational needs for 40M - it is a fantastic school and facility and more like a college. Have also spoke to Joe Fitzpatrick who has an email from you asking if there is any more information re Petheram Bridge site and I understand that Colin McCreadie is to get in touch with you today. But many of us still have a lot of questions on different issues re some of the sites being looked at."

Our meeting noted that there was running at the same time a meeting in Tayport about the New Madras, attended by some councillors. The chair had enquired about the meeting and had been reassured that it was not appropriate to postpone our meeting in order to attend that one.

Cllr Thomson noted that the Fife Council officials were not expected to do a full feasibility study on the Petheram Bridge site, but that some work should have been done and released by now. His own opinion was as published in the Citizen, ie that the split level site would be difficult to use, the space was tight, there would be a need for high quality facing materials, and that the loss of town parking spaces and the link road was unacceptable. He was in favour of the Pipelands site. One parent commented that Pipelands may be rather windy for sports. Cllr McCartney commented on the likely planning issues associated with the Pipelands site.

Dunfermline High School was discussed, as FC was highlighting the success of that new build. The Rector commented that while parts of that were excellent, there was a real worry at the small size of some of the spaces, including of the games hall. He noted that 89% of the Madras Staff had been in favour of redevelopment of the Kilrymont Road site.

The meeting had a strong desire for a decision to be reached and a school built as soon as practicable. The Chair and Secretary were instructed to write to Fife Council stating this need, but not expressing a preference for a particular site. Cllr Thomson noted that the Labour administration was aware of the need to move the project forward as soon as possible.

## **11. AOCB**

Thanks to members staffing stall last night. This meeting, organised by the School for late primary and early secondary pupils, seemed to have gone very well. A pupil presentation had been particularly highly praised.

At the open meeting Cllr Poole was interested in how the Madras finances would work to keep the current buildings fit for purpose even if a New Madras was being planned and built. Is there any update on this please?

A member asked about a sports funding possibility detailed at <http://www.sportscotland.org.uk/ChannelNavigation/Topics/TopicNavigation/Facilities/Legacy+2014+Active+Places+Fund/Legacy+2014+Active+Places+Fund.html>

The Rector noted that there were some concerns about the conditions of funding in this scheme, but his team would explore. He noted recent successes in obtaining funding for playground stuff and for mountain bike track.

The Chair asked the Pupil Representative if she wished to make any comment after observing one meeting. She commented that with regard to the homework planner document many pupils would now photograph homework requirements with their mobile phone or use an electronic diary to record what was needed. She felt that the Scholar web site and associated books were particularly good, but Glow had not been so successful. The Rector commented that the school will consult with pupils regarding new technology.

A member asked about pupil lockers in South Street and how pupils could get access. These are available only to female pupils, and indeed these are soon to be moved from their current location. Pupil services are the people to contact regarding getting a key.

A member asked about School policy regarding politics. There had recently been a debate and vote associated with the independence referendum, which was considered to have been a good thing to do. However, at the debate one side was represented by a professional communicator employed by the SNP, and the other by a pupil. In this case the pupil was considered to have done an excellent job, but it seemed a little uneven in the choice of speakers. The Rector commented that this was run in the School by an external organisation, but he would investigate.

A member asked about the frequency of the School Newsletters. These are due out at the end of the Christmas, Easter, and Summer Terms. A high percentage of parents in a recent survey stated that they felt well informed about the school, which included these newsletters. They are particularly good at highlighting achievements.

On 10 November there is a meeting of the Scottish Parent Teachers Council, at which Sal has been invited to talk about her success in negotiation with Fife Council to improve the state of the toilets in her child's primary school. Others may wish to attend also.

**Date of Next Meeting** – unless there is a need to meet to discuss extra-ordinary business this will be 23 January 2013.

*Attachments of the minutes of the Comms and HomeStudy groups.*

## **Madras College Home Study Policy Review October 2012: Parental Working Group**

**Meeting Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 3.45pm Kilrymount Campus**

### **1. Attendees.**

Staff: Elizabeth Smart (chair); Olav Darge; Lynn McCartney. Apologies: Hugh Watson (Guidance)

Parents: Paul Brown (pupils in years 1&4); Jane Pettegree (pupils in years 3 and 5); Susan Simpson (pupil in year 1 and primary).

### **1. Purpose of the group.**

Madras College is currently reviewing its home study policy to address questions raised by the following.

