

Acting Executive Director of Communities and Families Update

Update for Parent Council Neighbourhood Groups – November 2016

Introduction

Autumn is now well and truly with us and there continues to be a huge amount of activity, and achievement, across our schools.

At a national level, the Scottish Government has announced an Education Delivery Plan and far reaching Governance Review of schools with the aim of continuing to improve attainment across Scotland, so that all children, irrespective of their circumstances and background, can achieve.

The Delivery Plan aims to achieve excellence and equity in our education system by focussing action around three key priorities:

- closing the attainment gap;
- ensuring we have a curriculum which delivers for teachers and children;
- empowering teachers, schools and communities to deliver for children and young people.

We know from our own experience that narrowing the gap requires a full range of services to work effectively together, and schools play a crucial role in this. The consultation on the Governance Review concludes on 6 January 2017 and I would encourage all Parent Councils to respond and offer their views on the proposals being put forward. This is an important matter and formed the main area of discussion at our last meeting of the Consultative Committee with Parents in October.

Councillor Cammy Day was appointed as the new Education Convener at the City of Edinburgh Council meeting on 27 October and he will now chair the Education, Children and Families Committee. Councillor Day takes up his new responsibilities with immediate effect and arrangements are being made for him to meet with staff and get to know first hand the wide range of Children and Families services across the city. We very much look forward to working with Councillor Day in the months ahead.

Education, Children and Families Committee

The first Education, Children and Families Committee of this school session took place on Tuesday 11 October. Some highlights included the possibility of a new employment and enterprise hub for young people being set up in Edinburgh as a partnership between the Council and the Prince's Trust. A report recommending the Council work with the Prince's Trust to identify suitable premises for the charity in the city was approved and work is now underway. The new hub would support young

people aged 13 to 30 to help them get back into work, education, training or support them setting up their own business.

Important reports were also presented to committee regarding Special Schools. One of these focused on the whole special school estate and the demands going forward for pupils with additional needs. There has been an increase in the number of children with autistic spectrum disorder and the report outlined how the Council may be able to create space for more children with complex needs in the special school estate over the next few years. A main proposal to be considered is the merger of Oaklands and Braidburn schools. Currently, this is at a very early stage of informal consultation and fact finding via a feasibility study. The report also outlined the work of a working group considering how we continue to meet the needs of pupils with additional needs in mainstream schools and what support is needed to do this.

This was the last committee led by Councillor Paul Godzik. We have really enjoyed working with Paul over the last few years and many of you will know how much he cared about improving outcomes for children and young people. We wish Paul good luck for the future and thank him for his contribution to our schools and children's services.

Playground Improvement Projects

Just in case anyone missed it, there was an update in the Business Bulletin of the October Education, Children and Families Committee on Playground Improvement Projects. This explained that over the last two years, a number of schools have actively developed their playgrounds for natural play. Whilst the benefits of these projects for the children have been enormous, some problems have also arisen. Although most parents are very supportive of playground developments, some questions have been raised about health and safety and accessibility for children with additional needs. As a result, any schools looking to start planning improvement work, or who have not yet commissioned this are asked to postpone their plans until after Christmas. This will allow time for a full review of how we take projects forward.

Having taken internal and external advice, new Council guidance will detail the process and protocols which ensure the development of safe, challenging and appropriate school playgrounds. A playground steering group of head teachers and other Council representatives will also seek to consolidate the learning from current projects and improve the process for future developments.

Training will be delivered to all head teachers before December. As part of the new guidance, head teachers will share the new protocols with their Parent Councils and details of the council support available.

If you require any more information, please contact Janice MacInnes, Senior Education Manager (Early Years) on (0131) 529 6268 or by email:

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New Online Payments System

As you may be aware, the Council is introducing an online payment system in schools that allows parents to pay online for things like school meals, trips etc. The system also allows primary parents to order their child's school meals online. This will be rolled out on a phased basis and all schools will be online by the end of the school session. Information will be sent out to parents directly, approximately five weeks before the system is introduced in their school to allow them to set up their accounts and those in the first phase will have already received information.

Further information is available at: www.parentpay.com

New James Gillespie's High School

On 26 October, the new James Gillespie's High School was officially opened by John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Mr Swinney was joined by Councillors Paul Godzik and Cathy Fullerton, Head Teacher Donald J Macdonald and Paul McGirk, Chief Executive of Hub South East Scotland, the Council's development partner.

