

Prior to the meeting -

Photos for Microscopes - Iain asked for some parent volunteers to join him with biology teacher, Mrs May, to have photos taken with the microscopes, which the Parent Council had paid for. Mr Shand kindly took the photo.

Wick High School Parent Council



Minutes of Meeting – Monday 9th March 2015

Present

Iain Baikie (Chairperson), Sindy Rudhall (Vice-Chairperson), Ross Henderson (Treasurer), Elena Koponen-Baikie, Linda Malik, Rhona Gill, Debbie Lee, Julie Sutherland, Sheelagh Paterson, Jason Hamilton, S Mackay, Gordon Tait, Mrs Macbeath (Depute HT), Dr Grant (HT), Cllr Bill Fernie and Jacqui Budge (Secretary),

Apologies

Joanna Coghill, Chester Henry and Cllr Gail Ross.

1. Welcome

Chairperson Iain Baikie welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. He asked that we discuss the bus issues first as some parents and their children had come to speak to us about this.

2. Lyth Bus Route and other Bus issues

A number of parents (along with their children) attended tonight's meeting to share parental concerns about the current bus service offered by 'Stagecoach'. They were - Mrs Alexander with Ewan from Lyth and Mr and Mrs Henderson with Gordon from Bower. They shared that they are very concerned about the following –

- The ‘Stagecoach’ bus sometimes has not turned up at all to collect the children! The children are then stranded. This is a serious Health and Safety concern for the parents.
- The children have had to wait for 30 minutes for the ‘Stagecoach’ bus in the cold and wet. This is not safe. The children have then had to sit in wet clothes for the rest of their day at school.
- The bus shelter, where the children wait, is on the wrong side of the road, on a verge with no pavement. This is also a very ‘fast’ road.
- Less grit is being used on roads, which can result in them being more icy and more likely to hit the bus shelter, which is right at the edge of the actual road.
- The ‘Stagecoach’ bus is NOT RELIABLE and is regularly late. Pupils were recently late for their exams due to this, which is not good enough. It is very disruptive to their learning and to the life of the school.
- One of the buses recently caught fire, while children were on it.
- The current arrangement with Stagecoach is not working!

The parents are very pleased by the service which Dunnet’s operates. It collects children on time and is very reliable. However, it has to drop the High School pupils off, so that they can get the Stagecoach bus for the remainder of their journey. There have been times in the past, when the Dunnet’s driver has waited with the children when the ‘Stagecoach’ bus is late, but he can no longer do this, as it then makes him late for picking up the Primary School children. Therefore, the High School children are left all alone waiting for a bus which is very regularly late and which often doesn’t turn up at all.

Iain thanked the parents and pupils for sharing their experiences. He had written to ‘Stagecoach’ in January to share his concerns. Iain read out part of the reply which he received from Sam Greer, which stated that they are monitoring this situation.

Iain also contacted Christine Dodd, the local transport officer. She was not helpful and would only provide the delays in the Stagecoach service for Jan 2015 after repeated requests from Iain.

Iain read out a part of Sandra Thain’s letter from last week’s ‘John O’ Groat Journal’, about concerns about school transport.

Iain stressed that the children should be taken ‘from a place of safety to a place of safety’.

Iain shared that he will now write to the ‘Stagecoach’ regional director to stress that the service is not safe and that the current arrangement is not working. He is also going to ask for financial compensation of £1000 for every minute that a pupil is late for an exam. (*See Action Plan Point 1*)

Iain is going to write an ‘open’ letter to the press about this. (*See Action Plan Point 2*) He added that parents should write to complain about the service.

Elena added that “Council officials should also be a target for letters of complaint, as well as ‘Stagecoach’. Mrs Macbeath added that it should be discussed at a future Community Council Meeting.

Mrs Macbeath added that a resident from Lyth phoned the school to say that he can see the children waiting in the bus shelter, on the wrong side of the road and that he is very worried when the children have to then cross the road to catch the bus. He feels that it is ‘an accident waiting to happen’. Mrs Macbeath reassured him that High School staff and parents are aware of this health and safety concern and that they’re working together to resolve it.

In summary, everyone agreed that –

- the bus shelter should be moved to the correct side of the road. It is not safe to be used, as the children have to cross a very busy, fast road, which is very dangerous, to be able to catch the bus.
- the children make their journey on just one bus, as the passing from one vehicle (Dunnet’s) to the other (Stagecoach) is a problem, due to the unreliability of ‘Stagecoach’.
- parents should now keep a record / diary of problems experienced with the bus service.
- Dunnet’s buses should take over the service.

