

Madras Parent Council

Wednesday 20th January 2016
7.00pm – Kilrymont Campus

Minute

1. Apologies received. Sam Byres; Lynn Christie; Charlotte Kirby; Callum Macleod; Jo Secker; Susan Simpson; Rebecca Trengove; Carol Urquhart; Sally Walker; Cllr Tim Brett; Cllr Keith McCartney; Cllr Margaret Taylor

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting. Adopted (nb heading corrected to read 'Minute').

3. Matters Arising.

3.1. School website / diary: the diary is now online, but parental comment was that it still is not very easy to find. It was suggested that it might be moved to the homepage if possible.

Action: HT to investigate.

3.2. S3 tests now all completed.

3.3. S5/6 Study Leave for prelims – awarded for those doing 2+ Highers.

3.4. Numeracy Policy. This is to support pupils, parents and teachers at all levels, in across the cluster of feeder primaries, to use a common language and process for key concepts. The Rector gave an overview of challenges in numeracy attainment levels, and target areas to be addressed by the policy. Maths attainment levels have dropped across Scotland, and although Madras's attainment is relatively high compared with the national average and has risen in the past couple of years, it is still important to address the general trends and to seek ways to sustain/improve the curve.

Madras Attainment Levels in Numeracy – nb mathematics is lower

	% Level 4 or N4	% level 5 or N5
2011	61.77	37.2
2012	72.38	33.22
2013	76.6	39.57
2014	88.79	56.03
2015	93.58	67.89

Two analysis methods are helping the school to target improving attainment.

- Analysis of N5 passes by subject choice columns shows that some columns were not generating as many chances for pupils to attain N5 qualifications. The school is addressing this by adding in additional (e.g. practical) N5 options to these columns.
- The attainment levels for the Mathematics and English subject columns are particularly significant as these columns are core for nearly all pupils. While English is showing high levels of N5 passes, Maths is relatively lower.
- Analysis of specific skills gaps in mathematics show that some pupils have significant gaps in handling algorithms (e.g. common arithmetical processes such as long division and multiplication); fractions and percentages. There are also some general weaknesses in handling decimals and operation orders.
- The HT explained that maths teaching involves both '**conceptual learning**' (deep understanding) and '**procedural learning**' (learning common working methods that produce the right number – what used to be called learning by rote); the toolkit encourages both approaches. Success in mathematics requires both at all levels of learning. In his view, targeting '**number bonds**' at primary school level (i.e. simple arithmetical sums like $3+4=7$), a necessary 'procedural' task, will help pupils move towards more complicated mathematics.
- The HT suggested that while mental mathematics was very useful, pupils should not be discouraged from '**showing workings**' as again, this would help them as they moved towards more complicated tasks.
- All subject areas at Madras are being invited to identify one area where key numeracy areas occur, and to ensure concepts are used consistently e.g. data handling for social sciences; measurement for technical/home economics etc. (see toolkit, 'numeracy experiences').

The Parent Council praised both the policy (available online) and toolkit (not yet online). Questions discussed were how could the cluster primary schools and parents of pupils in S1 to S3 be encouraged to engage with this?

- **The whole or the part** - while the toolkit is great, it is quite substantial for non-expert parents to digest – can it be broken into smaller chunks e.g. on the website?
- **Transitions** - could targeted 'numeracy evening' workshops run for primary parents e.g. P6/7 lead up to transition to secondary? One parent reported the success of this at Wormit, where the approach had been informal and focussed on shared learning.

Action points:

HT: consider how the policy and toolkit can best be served up on the school website.

4. Office-holder Reports

4.1. Chair's Remarks

The Chair reminded the PC that all office holders will need to be replaced next session and asked for volunteers to come forward and speak to outgoing officer bearers.

Job description (Chair):

- meet regularly with the HT to discuss points coming up and best strategies for taking these forward to the PC*;
- involved in some interviews of discussions for staff appointments /renewal;
- consulted by HT on some confidential (e.g. particular to individual cases) issues that need parent input, or which have been raised by parents for discussion with the HT;
- representing the views of the PC to the press and other external bodies as required.

Job description (Vice Chair):

- may chair PC in absence of the Chair;
- currently also represents the PC in any discussions about the proposed new school. Nb The outcome of the new school hearing looked likely to restart plans for this building. The hope is that once this happens, a wider cluster parent / community focus group should be re-established so that parents of all pupils who might benefit are involved.

Action: Chair to write to Derek Brown, Head of Education for NE Fife area, to suggest reforming the local development group.

*Nb in addition to regular meetings with the Chair, the HT also meets with an informal *parent focus group* that is convened to address issues that might be case-sensitive or particular to a smaller number of pupils. This group is currently represented on the PC by Susan Simpson.

