

WEST LINTON PRIMARY SCHOOL PARENTS' COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 18 March 2008

Present: John Barrie, Emil Berthelsen, Sally Bowie, Moira Brown, Tom Davidson, Calum Greenhow, Mary Gunn, Margaret Hogg, Gail Jackson, Gerry McLachlan, Michael Pryor (Chair), Jane Quinn, Claire Shaw, Chris Tate, Sheila Warren, Steven Whalley.

In attendance: Hilary Elliott, Denise Halcrow (Clerk).

Apologies: Glenda Barton, Katrina Culshaw, Cathy Grant, Laura Robertson, Alastair Young.

1 Minutes of the last meeting held on 28 January 2008 were agreed and signed.

2 Matters Arising

- I. Additional Needs Assistant hours - Claire has received acknowledgement of her letter, but no actual reply. Michael will email Glen Rodger again. Mrs Elliott has been granted 5 extra hours for the next 5 - 6 weeks.
- II. School Centenary 2009 – Calum reported that Tom Davidson, Ian Reid and Gregor McGregor are on the working group, and it is also hoped to include someone from the school and from PTA. Sally Bowie and Mrs Elliott will ask for volunteers. It has been posted on the West Linton Parents' Forum web site but there have been no replies as yet.
- III. There is to be no photo of the Council.
- IV. Playground Supervision – Mrs Elliott reported that there is one playground supervisor covering the whole playground who is present at lunch times and from 8.30am to 9am and from 3.15pm to 3.45pm in order to help provide a safe environment for the children. The janitor patrols the playground during the morning interval. A number of Additional Needs Assistants are also in the playground over interval & lunch times. There is an additional supervisor present at the back of the school from 8.45am to 9am in response to parents' concern. Mrs Elliott will inform the Parents' Forum if this extra supervision is to be removed.

3 Role of Class Representatives

John Barrie reported on behalf of the working group with a draft outline. This was discussed and a few changes suggested. It was felt that class representatives should not need to get directly involved with the children in the class but rather be a conduit for parents with children in the class. If parents would like to be more involved with classroom activities Mrs Elliott suggested that parents should add their names to the volunteer list. The final draft (attached at the end of these notes) is to be added to the constitution after approval at the AGM and issued to all parents. Katrina has withdrawn, so another P1 rep is needed.

4 PC Familiarisation with Policies in operation in the School - Allocation of children to composite classes

Mrs Elliott reported that the majority of Scottish schools have composite classes and that it was an organisational requirement due to maximum class sizes which are set nationally. Mrs Elliott observed that whereas some parents may be anxious about composite classes, children are rarely concerned about being in a composite class. Occasionally some children may be concerned if they are separated from their friends or have a new teacher, but this is not a composite class issue as this can arise if for example there are two straight classes within a year group. A composite class is little different from a straight class for the class teacher. Within any class, there is a range of personalities, maturities and abilities. Teaching is planned to meet the needs of pupils within the range of abilities presented. Ability groups are created, particularly for language & maths activities; social groups are created to allow mixed-ability working & discussions and whole class teaching takes place with activities or expected outcomes differentiated to take into account the needs and abilities of the learner.

The organisation of a composite class is the responsibility of the head teacher and may be arranged by age, ability or alphabetically. At West Linton school it is done by age for a number of reasons: so that there is only one year's age range - the same age spread as would be evident in a "straight" class; it is a 'fixed' criteria – it is not down to a judgement or perception; it cannot be challenged as a misjudgement or perception.

If it were done alphabetically there could be an age range of up to two years among the children in one class. Arranging by ability would prove complex and be open to interpretation and misjudgement; could result in "streaming" of pupils and labeling; does not allow for a natural variety of ability as would be expected in a straight class; limits fluidity of groupings e.g. moving up/down a group in response to pupil need.

For the variety of reasons outlined above, organising by age is considered preferable. Only in exceptional circumstances, such as in the case of twins (who may be placed in separate classes following discussion with parents) will an exception be made to this policy. This is in keeping with SBC Policy and Guidelines.

Gail felt that it was unfair and could have adverse effects when the same children were repeatedly chosen to be in the composite classes. Mrs Elliott responded that she felt there are no disadvantages in being in a composite class. Sheila pointed out that composite classes were inevitable due to the increased school roll. Margaret asked how often were children in the same year group brought together to which Mrs Elliott responded that there were numerous opportunities such as the Knex Challenge for P6, circle time, talks and computer studies and children in the same year group share the same playground area so they can play together.