- Madras College's Parentwise survey on communication indicated that while 52% of respondents felt they had good information about supporting learning at home, there were significant differences in year groups across the school, with parents in the junior phase less happy that the school provided sufficient information about supporting learning at home:
  - 75% of parents of pupils in S6 were happy that they were sufficiently informed.
  - 67% of parents of pupils in S4/5.
  - 20% of parents of pupils in S3.
  - 35% of parents of pupils in S2.
  - 45% of parents of pupils in S1.

The survey was undertaken for school year 2011-12 i.e. the S3 pupils are the last cohort to be taught under the pre-Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) framework. The low level of confidence in parents of S3 pupils (currently S4 2012-13) may therefore reflect *in part* the acknowledged problems in pacing the old curriculum, but problems still clearly remain in the lower school.

- The introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) provides an opportunity to review current practice to ensure that the school's home study policy is effectively designed, communicated and delivered.
- The Madras Parent Council in year 2011-12 had also expressed concern that the transition from the lower school stages to the upper school examination years seemed to involve, for many pupils, a sudden, large leap from a baseline of virtually no home-study, which was difficult for many to manage. It had been suggested that there should be a more carefully managed learning curve, and that parents might need more information in order to play an effective support role.

## 2. Audit of Current Practice.

Elizabeth Smart explained that rather than just revising a high-level policy document, the school had now completed an audit of current departmental practice regarding home-study, and that there was now a comprehensive overview that summarised the following for each subject area:

- Type of home-study task
- Frequency of task
- Marking and monitoring of completion
- Feedback to pupils
- All of the above criteria mapped against each year S1-6.

It was suggested that a final column on this departmental matrix identifying useful home-study support materials (e.g. Conquer Maths, Linguascope, etc) would also be useful to parents. While each Department would have its own recommendations, Paul Brown agreed to research any additional resources via the Parent Council network, Parentzone website, etc. to identify generic study skill material in addition to subject-specific resources, and also information that might enable parents to play an active role in supporting home learning.

The format of this matrix would allow the information to be laid alongside the **curriculum grid** also currently being developed for the CfE. With the addition of other items of home-study information (see section 3), this could form the basis of a comprehensive set of notes to aid home-study. Note that this is indicative rather than a schedule in most cases, although larger project / investigation deadlines could be indicated on the curriculum grid.

Discussion addressed the following important points:

- **Communication** between the school and parents/pupils. Home-study policy can be communicated to incoming S1 pupils and parents in the transition pack and to existing pupils on the school website. ParentMail can be used to alert parents to the existence of this information once the website is updated. (\* nb at the communication subgroup meeting on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October, it was stated that general policy leaflets etc are still set out by post to parents NOT yet on ParentMail.).
- Use of the **homework planner**. There was an extended discussion on the current use of the Planners. It was felt by all round the table that the current design was not optimum i.e. that the pupils found it more useful to record learning intention information in their jotters, and that the Planners should be used **ONLY** for recording specific homework tasks. Staff agreed to revisit the design and use of the planners: the ability to organise workload and deadlines depended on pupils developing good habits in recording tasks and deadlines. Planners also enabled pupils to see where several deadlines coincided (staff emphasised that it was up to pupils to discuss any deadline clashes with subject teachers). It was also recommended that Social Education classes should review with pupils how to use the planner alongside other methods to organise their work.
- Nb some tasks e.g. regular review of notes and (modern languages) vocabulary should be taken as **ongoing**, and would not necessarily be recorded in the planners. However, parents should be able to identify these from the home-study matrix and encourage pupils to include these tasks in their routine home-study.



### 3. New Policy

3.1. The **audience** for the home-study policy documents would be:

- Pupils
- Parents
- Staff

Parents felt it would be important to have the information in common format equally accessible to both pupils and parents.

The home-study information might be particularly useful for some vulnerable groups e.g. pupils with long-term sicknesses, or shared-care arrangements, and care should be taken to ensure these vulnerable pupils and their carers were kept up to date with the home-study resources.

### 3.2. What should be in the home-study information policy and how might it be structured?

This area would need further work but in outline:

- *Overall statement defining what is meant by home-study* ('what is home study for?'). It was proposed that home-study tasks should be meaningful – not just work for the sake of work.
- *A definition of roles and responsibilities* for pupils, parents and school, which would help parents to understand how they could support pupils
  - through helping them to organise their time and manage their workload
  - through helping them to organise their notes (e.g. home filing)
  - through helping them to manage the conditions of their home-study (eat, sleep, work) (especially important in stressful exam years)
- *The home-study departmental guidance notes* as outlined in section 2.
- *Further subject-specific information about home-study resources* as outlined in section 2. These potentially could both help pupils AND keep parents abreast with ideas for actively supporting their children in particular subject areas.
- *Further information about after-school study groups* available on campus. These were already happening, but should be publicised regularly to parents and pupils. Staff raised some issues of supervision which needed further thought (e.g. the risks and opportunities of running 'detention' and 'home-study' in parallel).