4.2. Treasurer's Report

Job description (Treasurer):

- maintain accounts – including arranging for annual audit
- receive requests for funds
- dispense funds as agreed by PC

4.2.1. Balance in the bank: £4548.50

This includes £76 raised through the Easyfundraising scheme.

4.2.2. Requests.

- Those running the **Ohio exchange** requested assistance towards the costs of educational trips to Edinburgh and Dundee involving Madras pupils and Ohio visitors. Total costs for this are c.£720. The Parent Council granted a ceiling of £350 towards these trips, providing they went ahead.
ACTION: Treasurer to discuss the transfer mechanism with Kay Hunter. Mr Wishart to brief teachers concerned.
- The **Pipe Band** is attending the Scottish Schools Pipe Band Championship (13th March). Following on past years, the PC granted up to a max of £300 for the bus costs (pupils also pay £2 each for this, as per sports fixtures).

Action: the HT to check that the PT Expressive Arts had not already covered this through other routes, e.g. the East Fife Education Trust or St Andrews Welfare Trust.

4.3. Secretary's report

Job description (Secretary):

- Set up PC meetings (liaise with school to book room and circulate agenda); attend meetings, write minutes, get minutes cleared by Chair in consultation with HT, and arrange for circulation and publication to website.
- Maintaining electronic circulation lists of current PC attendees.
- Manage email inbox – circulation of e.g. relevant SPTC newsletters.
- Relies on a willing and competent person to manage the PC website – currently Graham Kirby.
- The current secretary thinks there is room for more creative and proactive thinking about getting information to parents than she has been able to manage.

The Secretary proposed that rather than delay the website publication of minutes to the subsequent formal adoption meeting, that minutes should be published to the web 'subject to approval' once they have been cleared by the Chair/HT.

5. Rector's Report

5.1. Management team. Mr Wishart, Mr Watson and Miss Robertson all confirmed in DHT posts.

5.2. AB Tests. S4 November tests are mostly complete; where CfE certificate subjects were introduced in S3 (e.g. maths and English), all complete. Others start only in August (e.g. technical). All will be completed by the end of the prelims.

5.3. School concert in December.

This was praised for the diversity of contributions and number of contributors, and was well attended. Parents thanked PT Lynne Miller, and particularly noted her successful efforts to encourage choirs at all levels, and for getting boys involved in singing.

5.4. Reports.

S3 – ready to go.

S5/6 progress reports – just out.

S1 – about to start preparation.

Noted: that SEEMIS restricts the format.

The Guidance team wrote 123 UCAS references, including for past pupils. Their efforts were praised.

5.5. Focus Group Update

Recent areas discussed includes:

- Request for greater clarity in task definition for science class ‘reports’.
- S1 – the pace for most able pupils felt to be too slow for maths, following the introduction of mixed ability classes. This will be addressed next session by broader banding in S1, S2 and the first ½ of S3.

5.6. Heriot Watt Scholar Program – online resource

Madras Science teachers (Kilgour, Nabi and Tombes) praised by this national scheme for high level of Adv Higher pupil engagement.

5.7. Charitable activities

Prior to Christmas, pupils had engaged in a variety of programs including:

- Presents for elderly in sheltered housing
- Toy drive
- Food bank
- £360 split between a local cancer charity and ‘Text Santa’
- £550 raised for Poppy Appeal Scotland
- Senior citizens’ lunch

Ongoing efforts include:

- Significant funds and activities to raise money for motor neuron charity, in appreciation for the contribution made to teaching by Mr Grewar
- Sports Relief ‘cycle round the world’

Parents and councillors praised the pupil's efforts (and supporting teachers).

6. AOB

6.1. Prefect appointment process – criteria to be reviewed with the Pupil Council, and made clear to all senior pupils prior to next session selection (including published to web).

6.2. School exchanges. Enquiry from a parent from another school about the arrangements for these. Referred to HT as these are not run by PC – need school leadership and risk assessment processes.

6.3. Website.

Further points raised about keeping this up to date e.g. for extracurricular activities and sports meetings; subject choices; electives; etc.

Action: HT to investigate (see earlier point, 3.1.).

6.4. Sports Strip.

Some groups e.g. Pipe Band have a strong identity, and school uniform is now promoted – but what about sports team strips? Field sports like rugby and hockey appear to be particularly diverse. Can anything be done?

Action: HT to investigate.

6.5. Fife Budget.

Councillor Thomson reported that recommended cuts for next year had risen from £21 million to £38.8 million, with £90 million cuts needed over 3 years. So far teaching posts have been protected but as the education budget is approximately 50% of the total, there will be some impact. Areas vulnerable may include early years, music service, school meals, and (already cut?) free fruit.

6.6. Guardbridge Roadworks

Bus timetables and passes have been issued to affected pupils,

Minute cleared for circulation and publication to web: 29/1/2016.

Subject to adoption in next meeting

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 2nd March 2016