Sally suggested a meeting be arranged at the beginning of the year so that parents' anxieties may be allayed. Mrs Elliott indicated that there used to be parents briefing sessions about composite classes when they were introduced at West Linton but that these had not happened in the past few years. She agreed that it would be helpful to organise an information meeting about composite classes before the end of this session. Michael will email round to get any further views on the matter.

5 Head Teacher's Report

Update on staffing: Mrs Nichola Ryan is to provide maternity cover for Mrs Dundas until October and Miss Lynne Haston will cover for Mrs Scott when she starts maternity leave on 14 April. Mrs Kirsten Duncan is the new Learning Support Teacher (Point 5) and Mrs McGregor will be full time in the Nursery when Mrs Dalling leaves after the Easter holiday.

The recent Health Week proved a huge success with added input from health professionals, SBC personnel, sports coaches and parent volunteers and £200 was raised for Sport Relief by the class walks. Pupils recorded personal diaries throughout Health Week. Mrs Elliott expressed her gratitude to everyone who supported the week's events.

Mrs Elliott is extremely concerned about the proposed SBC 2% efficiency saving, which amounts to a £13,000 reduction in the school budget and is to be introduced from this April. She has been asked to identify how to economise. This is a huge part of the school budget and will have an impact on the children. Mrs Elliott is attending a meeting of Tweeddale Head teachers to discuss the matter.

The Parent Council will make parents concerns known.

Once the teaching element of the PC departed further discussion continued on the funding cuts:

Gerry suggested drafting a letter for all parents to sign. It was agreed to send letters to Glenn Rodger, Catriona Bhatia, Neil Calvert and Willie Archibald. Michael will contact other PC's in the area as to what concerted action may be taken and Tommy will raise the matter at the next Community Council meeting. It was also decided to invite Councillor Catriona Bhatia to a meeting on Monday 21st or Thursday 24th April, along with Neil Calvert and Willie Archibald.

6 SBC Consultations

Changes to school terms and the school week – parents were canvassed at Parents' Evenings and most want no change to term times or to the current school week. The possibility of moving to an asymmetric week found mixed responses with parents who both work particularly not keen for the change. Michael proposed sending a letter from the PC outlining these responses and will email a draft round for any additional comments.

Developing a Parental Involvement Strategy – concerns how the Education Authority and schools interact with parents. Individual responses are being sought. A newsletter from the PC should inform parents about class reps, 2% cuts and SBC Consultations.

National Representative Parents Council – Michael will find out more.

7 PTA Update

Sally reported that the bank balance at the end of January stood at £5,222 following the Christmas fundraising. The following purchases have been made: a smart board, a laser printer, 3 digital cameras with printers, a lap top computer, a visit from Hopscotch Theatre Company funded, £250 donation made to the school travel fund, ongoing support for school transport costs and fruit and snacks for the recent Health Week. The main aim for fund raising in 2008 is to be able to purchase five laptops which are about £1,000 each.

The following events have been arranged: ongoing Bacon Butty mornings (see posters for details), a Green Day on Saturday 17th May with an eco theme for which volunteers are needed, Whipman Junior Disco, 50/50 Club which is ongoing, and the usual Christmas events. Any other ideas are always welcome.

The PTA Constitution has been amended to reflect changes brought about by the setting up of the Parents' Council and a copy will be emailed to members of the PC.

Finally, Sally reported that all the current PTA office bearers are standing down in September so replacements are needed, and if anyone is known to be interested they should contact Sally or other office bearers.

8 Agenda Items for Next Meeting

Safe routes to school
Key issues from the Parent Forum consultation

9 Dates of Next Meetings (all at 7.15pm)

Monday 21st April with Councillor Bhatia
Tuesday 13th May
Tuesday 17th June

Role of Class Representatives

- Undertake to support the Parent Council and school in partnership to provide the best educational opportunities for all pupils
- Act as a named point of contact for parents, particularly those whose class they represent
- Help to disseminate and collect information on behalf of the PC, such as questionnaires and promotion of forthcoming events
- Encourage all parents to participate in events and opportunities designed to strengthen the home/school partnership
- Bring requests for information and clarification about school matters to PC meetings for inclusion on the agenda

Matters regarding individual pupils should always be raised with the class teacher or head teacher.