

James Gillespie's High School Council

School Council Meeting

Tuesday 11th March 2008

Minutes of Meeting

Present:

Elizabeth Bomberg, John Forsyth, Ann Henderson, Carina Hibberd, Kate Katagiri, Karina Kodymowska, May Livsey, Penny Long, Celia Macintyre, Alpana Mair, Chrsi McKinnell, Derek Mills, Lucy Norris, Sheena Purdom, Helga Rhein, Gail Robertson, Vivienne Robinson, Claire Soper, Gill Steele

Staff: Alex Wallace, Allan Crosbie

Apologies:

Nigel Goddard, Nick Hughes, Tom Macintyre, Alpana Mair

Ann Henderson chaired the meeting as Nigel was attending a City Council parents consultation meeting.

1. Minutes of Last Meeting

1.1 The minutes of the meeting of 5th February were approved.

1.2 Matters Arising

1.2.1 **School Review:** VR asked when we could expect to receive feedback on the School Review carried out last October/November. It was agreed that the School Council would write to the Children and Families Department to ask.

[Action: Ann Henderson]

1.2.2 **Kenya Backpack Appeal:** Parents noted that the request for contributions in the school newsletter had come out too late. Clair Soper confirmed that contributions could still be made to Laura Halliday (Modern Studies) until 17th March. It was agreed that this information would be circulated by email to parents on the School Council distribution list.

[Action: Communications Group]

Alex said that the appeal had been very successful and would be repeated in future years. On the subject of the school newsletter being distributed in good time, Ann Henderson mentioned that the School Council was in discussion with Mr Anderson, JGHS Business Manager, about this.

2. Headteacher's Report

1.1 **Budget:** Alex Wallace reported that a city wide spending moratorium had now been declared. The school is not able to spend on anything except critical items until the next budget. There will be a 1.5% cut in budget next year and this is on target to be met through 'natural wastage'. The impact on the curriculum will be minimal.

1.2 **S1/S2 Concerns:** Issues had been raised by parents on various matters.

1.2.1 **Use of Internet** - The school is also very concerned about inappropriate use of social networking websites and do raise it in assembly and PSE, usage is not allowed in school. The police will be involved on specific issues as necessary. Sheena Purdom reported that said that some parents in the 'Events' Sub Group were thinking of holding a discussion forum on this issue and support for this idea was expressed by others present.

1.2.2 **Communication** – There was concern about mixed messages about who to contact for different reasons. Alex Wallace confirmed that the Support Teacher (previously known as the Guidance Teacher) should always be the first point of contact. They would then contact subject teachers as necessary. Parents phoning school reception can leave messages for the Support Teacher who will call back. Emails to the admin@jamesgillespies.sch.edin.uk should contain the name of the teacher for whom the message is intended, in the Subject Line, and it will be forwarded. Parents indicated that letters home from Dept Heads were not always consistent about who to contact in response and it was agreed that the School Council would liaise with Mr Wallace to agree a form of words which would be used for all communications. Information on School website also to be consistent.

[Action: Communications Group/Ann/Vivienne]

1.2.3 **Home Study** – Depute Head Teacher, Tom Rae will confirm a date for a meeting in early May with the parent volunteers for the working group, and advise the School Council.

[Action T.Rae/Council sub group]

Guidelines on Home Study were issued to parents earlier in the year.

1.2.4 **Lunches** – Alex said he had formally complained to the service provider about the quality, quantity and service of lunches. He had a meeting with the Head Of Direct Catering scheduled for the next week.

1.2.5 **Fights/Bullying** –Concerns had been raised by some parents earlier in the year. Alex assured parents that incidents are dealt with quickly by the Senior Management Team, and that students, staff and parents are encouraged to report any incidents as quickly as possible.

1.2.6 **Curricula and Qualifications** – A handout is due to go out to parents. An example course outline was distributed to the meeting, for S1/S2 Modern Studies. Alex thought the volume of this indicated that it was not practical to produce for all subjects. Some parents felt it was useful to have. It was

agreed that condensed versions could be produced and put on the website, with links to more detailed information. Ann added that two parents had volunteered to help the school prepare information for the parents of incoming P7s/S1s.

1. **3 Litter:** Alex said there had been a great increase in litter dropping recently both in and outside of the school. He requested that parents assist in putting the message out about this.

3. Themes for Future School Council Meetings

Home Study policies and others to be left until September. Parents are invited to suggest topics and speakers.

Business Meeting Closed at 8pm

(several parents arrived to join the second part of the meeting)

Zwelibanzi Event

The meeting was joined by a group visiting from Zwelibanzi School in South Africa and also 35 JGHS 6th year students who had been to visit Zwelibanzi in February 2008. The following contributions were made:

1. Alex introduced the visitors and explained that most of them had only arrived today after being held up in immigration for three days.
2. The Zwelibanzi visitors sang.
3. The head of the Zwelibanzi School Governing Body, Mr Zulu, spoke. He warmly thanked the JGHS staff, students and parents for their hospitality and fundraising and listed some of the things that this had been used for eg a sports field, soup kitchen and library equipment. Mr Zulu extended an invitation to the JGHS School community to come to visit Zwelibanzi.
4. Alex spoke about the JGHS trip in February and about the School Partnership link generally. He explained that he had first gone to Zwelibanzi in 2003 whilst doing his Head Teachers qualification and had made a promise not to forget them. He wished to establish a mutual relationship, not just one of giving, although this was necessary initially to get them to a certain level. For JGHS, he thought that a good school was not just about attainment, despite the current push towards this, but should also promote cooperation and humanity. In the last few years 25 JGHS staff have visited Zwelibanzi, hundreds of students and a few parents. He found that the students gained an extremely valuable experience from their visits. Finally he mentioned the Sponsorship program that costs just £30/year to support a child in school and urged parents to pursue this scheme.
5. Excerpts were shown from a film made by the 6th year students on their visit in February.
6. A few of the students spoke about how much they had gained from their experience of visiting Zwelibanzi. Several people commented that they couldn't have imagined quite how much it would mean to them until they had been.

7. The music teacher from Zwelibanzi, Tandeka, presented some musical instruments as gifts to JGHS and conducted pupils and adults from both schools in a singing performance.
8. Finally there were some positive comments about how the partnership involves whole families, about the need to find other ways of engaging with JGHS parents, and the idea of a parent trip to South Africa was mentioned. It was agreed to explore further how to increase parental involvement in the whole project.

All parents are welcome to comment on items covered in the minutes, also to discuss by email or in writing any ideas of topics or issues that they would like to see raised at future School Council meetings.