

Consultative Committee with Parents Item No. 4.1

Edinburgh, 26 February 2013

Present

Councillors Godzik (Convener), Corbett, Dixon and Shields
Diane Anderson, Parent Representative, Leith Academy
Mary Brownlee, Parent Representative, Tynecastle High School
Willie French, Head Teacher, Parsons Green Primary School
Jonathan Gibbs, Parent Representative, Nether Currie Primary School
Lindsay Law, Parent Representative, Broughton Primary School
Iain McGillivray, Parent Representative, Firrhill High School
Ellen Muir, Head Teacher, Pilrig Park School
Norma Prentice, Head Teacher, Drummond Community High School
Eileen Prior, Scottish Parent Teacher Council Representative
Alex Ramage, Parent Representative, Prestonfield Primary School
Sarah Ross, Parent Representative, St Catherine's Primary School
Josephine Samuel, Parent Representative, Kaimes School
Paul Smart, Parent Representative, Portobello High School
Lorraine Spalding, Parent Representative, Blackhall Primary School
Wendy White, Parent Representative, St Crispin's School
Tina Woolnough, National Parent Forum Scotland

Officers in Attendance

Gillian Tee, Director, Children and Families
Alistair Gaw, Head of Support to Children and Young People, Children and Families
Lindsay Glasgow, Asset Planning Manager, Children and Families
Billy MacIntyre, Head of Resources, Children and Families
Moyra Wilson, Special Schools and Specialist Provision, Children and Families
Jane Lockhart, Committee Services, Corporate Governance

Apologies:- Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Key, Redpath and Rust and Lesley Gibson-Eaglesham, Parent Representative, Gracemount High School.

1. Declaration of Interests

Lorraine Spalding declared an interest as she was currently involved in consultancy work for the National Parent Forum of Scotland.

2. Welcome

Councillor Godzik welcomed everyone to the meeting.

3. Minute

- 1) The minute of meeting of the Consultative Committee with Parents of 15 January 2013 was approved as a correct record.
- 2) Gillian Tee updated members on the matters arising from the minute as follows:-

Agenda Planning

It was confirmed that agenda-setting was two-way process and that a small group that would include Lindsay Glasgow and Sarah Ross would be formed to plan future agendas.

School Placements

The report on Strategic Management of School Places for P1 and S1 intakes for August 2013, scheduled to be considered by the Education Children and Families Committee at its meeting on 5 March, had been tabled.

It was stressed that the report would not be made available to elected members and the public until 27 February, but it was felt that it was important to share it with the CCWP. Future meetings of the CCWP would be scheduled to better match the Education, Children and Families Committee timetable.

A presentation on the impact of rising school rolls would be delivered by Lindsay Glasgow, Asset Planning Manager later in the meeting.

Parental Engagement

A document illustrating the method of two-way communication between parents and the City of Edinburgh Council had been tabled. It was intended that this would allow feedback by and to parents and the document would be uploaded to the internet to allow easy access. It was hoped that this improved business-like approach would be beneficial.

The Convener suggested that those interested in becoming involved with the parental engagement initiative as parent representatives were welcome to contact Moyra Wilson by e-mail direct on this matter and also to suggest agenda items for future CCWP meetings.

Agenda Planning

There was discussion on the benefits of the minute of the CCWP being produced for issue for consideration by Neighbourhood Groups. It was agreed by those present that the timescale of issue of one week before the CCWP meeting was insufficient to allow this to happen.

Whilst it was possible for parent representatives to provide an oral report to their group meetings, the preferred option was for the minute to be available. This meant a possible adjustment of the meeting pattern.

Gillian Tee confirmed that the arrangements for the agenda planning meeting could also be changed if a Tuesday morning was not suitable.

Alex Ramage asked whether it would be possible to list the Neighbourhood Group feedback items near the start of the agenda before the substantive items and the Convener responded that this would be considered.

Jonathan Gibbs suggested that it might be beneficial for neighbourhood group issues to be raised with the Children and Families Department before the CCWP.

4. School Placements - Presentation

The Convener acknowledged the importance of this issue and asked Gillian Tee to provide the background to the School Placement process.