Guest of honour was Sue Caton, niece of Olympic athlete Eric Liddell. The new sports building is named after the famous Scottish sporting hero. The new performance block has also been named the Spark building after novelist and former pupil, Dame Muriel Spark.

The school rebuild began in 2012 across all aspects of the campus, which serves pupils from 3 to 18 years in nursery, primary and high schools all on the same site. The final phase of works was completed in August this year with the opening of the new sports and performance buildings. The Grade A listed Bruntsfield House at the centre of the campus also underwent a major refurbishment. The project received significant Scottish Government funding through the 'Scotland's Schools for the Future' programme which is managed by the Scottish Futures Trust. The completion of the project gives the school community a campus they can be rightly proud of and I am delighted the parents, pupils and staff are so pleased with the new facilities.

Fairtrade School Awards

I was pleased to hear that two schools in Wester Hailes are helping to involve pupils in promoting Fairtrade and learning about the difference it can make to some of the poorest children in the world.

Sighthill Primary School and Wester Hailes Education Centre both achieved their FairAware and FairActive awards last session, and are now working towards the final

step which is achieving full FairAchieving status. They also feature in the magazine of Traidcraft (one of the leading dedicated fair trade companies), which is sent to Traidcraft supporters throughout the UK.

Becoming a fair-trade school offers a great opportunity to look at global issues such as where our food comes from and how we are connected to people around the world. Well done to these schools for successfully participating in this initiative.

Girls Inspired to Get Active

An innovative project has been launched by the Council to encourage girls at city high schools to become more active. The first 'Girls Day Out' conference held at Wester Hailes Education Centre on 26 October was attended by around 150 girls from S1 to S5 year groups across the city. Organised by the Council's Active Schools team in partnership with Youth Scotland and **sportscotland**, the project aims to inspire, encourage and support girls to become more active; raise the profile of successful girls and their achievements; and educate girls on the power of sport.

An interactive fun packed day included hearing from inspiring female role- models; workshops on nutrition and mental wellbeing; and alternative physical activity sessions including jump rope, trampolining and PiYo (cross between Pilates and Yoga). Partners Youth Scotland have also funded the girls to be put through the Dynamic Youth Awards, which is a peer-assessed award recognising the contributions and achievements of young people in the 10+ age group.

This initiative is a great way to work with our partners to increase participation in PE, sport and physical activity amongst girls and young women. It is also a terrific way for schools, clubs and hubs to showcase the opportunities available both locally and nationally.

Leith Academy at the US elections

Four S5 pupils are currently in the United States, where they have joined 16 other pupils from other parts of the UK to visit the swing state of Florida. They are working for Marco Rubio's Senate election; Neil Dunn's Congressional election; and Hillary Clinton's Presidential campaigns. The team from Leith won a national competition run by education charity, The Transformation Trust, and are tweeting regularly about their experiences.

Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, will visit the school later this month to meet with the pupils and learn about their once in a lifetime experience.

Forthview Primary

Fiona Hyslop MS, Cabinet Secretary for Culture Tourism and External Affairs visited Forthview Primary School on Tuesday 11 October for a Scottish Book Trust event as part of the First Minister's Reading Challenge. The visit highlighted Forthview's

involvement in the Challenge and the excellent work the school is doing with pupils and parents to encourage reading for pleasure. Since the launch of the Challenge, there has been a very high sign-up rate amongst schools with 60% of primary schools across the country now registered.

Dalry Primary

It was great to hear that Dalry Primary School has been awarded the status of Edinburgh's first primary Confucius Classroom Hub. An official launch is planned to celebrate the leading role the school will have in promoting and supporting the study of Chinese language and culture at primary level.

Primary Schools Open Day

On 2 November, every primary school in Edinburgh opened its doors to prospective carers and parents with pre-school age children as part of an annual open day event. The Council has been running this event for several years now and it aims to offer families an opportunity to have a look round their local school and learn more about the educational experience it can offer.

It is important for the Council to encourage families to register their children at their catchment school and support the local community. We all want to see thriving local schools at the heart of our communities, especially given the pressure of increasing primary rolls across the city. At the start of the 2015/16 session, there were 28,804 primary school pupils, however this is predicted to rise to 31,300 by 2020 and then increase further to an estimated 35,400 by 2030.

Last year, the number of appeals put forward by parents requesting a placement at an out of catchment school fell to a record low of 152. As stated in my last update, the Council has urged parents not to use false details to try and get their child a place into a popular school. Last year 11 families had their primary placements withdrawn after providing false information.

Alistair Gaw

Acting Executive Director of Communities and Families

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