Treasurer’s Update

Ross (treasurer) is continuing to still have dreadful problems with the mandate. Iain asked Ross to give him details of his experiences, so that he can write a letter of complaint to the ‘Bank of Scotland’. Iain shared that he intends to ask them for compensation for the inconvenience that this has and continues to cause. Iain will also write to John Thurso, who is part of a banking committee, to alert him to the problems that have been faced. Iain also asked Linda to contact Sarah, to find out about her experiences of working with this bank. (See Action Plan Points 3 - 5)

Items from previous meeting

- Iain has not been in touch with Bill Alexander yet as he feels that we should invite him to a future Parent Council Meeting. Everyone agreed. (See Action Plan Point 6)
- The 33 period week has not yet been finalised.
- Iain did contact ‘Stagecoach’ but now feels that a more rigorous letter is required. (See Action Plan Point 1) He added that any compensation received could go towards our fundraising target of £10,000.

Head Teacher’s Report

Dr Grant confirmed that although they are not yet using a 33 period week, she has put in place an interim solution, resulting in the school now functioning with 7 period days, of 50 minutes duration in the morning and 45 minutes duration in the afternoon.

Dr Grant has advertised teaching posts for English, Technology, P.E. and Home Economics. She is pleased that 5 out of the current 7 probationer teachers want to stay at Wick High. She has requested probationers for August in English, Maths, History and Technology.

Jason Hamilton asked if there were enough teachers to teach the children and if the teachers were qualified to teach the subjects? Dr Grant confirmed that the teachers were qualified to teach their subjects. Iain added that we had to follow legal guidance and that our meetings were not the forum to discuss specific concerns about individual teachers. However, he did add that he felt that teacher quality should be a topic for discussion at a future Parent Council meeting.

Request for Support for Social Seating

Dr Grant shared that there was not enough seating in the foyer. She also added that the seating that is currently there is not strong enough. She and Mrs Macbeath shared that they desperately need seats. They are planning to open up the hall to provide some extra seating but it still won't be enough. They have looked and know what type of seating they would like to buy and this could then move with them in to the new school. It was agreed that Linda will apply to various windfarms, such as 'Tannich' and 'Camster' for funding for seating. She will then pass these applications to Ross and Iain. (*See Action Plan Point 7*)

Safer Routes to School

Elena shared a review of meetings she's attended. There was a plan done for the new campus and after issues being raised to Highland Council, these have been improved. Elena shared that she was pleased by this and hopes that it will all be in place for the opening of the new campus.

Iain shared that at the last meeting, he felt that all of his points were taken on board. He feels that there are safer routes but only for those children living in Wick and not for those travelling by bus.

Spain volunteering and conservation expedition

Iain read out parts of Mr Aitken's letter requesting support and asked the parents for their views about giving money to this. After some discussion, it was agreed that Dr Grant would speak to Mr Aitken and pass on that we may be able to help with any shortfall, if he comes

back to us nearer the time. She is also going to pass on suggestions of who he could contact for funding. (*See Action Plan Point 8*)

Stakeholder Meeting Update

Iain and Dr Grant went to the last meeting so updated us as follows –

- The opening date for Noss Primary has been delayed. It suffered damage following the recent stormy weather.
- Iain asked for a breakdown of the £48.5 million spend on the new campus. Iain feels that despite parents having campaigned for years for a new school, they aren't now being told how the money is being spent. Instead, Iain was told that it was a 'commercial secret'. (*See Action Plan Point 9*)
- The building of the campus is now £10 million over budget.
- There is still no access for pupils to the all weather pitch. Dr Grant explained that the construction equipment and pupils is a lethal mix. (*See Action Plan Point 10*)

Suggestions for Co-opted Parent Council Members

Iain asked everyone for suggestions of who could become co-opted members. Following a discussion, it was agreed that Iain would approach and ask John Inkster, Willie Watt and Anne Dunnet. (*See Action Plan Point 11*)

Press article – Financial Irregularities

Iain referred to and showed everyone the article from last week's 'John O'Groat Journal' which had the headline "Cops probe school funds!" Iain asked Dr Grant for an update on this situation. Dr Grant said that there was no update, as such, but that it is an ongoing investigation.

£3500 microscope money

Iain said that this had been discussed before at our previous meetings. On the 14th November 2014, Iain wrote to Graham Nichols about the £3500, which was supposed to have been used to buy microscopes. Graham Nichols response was not helpful. So, Iain then wrote to Brian Porter and Bill Alexander and this has resulted in them agreeing to give the £3500 to the school.

£4000 won by Shona Tait

The discussion then moved on to the £4000 which Shona Tait won for the school a year and a half ago. There is no record of what this has been spent on and it is no longer in the school fund. In January, her Dad, Gordon, wrote to Bill Alexander to ask for the reimbursement of this £4000. Iain said that he felt this was part of a 'wider issue' and he suggested that we invite Bill Alexander to come and speak to the Parent Council about this. (*See Action Plan*

Point 6) Linda added that it was unfair on Shona, who had never had the chance to select what the £4000 that she's won, should be spent on. Everyone agreed that we should pursue this matter. Councillor Fernie said that he would speak to Bill Alexander about the missing £4000. (*See Action Plan Point 12*)

Dr Grant added that she has no money in the school fund and so last week when the school had visitors, who helped with the lights and sounds for the Friendship Oscars, she herself paid for their school lunches and a helper, Mr Watt, paid the amount due for the special effects. This is not the first time that Dr Grant has had to pay for things like this from her own salary. Everyone agreed that this is not acceptable and agreed that £1000 from the Parent Council's account should be paid in to the school fund for Dr Grant to use as she sees fit. We also agreed that a cheque for £2000 should be given to Dr Grant to help purchase items but Ross will need to get Sarah and Emily to sign it, due to the ongoing difficulties with the Bank of Scotland.