Gillian Tee explained that the fundamental fact to bear in mind was that there was a school place for every child in Edinburgh and the catchment areas provided the basis for planning the number of places needed. There was no requirement to provide places for pupils living outside a school's catchment area and the reduction in school rolls had meant that although there was still parental choice, there was less likelihood of placing requests being granted. She highlighted the list of schools that showed where there was pressure on places and had been included in the report tabled earlier in the meeting.

There remained a commitment to ensuring a school place for each child living in the catchment areas, but where there were no available spaces, only very special circumstances would allow for pupils from outside the catchment to be added to the school roll.

It was acknowledged that the lack of spaces at preferred schools was likely to cause disappointment to parents therefore it was felt it best to provide as much information as possible at the outset to inform their decisions on whether to proceed to appeal.

It was emphasised that in schools where there were insufficient places for children living in the catchment area, every effort would be made to place them.

In response to a question on the impact on special schools, it was confirmed that Alistair Gaw, Head of Support to Children and Young People, would address this following the presentation.

Lindsay Glasgow outlined the impact of rising school rolls on primary school intakes and the eventual effect on secondary schools.

The projected population of children aged 5-11 years was expected to increase by 20% by 2019, with the current number rising from 25,900 to 31,100.

The increase in the city's birth rate since 2004 had impacted on P1 intakes five years later and these were expected to peak by the 2015/16 term, with secondary school rolls expected to peak in 2025.

In relation to forecasting intakes, there were variations at local level and no close correlation between births and P1 intakes. Changing trends were influenced by migration across the city and housing market and the private education sector.

In order to meet catchment demand, additional permanent classrooms and general purpose space were being built, having been identified in the annual assessment at the end of January.

The first four new-build schools were being progressed for August 2013 and were part of an estate-wide project with a choice of 4 standardised designs to fit the land footprint.

An intake report had been prepared, using registration data that became available in November each year. The report set out the standard policies governing the school intake process and identified any school needing a specific policy or accommodation response.

The intake report for 2013 showed there was a need for prioritisation as follows:-

- placing requests out of Liberton and East Craigs Primary Schools.
- baptised Roman Catholics into 12 out of 15 denominational primary schools and St Thomas of Aquins High School

As previously mentioned, an appendix to the report listed the occupancy level of every school and gave details of 39 schools where some placing requests would be refused and 20 schools where no requests were likely to be successful.

It was, however, stressed that the placing request position changed significantly between April and August, often on a daily basis, because of movement in and out of catchment areas and decisions taken by parents to enrol their children in private schools.

Lindsay agreed to circulate her presentation to parent representatives to be shared.

The Convener emphasised the intention to encourage parents to send their children to local schools and it was confirmed that the space in those whose rolls were lower was fully used.

Details of the Gaelic Medium School at Tollcross and the method used to calculate capacity were also confirmed.

In response to a question on the role of the Placing in Schools Appeals Committee, it was confirmed that the Appeals Committee had the option to overturn the decision not to place a child, if they felt there were sufficient reasons or special circumstances. All parents had the right to appeal the decision to refuse a place for their child at a particular school.

During further discussion on the appeals process and the options to accept out of catchment pupils, it was confirmed that legislation allowed assessment of whether to employ additional teachers, however this decision would be taken mindful of the need to ensure the best learning environment for pupils.

In relation to Special Schools, it was confirmed that the range of schools across the city provided for the diverse needs of their pupils and assessments were based on the specific needs of each pupil. Kaimes School, where pupils required support related to the Autistic Spectrum, assessed and sought inclusion in mainstream schools where possible.

In response to a question on a possible review of catchment areas, it was confirmed that a review would be unlikely to address rising school rolls.

Gillian Tee hoped the presentation was helpful in sharing the complexity and best use of resources in the process. The intention was to explain the facts and show the methods of implementing policies, whilst bearing in mind the high quality of local schools to meet the needs of children.

The list of schools in the appendix to the report had been requested and informed parents at the outset of the restrictions on some school places in order to avoid as much parent disappointment as possible. The list showed that fewer parents would be able to obtain places for their children outside their catchment areas, however the option to appeal still remained.

