

Madras College Parent Council Meeting - DRAFT MINUTES
28 May 2008

Present:- Henry Paul, Ian Jones, Andy Herd, Robin Dewar, Catherine Dunn, Alex Slawin, Marjory Finlay, Lynsey Seeley, Jo Wright, Jackie Himpson, Cllr Robin Waterston, Cllr Dorothea Morrison, Gillian Bowman, Fiona Roger, Bruce Sinclair, Alistair Black, Eric Bowman.

In Attendance:- Alan McNish, Business Manager

Apologies:- Cllr Ron Caird, Phillip Williams, Adam Alexander, Emilia Ferraro, Olav Darge, Alison Scott, Heather Marriage, Jackie Morrissey

Resignations:- Ian Colie, Matt Paterson

1. Eco-Group

The chair gave a short presentation on the work of the School's Eco-group and ways in which the Parent Council may be able to assist in its goals. There is to be an action day on 27 June. Roger Coultherd's business is providing some machinery, the RAF is providing some manpower, and the University is providing some equipment. Members of the parent forum are invited to assist. Earlier in the day external Eco-inspectors had been in the School. The Eco-club plant sale at the S1 parent evening had raised £100, the performing arts event £150, and the School had donated £500. The Eco-group was hopeful of securing £15000 of grant funding from Fife Council.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of 20 March were accepted as a true record of the meeting. Under matters arising, it was stated that the questionnaire on bullying would go out to parents towards the end of the 2008-9 academic session.

3. School Finance

Alan McNish, the School's Business Manager, introduced himself and talked about his role in the School. His role included responsibility for the School budget, as well as many other non-teaching aspects of the School. Madras was the last secondary school in Fife to appoint a Business Manager, and he has been in post here for just over a year.

The School's devolved budget for 2008-9 is 6.162 million pounds, though all but a small fraction of this is for staff costs. There are other budgets associated with the School, but not devolved to it, including allocations for power, refuse, and insurance. Last year's equivalent budget was £5.978 million. There will be an increase of 6% in the amount of money from the devolved budget that goes to departments (the "A" allocation) to a total of £114,472 in this Financial Year (more in the Rector's report below on this topic).

Fife Council requires the Education Service to make efficiency savings. This, in turn, requires Madras to make savings on its own devolved budget. The School is required to save £190k this year, rolling on to £215k in the second year and £263k in the third year. Additionally, the School is also having to find money to "pay back" a historical overspend. In addition, some non-devolved budgets have been cut, including those for toilet attendants, bus-boarding supervision, and Home School Link Officers.

The savings that the School had to make were identified under specific headings - bus supervision, travel, efficiency savings, headcount reduction, staffing structures, vacancy management, toilet attendants, as well as minor savings, but there was flexibility in the School identifying its own savings.

Given that most of the School's devolved budget is for staff costs, there will have to be reductions in staffing levels. Budgets in other areas will not have a significant enough effect on working into these savings. As an example of why this is the case, the budget for IT last year was £20k, Maintenance £16k, Miscellaneous Supplies £24k, and Staff Training (CPD) £17k. The senior staff had gone through a process of looking at pupil numbers, course choices, and had calculated the appropriate staffing numbers. In answer to a question from a member of the Parent Council, the Rector stated that choice for pupils currently in the School will not be reduced, but classes will be made up more efficiently, though pupils joining during the School year may not be able to get the full range of choices.

The Rector commented that due to the efforts of Robin Waterston the Education budget had not been hit as hard as it might have been. A member thanked Cllr Waterston for this, but asked why Fife Council was cutting education at all, given that the member's impression was that schools were already short of money. Cllr Waterston stated that part of the cuts were to go to a capital expenditure programme, and to help protect services. He believed that these savings could be achieved without loss of service.

There was a discussion about the reasons for Madras having a greater current expenditure on staffing than might be expected. This is in part due to the problems of a split-site school, for which the School receives an extra 6% funding on top of the formula allocation, and the effects of the McCrone agreement, the results of which currently see more staff on Principal Teacher pay scales than is to be expected in steady state.

More positively, Fife Council is providing some finance to improve parts of the Ground Floor of Kilrymont, moving what had been in the Kilrymont 'Support centre' Hut into the main building, an upgrade of certain offices and rooms in Kilrymont and South Street, and £30k for flooring and wall improvements, an issue that had been highlighted by the HMI inspectors.

Alan was thanked for his input.

4. Rector's Report

There is to be a new guidance structure in the School, based around house groups. This reinforces the House system and gives a team working each with a third of the School. There will be weekly meetings of the deputies and the guidance team to discuss issues. A message has gone home on Parentmail.

The spend per department was shown to the Parent Council.

The School's development priorities for the coming session will have been discussed in a school meeting the day after the Parent Council meeting, and are expected to be:-

- Continue working on A Curriculum for Excellence, including homework and "assessment is for learning".
- Meeting needs of pupils – ensuring that an appropriate level of course is there for all pupils.
- Develop Aims and Values of the School. This is currently a single-page document, and the desire is to make this sharper. The staff will discuss this topic, and will involve the Parent Council in due course.
- Relationships. This topic includes behaviour for learning, which is currently piloting praise and reward systems with S1, and bullying. The latter will be taken up by the new guidance system, with one of the team having particular responsibility for bullying policy.
- Communications.
- Leadership – from classroom teachers leading learning to Head Teacher leading staff.

5. Sub Groups of the Parent Council

a) Fund Raising and Social Group

The Chair of the PC apologised to the chair of this sub-group in her absence for having to cancel the ceilidh. He urges all members of the PC to let people know if they see problems, such as (in retrospect) the unfortunate timing of the proposed ceilidh. Lots of effort went in to organising the ceilidh, but there was very little take-up. One member suggested that this sort of event might be done better in year groups. Another suggested that fund raising in this manner was very difficult, and a bag-pack at a major supermarket is a much better way of raising funds. The 50/50 club is not getting a large response. The Chair hopes that targeted fund raising such as for the Eco-group may do better. Please urge people to bring in their Safeways vouchers and donate their old mobile phones to the School's recycling programme.

b) Infrastructure Group

There is a mid-June meeting at which Fife Council may give the go-ahead for the new Madras planning to start in earnest. The Chair's opinion is that it is then at least five years until a new school building be working. While we need to put effort into working with Fife Council on the new Madras, we should also try to ensure that the current estate is maintained to a suitable level.

c) Communications and Policy Group

The minutes of the last meeting of this Group were approved. Geraldine was thanked for the professional job she had made of the PC Newsletter. The aim was to get about two out each year, currently on both paper and Parentmail. Eric was thanked for producing the questionnaire which had gone out to parents with the newsletter. Responses so far all suggested that Parentmail was being well received. Thirtyone responses had been received to date. The most numerous cause suggested for action so far is pupil behaviour and discipline. A member suggested that a reminder to complete and return the questionnaire should go out in a wee while.

The Chair had a bus survey that need completing, and asked for a parent of a child who uses the School's buses to complete this. Eric and Jackie volunteered. Most buses now have CCTV, and there is a police officer who occasionally travels on a bus. Misbehaviour can be reported to the School and action taken.

6. Dates of forthcoming meetings

AGM – 17 September 2008

PC – 8 October 2008

PC – 14 January 2009

PC – 11 March 2009

PC – 27 May 2009

7. AOCB

A member asked about continuing to attract good quality teachers to Madras, but was reassured by the Rector that there are many good applicants coming forward for each place.

The Chair appealed for photos of facilities and events that have been made possible by PTA funding, in order to use them at his presentation at the AGM.