AOCB

- Jacqui asked about applying for the Parent Council's funding from Highland Council. She and Iain will sort this and the Gmail addresses. (*See Action Plan Point 13*)
- Ross asked if there was a 'Debating Society'. Dr Grant explained that this is linked with Thurso's English department. Ross asked if the Parent Council would be happy to fund prizes for this and said that he'd be happy to be a judge. We agreed to carry this forward to our next meeting.
- Jason asked about 'Duke of Edinburgh' awards and work experience. Dr Grant explained that work experience is organised by staff for 4th year pupils. 5th and 6th year pupils are expected to show initiative and identify where they'd like to go for this. Pupils can only have work experience in places which Highland Council have authorised.
- Jason asked if the school has enough textbooks and Dr Grant confirmed that she had just today ordered 2 new sets of textbooks.
- Sheelagh asked about using I-Pads in school and Councillor Fernie explained that he knows of one High School, who have I-Pads for every pupil. He added that it could be the long term aim, but that it would require a lot of funding.
- Iain asked Dr Grant whether she feels I-Pads or books are better. Dr Grant said that she feels books as I-Pads break.
- Jason said that he would be willing to buy his daughter's textbooks and then sell them on the next year at half price. We agreed that this could prove difficult for those parents who can't afford to buy textbooks.
- Elena raised the issue of a fund raising project. She feels that it's important that we have an event. She asked Dr Grant and Mrs Macbeath if the school had any ideas. Dr Grant said that Mr Glenn would be organising a school summer fayre, which would be a fun day and that parent helpers on a sub-committee, are needed to organise this.

Jacqui will e-mail Dr Grant the names of the parent volunteers. (*See Action Plan Point 14*)

- Linda spoke about ‘Awards for All’ and said that she would be happy to complete an application but she would need to know what the school needed. Dr Grant said that she would find out and it was agreed that we would discuss this at our next meeting. (*See Action Plan Point 15*)
- Debbie said that Chester hadn’t received his e-mail about tonight’s meeting. Jacqui to ensure he is on the mailing list and to add the e-mail addresses of the new parents that joined us tonight. (*See Action Plan Point 16*)

Date of Next Meeting

Monday 18th May at 7pm.

Wick High School Parent Council Action Plan, March 2015

No.	Who?	What?	Completed?
1.	Iain	Write a letter of complaint to the Regional Director of Stagecoach and ask for compensation.	
2.	Iain	Write an open letter to the press about the unacceptable current bus service operated by ‘Stagecoach’.	
3.	Iain	Write to the ‘Bank of Scotland’ complaints department re the ongoing problems that Ross has had re the	

		mandate.	
4.	Iain	Write to John Thurso to inform him of the problems that we've been experiencing with the bank.	
5.	Linda	Speak to Sarah to find out about her experiences of the bank. Pass these on to Iain.	
6	Iain	Invite Bill Alexander (Director of Care + Learning) to our next Parent Council Meeting.	
7.	Linda	Apply to various windfarms for funding for social seating. Pass this on to Ross and Iain.	
8.	Dr Grant	Pass on to Mr Aitken that we may be able to help with a small amount of funding nearer the time of the trip. Also, pass on that he could apply to the following for funding – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MFR Cash for Kids • Windfarms • Local Ward Forum 	
9.	Iain	Write to Ross Gibson to ask about the financing of the new campus as there is a concern about what the money is being spent on.	
10.	Dr Grant	Monitor the progress of the path until the 1 st April and then update Iain on this.	
11.	Iain	Approach the following people to ask them if they would become co-opted members – John Inkster, Willie Watt and Anne Dunnet.	
12.	Councillor Fernie	Speak to Bill Alexander (Director of Care + Learning) about the missing £4000, which was won by Shona Tait for the school.	

13.	Jacqui + Iain	Organise the Gmail addresses. (Need for the end of April – route for PC funding 15 / 16.) Apply for the annual funding from HC for the Parent Council.	
14.	Jacqui	E-mail names of parent volunteers for sub-committee to help organise the School's Summer Fayre.	
15.	Dr Grant	Ask staff what resources they need, so that application forms for funding can be completed.	
16.	Jacqui	Check e-mailing list – is Chester on this? Add on Councillor Fernie, Jason Hamilton, Marelle Alexander ande Avril Henderson.	