In response to a comment on the fact that parents of upcoming P1 pupils were not in attendance at this meeting, the importance of sharing the need for parents who decided to appeal to clarify their reasons why a particular out-of-catchment appeal was being submitted was emphasised.

Decision

To note the presentation and the discussion that followed.

5. Parental Engagement Strategy

Moyra Wilson presented the draft Parental Engagement Strategy 2013-16. Six objectives were described and following a lengthy consultation process, lead officers and partners had prepared the draft Strategy based on feedback received.

The Convener acknowledged the work carried out by officers and parents in preparing the document and invited questions.

In response to a question on how resource allocation would be prioritised, it was confirmed that some elements, including parental involvement and support and IT, were already in place and resourced.

It was agreed that it was beneficial to capitalise on harnessing opinions and views for discussion at Neighbourhood Groups and that the document, when finalised, would be useful. It was also felt that it was helpful to encourage ownership by Neighbourhood Groups and other partners to deliver the Strategy.

There was discussion on the relationship between parental groups and the wider community, which generated an increased appreciation of schools and possible links with businesses. Suggestions on the means of this were invited, to be submitted to Moyra Wilson.

The Convener stressed the need to ensure community engagement and partnership working and it was noted that there were some good examples of this across schools. There was also a need to ensure a balance of city-wide expectation of parental engagement.

During discussion, it was noted that perceptions by year groups in schools differed and that parity of engagement was crucial, ensuring the inclusion of all diverse groups.

The comments made were welcomed and it was confirmed that the draft Strategy would be circulated to schools in the week beginning 4 March before going out to consultation.

Decision

To note the detail of the draft Parental Engagement Strategy 2013-16 and the action to be taken.

(Reference – draft Parental Engagement Strategy 2013-16, submitted.)

6. Role and Remit of the CCWP

Moyra Wilson reminded members that it had been agreed at the last meeting to prepare a document on the role and remit of the Consultative Committee with Parents.

During discussion it was suggested that CCWP minutes be made available before Neighbourhood Group meetings, which would mean a possible review of the timetable, that the strategy be broadened and that remits be prepared for Neighbourhood Groups.

It was also confirmed that a Parent Representative had been appointed to the Education, Children and Families Committee.

Decision

- 1) To note the role and remit of the CCWP.
- 2) To note the points made during discussion.

(Reference – role and remit of the CCWP, submitted.)

7. Budget Update

Gillian Tee reported that the Times Educational Supplement had shown cuts in services but she confirmed that education in Edinburgh had been protected, with £1.8m additional funding identified for the demography of the school estate, to provide additional support needs. She added that parent feedback had proved useful.

The Convener confirmed that education had been identified as a priority in the current financial year, however this would not continue in the future. The commitment remained, however, to engage parents and interest groups.

In response to a question on when parents would be able to view the budget for 2013/14, it was confirmed that every effort would be made to make it available in September 2013, together with a set of budget proposals.

Gillian Tee undertook to ensure that the note of the Parent Council Chairs' meeting would be circulated and suggested that it might be appropriate for a sub-group to be created to consider budget matters.

During discussion, it was suggested that the document be issued to Parent Councils and that a list of preferred options and those accepted be prepared. In addition, an open meeting was suggested to allow full discussion on individual issues.

In relation to the role of Special Schools in the budget process, the Convener confirmed that this would be part of a separate discussion and it was suggested that there be a session on the subject at the next Special Schools' CCWP.

Decision

To note that update and the points made during discussion.

8. Issues from Neighbourhood Groups

1. South West

Iain McGilvray reported on the discussion at the South-West Neighbourhood Group as follows:-

- 1) Concern had been expressed by representatives of Balerno High School at the lack of sports provision and Community Access to Schools (CATS). He asked whether the Group could be issued with the report scheduled to be considered by the Education, Children and Families Committee in May.

The Convener stated that Councillors Ricky and Bill Henderson had both approached him on the matter of the pitches at Balerno and Robin Yellowlees, Principal Officer, Sports and Outdoor Education, was currently exploring options for additional funding to extend them. The discussion continued and would reach a conclusion in due course.

