

Madras College Parents' Council

DRAFT Minutes of Meeting 14 November 2007

Present:- Adam Alexander (Vice Chair), Alistair Black, Gillian Bowman, Eric Bowman, Rebecca Bransby, Councillor Don Caird, Councillor Dorothy Morrison, Roger Coultherd, Cathy Dunn, Ian Green, Lynsey Grubb, Andy Herd, Jackie Himpson, Angela Hodge, , Ian Jones (Rector), John Lyden, Heather Marriage, Matthew Paterson, Henry Paul (Chair), Katy Pitman, Christine Rawlinson, Fiona Roger, Alex Slawin, Alison Scott, Mary Scott (Treasurer), Bruce Sinclair, Iona Smith, Councillor Robin Waterston, Charlotte Watson, Phillip Williams, Geraldine Wooley, Joanna Wright

Apologies:- Robin Dewar, Lyn Hynd, Iain Collie, Emilia Ferraro, Marjory Finlay, Jackie Morrissey, Brian Purvis

1. Tour

Members of the Parent Council had had a tour of some of the facilities at Kilrymont Road, ably led by school pupils. In "my" group the pupils were very positive about life in the School, and highlighted good things. The state of repair of some parts of the building and furniture was of concern to members.

2. Welcome and thanks

The Chair welcomed everyone, and expressed the thanks of the Parent Council (PC) to the Rector for organising the tour and particularly to the School pupils who had hosted the tour.

Membership and Apologies

The Chair reported that Prof Peter McKiernan had declined the invitation to be co-opted due in part to his role in promoting a new build in conjunction with the University. The PC agreed that the Chair should write to Peter thanking him for all his work on the School Board. Three Councillors had accepted the invitation to join the PC. Teacher and pupil representatives had also agreed to join. The teachers are Lyndsey Grubb, Robin Dewar and Jack Lyden, and the pupil is Charlotte Watson. Andy Herd of Community Use has also accepted the invitation.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes were taken to be an appropriate record of the last meeting, proposed by Adam Alexander and seconded by Phillip Williams.

i) The New Madras(es)

Ken Greer had been invited to address this meeting, but was not able to come. He had passed this request on to an Education Officer in Fife Council (FC). However, FC was now saying that there was nothing to report, despite it being 18 months since the "unsatisfactory" report by HMIE, and declined to send any official to our meeting. The suggestion is that there needs to be a political decision before FC will plan new schools.

Councillor Waterston told us that he shared our frustration at the lack of visible progress since the HMIE report. Councillor Waterston is a member of the Education and Children's Services Committee that is driving progress. He stated, however, in what might be regarded as a contrast to the statement from officials, that there had been lots of progress. He stated that FC has been working on producing a report on the question on whether the new Madras should be in one or two schools, based partly on evidence of costs, bussing, educational impact, etc. He hopes that the report will be thorough, and better than the report produced by the previous administration. He stated that the material in this report is not yet available for viewing or consultation with the PC. It will be presented to the Education and Children's Services Committee as a publicly available document. He believes that a decision will be made for one or two Schools early in the New Year. The Chair commented that it was difficult for us to talk positively with HMIE about progress on this issue since their report, as there is no firm progress that is visible to us.

A member asked Councillor Waterston if this new study was simply going over old ground. Councillor Waterston stated that the report given to the Children's Services Committee in May 2005 had proposed a single-site Madras and a consideration of a Bridgehead School, and ambitious timescales. He stated that it is now clear that that research had not been adequately done, and is now being done better. Schools built in Scotland in the last ten years have been funded by two phases of PFI, as Councils are not permitted to borrow money. There is not yet a third phase of PFI, though announcements by the Scottish Government today may have shown a route forward.

Members of the PC asked that even in the absence of an obvious funding route, why can FC not make plans for what is needed, so that things can move more rapidly once funding is obtained. Councillor Waterston replied that this is the study currently in progress, and which involves various structure plans to input into it.

A member asked if the current FC study had yet consulted with the PC. Councillor Waterston replied that FC did not think it to be appropriate to talk with parents and the PC yet.

A member asked that if plans went ahead, when might the build happen? Councillor Waterston said that he would like an answer to this. No decision can be made until the Fife Structure plan is finalised, and other local plans considered. The option of a University and School campus is being considered. He does not expect a final decision until late 2008. Things may move relatively quickly after that, with a possibility of building work starting in 2009.

ii) State of Facilities

Some of the concerns listed in the last minutes were seen on the tour.

iii) HMIE Survey

The Chair had responded with comments that he had received.

vi) Insurance

FC have included us in a wider insurance policy. There was not felt to be any need for the enhanced policy.

vii) Treasurer's Issues

The Treasurer is ready to move bank accounts once material associated with regulations preventing money laundering have been dealt with.