The policy document could be usefully supported by:

- *Parent/pupil afterschool workshops in study skills*. The timing of this was briefly discussed – a pilot had been run during a parent-teacher night, but the format of the evening had been too busy and so not many parents had attended the workshop. It was recommended that this workshop format needed to run on a separate night, and that the lower and upper school stages would need a different format.
- *Soc. Ed. sessions on study skills* eg planning, note taking, learning strategies, etc (ongoing).
- A podcast (?source?) on the web of home-support good practice.

Some caveats were also raised:

- Not all children welcome parental involvement in their learning, and some family circumstances make support difficult. The policy should encourage and facilitate parental support while recognising that home circumstances differed.
- The school does not currently have an automated web management system and relies on one very busy member of staff to maintain materials. Web documents cannot therefore require too much time-sensitive updating and maintenance. Home-study task information, for example, would probably remain generic rather than class-specific for most tasks for the foreseeable future, although the curriculum grid should give an indication of major project or assessment deadlines.

### **3.3. Next Steps**

The goal is to have the outline policy document available on paper (staff document and parent/pupil leaflet) and on the web by January. The detailed information will take a bit longer to prepare.

- Minute approved by E Smart as accurate and circulated for comment by email to parent council. (Action: JKP to Bruce Sinclair for circulation)
- Faculty template policy document prepared from audit matrix and circulated to the relevant staff for comment (Action: ES)
- Draft of policy rationale and roles and responsibilities prepared for discussion at next subgroup meeting (Action: ES)
- Researching home-study material from parent network sources – input welcome from parent council members (email to Paul Brown) (nb next meeting of parent council is Wed 31<sup>st</sup> Oct).
- Elizabeth Smart will also identify some parents from some different backgrounds (special needs, looked-after children, etc) who can be involved in future discussion of the policy documents.
- Next meeting of this subgroup – Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November 5pm.

## **Madras College Communication Working Group Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> October**

*Summary of discussion for report to Parent Council on Wed 31<sup>st</sup> October.*

**In attendance** – members of administrative office staff, reception, pupil support services, academic staff representative. Guidance input also expected to be sought (apologies for absence today).

### **1. Why?**

To review current home-school communication processes following Fife-wide surveys in previous school year. These surveys are expected to be conducted annually over the next few years.

- PupilWise survey – pupil views on communication issues are being sought through in-school consultation.
- ‘Celebrating success’ – a second working group is investigating ways to highlight achievement.
- ParentWise survey – raised concerns which now need to be addressed by the school. The survey found that most parents (80%) found the school newsletter to be useful in generally keeping them in touch with school achievements and issues, but comments received also highlighted some problems in home-school contact and follow-up of queries.

**Communications regarding absence from school** had been highlighted as an urgent area needing attention. New policy guidelines have been issued this week; a leaflet was sent out using ParentMail and by post to parents not on ParentMail. School procedures have been put in place to handle email as well as telephone reporting of absences more effectively. The new policy leaflet includes guidance on how and when to contact the school, and the sorts of information required from carers. The school cannot as yet phone home on the first day of non-attendance for *all* pupils, although a Fife pilot is underway investigating the use of text messages in this area. However, the home-school link officer has a note of vulnerable pupils for whom a first day alert is important, and for all pupils, a member of the Pupil Services staff should also contact home if an absence goes on for 3+ days.

The remaining areas of home communication concern fall into the remit of the Communications working group.

### **2. Handing Parent Queries.**

The group is looking at producing revised procedure and policy guidelines on how parent queries should be handled – by whom, and by when. At the moment, most queries are channelled through Guidance which does leave a clear record of the enquiry, but may slow response times. Most parental worries concerned calls not returned, or where it is felt that information has not been passed on or acted upon. The school is therefore:

- reviewing office procedures for call handling, logging and referral;
- clarifying and if possible streamlining processes for query referral;
- establishing guidelines on turnaround timescales for queries;
- and thinking about how these systems can be communicated effectively to parents and pupils. The aim is to produce revised literature by January 2013, following consultation with staff and parents.

This subgroup will next meet on 21<sup>st</sup> November.