- 2) There had been discussion on the use of social media and it was understood a policy on the subject was currently being considered.

Moyra Wilson confirmed that she had discussed the social media issue with James Coltham, Children and Families Department ICT Web Services and Content Manager, regarding the General Teaching Council code of conduct for staff. Responsibility for access by staff had been devolved to Head Teachers but as yet, no formal code of conduct had been prepared for children and young people.

It was accepted that some Parent Councils would access social media sites whilst applying the usual regulations should apply and it was agreed that consistency was needed across schools.

- 3) A view was sought on whether session dates could be set nationally.

It was felt that to set national school sessions, the balance across the country would be lost.

During discussion, the use of primary schools as polling places was raised and it was suggested that alternative venues were explored. An instance was given of parents who had lobbied local councillors, resulting in an alternative being found in the area.

The Convener explained that in some areas there was no alternative to schools as polling places and that every effort had been made to find alternative polling places where possible.

Gillian Tee suggested that the lists of schools used as polling places could be revisited and possible alternatives sought.

Decision

To note the verbal report and the responses to issues raised.

2. South Neighbourhood Group

Alex Ramage reported on the meeting he had attended on 20 February, where the following issues had been raised:-

- 1) School Rolls
- 2) Information on Neighbourhood Groups and School Councils
- 3) Time for Engagement
- 4) Number of items on CCWP agenda
- 5) Additional support to be provided as required.
- 6) Parking at schools – enforcement, suggested “permits”

- 7) Safer Routes to Schools
- 8) Community Access to Schools

Gillian Tee suggested that the issues be e-mailed to Moyra Wilson for consideration and response.

3. North Neighbourhood Group

Lindsay Law reported that no meeting had taken place, but she raised the important issue of illegal parking at Broughton Primary School.

It was confirmed that the local community policeman currently patrolled at Drummond Community High Schools to prevent illegal parking and it was suggested that he could assist at Broughton.

It had also been suggested that AstroTurf be installed in the school grounds, subject to sufficient funds being raised by the Parent Council and possible access to Council-approved contractors.

The Convener suggested that it might be possible to tie-in with outside contractors.

The issue of parking at Kaimes School was also raised at this point.

3. West Neighbourhood Group

Mary Brownlee reported the following issues raised at the meeting held on 19 February:-

- 1) P1 intake
- 2) The use of IT to communicate
- 3) The availability of Neighbourhood Group minutes to encourage discussion between the Groups.

It was noted that the issues would be considered and responses provided.

9. Issues Arising from Committee Report/s

Gillian Tee assured members that reports for consideration at the Education, Children and Families Committee would be accessible to CCWP members before being published.

She cited the report on Strategic Management of School Places: P1 and S1 Intakes for August 2013, tabled at this meeting, as an example of CCWP having advance notice of reports not yet published and stressed the importance of maintaining confidentiality until its publication on 27 February.

Decision

Noted.

10. National Parent Forum Scotland - Update

Tina Woolnough reported that an e-news update had been sent to Head Teachers for circulation.

She was pleased to announce that all places for the Qualifications Plus event on 5 March had been taken.

The launch of the “Let’s Talk” campaign, which gave an opportunity for informal meeting between staff and parents, was described.

A hard-copy newsletter had been sent to all schools and Parent Council Chairs, with a pdf version also available on the National Parent Forum Scotland website.

“Nationals in a Nutshell”, a course of N4 and N5 units in a number of subjects designed to develop learning skills, was described. Tina confirmed she was happy to assist in providing further information on the course.

Decision

To note the information provided and to thank Tina for the update.

11. Scottish Parent Teacher Council - Update

Eileen Prior described the organisation’s work with Parent Groups across Scotland by means of information sessions, contact and training. Leaflets were available on the SPTC website and there was also access through social media sites.

Research was currently taking place with the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland on engagement with that community.

Eileen invited members to sign up for the e-newsletter, which included a survey on bullying in the wide range of topics covered.

A link with Bright Futures, the UK's largest not-for-profit society that brought together pupils, students and graduates with progressive businesses keen to recruit was also mentioned.

Decision

To note the information provided and to thank Eileen for the update.