4. Rector's Report

i) HMIE Follow-Up Inspection

The inspectors will be in School on 18 and 19 December. They will see presentations, and will meet focus groups of pupils and staff, and probably parents. They will visit classrooms. The School is required to demonstrate what has happened on the report's four action points. FC Education Department has today responded to these questions. The Rector stated that with the exception of the split-site issue, there had been significant progress in all areas.

The Rector explained that it his job to make the best use of the available accommodation, and to minimise the impact of the split site. Education should be of high quality irrespective of the state of the buildings. He has addressed specifically

- Bringing behaviour support into the main building
- Changing office space for deputy Rectors.
- Plans to bring most admin staff to new offices in the reception part of Kilrymont
- Plans to bring subject staff who are under one Faculty-lead closer together geographically within the buildings

He has spoken with FC about funding for the latter two areas. He does not expect to be in a new building before 2011, so we need to make best use of the current buildings for at least the next four years.

Support for Learning has had a number of significant improvements.

Promoted staff are working better together, with Faculty structure, new guidance, and appropriate meetings.

Target setting and evaluation is a major new and ongoing process.

A member asked how these improvements are being communicated to parents. The Rector replied that the changes so far did not seem to be major enough to communicate to parents, but major ones will be communicated in newsletters etc.

A member asked why there was no soap seen in the school toilets on our tour. The Rector said that there had been soap in the October break, and that requests to FC to get maintenance done were taking a long time to get action. A member asked the Councillors what sort of reaction time FC should have for minor routine maintenance. Although the Councillors expressed concern about FC reaction times, they seemed to suggest that this was unavoidable due to FC procedures. This brought a gasp of incredulity from at least one PC member. The Rector regarded the lack of soap in the toilets as unacceptable.

The Chair stated that anything that was implemented probably had to be monitored to ensure that it became embedded in new operating procedures. He suggested that we may wish to make our thoughts about FC known to HMIE on their visit.

ii) Tesco's

The Rector expressed his concern about the ongoing discrimination against Madras pupils by Tesco's. He also commended senior pupils for their patience waiting outside Tesco's. He has asked to see the new store manager, but this person is currently away. Although the Rector has contact details for a more senior person, he is keen to communicate first with the local manager.

iii) Standards and Quality Report 2006-7

This report had been distributed to PC members, and the Rector agreed that the PC should put this on their website. A member congratulated Madras on getting exam achievements significantly above the national average, but asked if that was also the case with the 5-14 standards. He was surprised that only two-thirds of Madras girls at S2 reach the required standard in English writing and in mathematics. The Rector stated that these figures are also above the national average. However, he also stated that he felt the results could be even better in some areas, and the School was striving towards this.

Councillor Waterston commented that the Scottish Government no longer required data collection on the 5-14 programme, but all local authorities in Scotland continued to insist this data was collected.

iv) Improving Communications

Madras plans to buy ParentMail, subject to a satisfactory report from Crieff High. The basic version will cost £499 and the PC offered for this to come out of PC funds.

5. Anti-bullying Conference and Related

Adam Alexander reported on the SPTC conference that he and the Chair had been to about anti-bullying policies and procedures. This had been a worthwhile meeting. Minimising bullying is something that should involve the whole community, and we should recognise how bad it can make life for those affected. Adam distributed a survey form that can be used to look at the way that anti-bullying policy is implemented.

<http://www.antibullying.net/>

The School has a ten-year old anti-bullying policy, which is in need of updating. However, the School's actions are more up to date than this. The Scottish Parent Teachers Council suggested that with the recent formation of Parent Councils now may be a good time to address anti-bullying policies in an active way. It was suggested that one subgroup of the PC may wish to look at this in conjunction with the School. The Rector commented that leaflets on the safe use of internet and mobile phones had recently been distributed to pupils.

A member of the PC asked if there were many reports of bullying at Madras. The Rector answered that he would not normally expect to hear of most cases, only the most serious or repeated cases were brought to him. He commented that there is bullying in all schools, and it is the duty of schools to minimise this. In Madras guidance is given in social education lessons. The new forms of bullying via mobile phones and MSN can be particularly nasty. It is thought to be rare that older kids bully younger ones, it is usually within the same year group. Guidance and support staff try hard to reduce conflict arising from the breaking up of friendship groups.

Councillor Waterston agreed that this is an important topic. It is something that is difficult in all schools. Victims can be reluctant to come forward. He commented that some schools have found peer mediation to be useful. The Rector commented that he has had experience of this working well, and hopes to apply it in Madras.

A member commented on pupil to pupil violence seen in town. Bullying can be reduced when all members of the community are active in trying to stop such behaviour. Bullying outside School can be particularly difficult to deal with.

A member asked if the police would be called in by the School in the event of a violent attack by one pupil on another on the School premises. The Rector said that the School would not inform the police in such an incident, but would inform the parents, who may then themselves choose to inform the police.

A member asked where pupils should go in the School to report bullying. The Rector stated that there were three immediate places where they could go:

- 1) The Guidance base, which was almost always staffed
- 2) Pupil Services
- 3) Their registration teacher the following morning.

A member asked what was the difference between the Guidance Staff and Pupil Services Staff. The former are promoted subject teachers with guidance responsibilities, whereas the latter are generally not teachers but are there to support pupil behaviour.

The Rector commented that School staff time at the moment was focussed on issues associated with the HMI visit on 18 and 19 December and a review of the Anti-Bullying policy would take place after the inspection.

6. Groups

The Chair suggested that we need to have clear rules for the groups, and noted that all decisions had to be made by the entire Parent Council, though in many cases this would be to approve recommendations of a particular group.

After discussion, it was decided that for the moment we should have the following three groups, and that PC members could opt to join one or more of these.

- 1) Infrastructure and the New Madras, following on from the work of the School Board
- 2) Events and Fund Raising, following on from the work of the PTA
- 3) School Policy and Community Relations

The meeting decided that groups should come together on evenings other than PC evenings in order that people may contribute to more than one group. The meeting approved the Chair leading the Infrastructure Group, the Treasurer leading the Events and Fund-raising Group, and the Vice Chair leading the Policy and Relations Group. Members are invited to let the Group leaders know if they are interested in joining their Group.

5. Any Other Business

A member expressed concern about the way that some pupils dropped litter on their return to Kilrymont Road from Morrisons, and the way that FC employs litter collectors to follow them. The Rector commented that the School does not condone this action, and that one resident on this route thinks that things have got better recently. It is understood that litter wardens could impose an on-the-spot fine on pupils littering, and the feeling expressed at the PC seemed to be that this could be a useful thing to be seen happening.

A member asked what is the take up of School meals. The Rector did not have figures to hand, but he felt that Kilrymont Road cafeteria was well used and had little problems, whereas the servery at South Street was too small. The pupils report that the food is good, but there is frustration at the queueing. The new MyFife money-accepting machines appear to be broken or jammed too frequently.

A member reported that there is a new Lottery and Amusements Act, and the PC approved the spending of £20 to get a new licence under the new act for future fund raising events.

The issue of School uniform was raised. The idea of the sixth year blazers percolating further down the School had not had an enthusiastic reception at the Pupil Council. The Rector felt that the emphasis on the proper School uniform was working at Kilrymont Road, but was still more of an issue at South Street. There have been spot checks in assembly and in classrooms. There may need to be more focus on the correct wearing of the uniform in the future.

What is a Dates Tie and how is such an honour awarded? This is awarded for major achievements, such as coming first to third in a regional sporting competition. It is called a Dates tie as it used to be the case that a second such award resulted in dates of the first and second award being worn on a blazer.

There was a comment that the School's Home Study policy seemed to be inconsistently applied by teachers, and indeed that home study seemed to be completely absent in some areas.

The PC agreed to spend about £30 to maintain our contract with an Internet Service Provider for the PC web pages for a further year. <http://madrasboard.org.uk>

The Rector was asked if senior pupils were allowed to be out of School during self-study periods. This is not currently happening for sixth year pupils due to issues of lack of responsibility shown by some of the year group.

A member declared a possible conflict of interest due to him being also on another School's PC. The meeting did not believe that this was a significant conflict of interest.

6. Next Meeting

Wednesday 16 January 2008 at South Street. Meet 6.30 for an optional tour, 7 for the meeting.

BDS 15.11.07

updated 19.11.07
after input from
the Chairman and Rector

*Correction 20.11.07 "School Board" changed to "PC"
Minor update 21.11.07 ("Executive" changed to "Government")*