

Meeting Note

Parent Council Representatives Meeting : Tuesday, 27 May 2008

A meeting of representatives of West Lothian Council Parent Councils and parent associations was held on Tuesday, 27 May 2007 at Broxburn Academy from 7:00pm.

Gordon Ford, Director of Education & Cultural Services, welcomed 48 representatives from school parent bodies to the meeting and introduced the agenda of which, it was appreciatively noted, two items were raised by Parent Council members.

1. West Lothian Parent Network Report. David Mitchell, Linlithgow Academy Parent Council, explained the results of a survey of Parent Council's views on the formation, organisation and purpose of a local parent networking arrangement and a national body. All respondees supported the concept of some form of local network. Brian Innes, Customer Services Manager, Education & Cultural Services undertook to contact Parent Councils seeking nominees to establish a West Lothian wide body.

2 A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE). Margaret Ross, Education Officer, seconded from her substantive post as Head Teacher at Deans Community High School, gave a presentation describing the Scottish Government's proposed system of 3-18 education to replace that which currently leads to Standard Grades and Higher Still. Margaret summarised the concerns that prompted this Scottish Government initiative to develop modern aims for education in Scotland in the 21st Century. There are, within the aims of ACE, many similarities to teaching and learning strategies recently adopted in Scotland such as developing effective learners, creating challenge, personalising the curriculum and widening choice. Communication with parents is central to ACE.

ACE co-ordinators are working in the eleven school clusters (special schools are integrated into school clusters) to advise, inform and support staff. Notably, literacy, numeracy and health & wellbeing are cross-curricular responsibilities for all teachers – a significant change for secondary school staff. Draft “experiences and outcomes” associated with ACE are in schools for enlightenment of staff, with some staff “trailing” these, while debate in schools about ACE is ongoing. Scottish Government proposals for future National Qualifications, announced in the last four weeks, were briefly stated and included access to vocational ‘skills for work’ as well as academic studies and accreditation of children's extra-curricular achievements. A target date for the implementation of new exams was identified as session 2012/13.

As part of the ACE agenda item, Laura Compton, ICT Curriculum Support Officer spoke on 2 initiatives, (a) the GLOW project, the national schools intranet, and (b) Anytime/Anywhere Learning. Aims are to network every child and teacher and subsequently every parent in a secure environment where networks are an opportunity to capture the interests and abilities already demonstrated by pupils outside the classroom. A commitment was made to return to this topic in greater depth at a future meeting.

Gordon Ford rounded off discussion on ACE with a proposal to hold a special meeting for Parent Council and parent association representatives on the evening of Thursday

21 August 2008, after the Scottish Government's impending launch of a national consultation process, and when more details of implementation and outcomes were available.

A dedicated ACE website with details of "experiences and outcomes"; "trailing", etc, is at: www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/outcomes/index.asp

3 Attendance Issues. Lesley McNulty, Armadale Academy Parent Council, presented a brief description of attendance monitoring procedures at Armadale Academy. Poor attendance, she explained, has a knock-on effect throughout the school, if pupils observe truancy taking place without any visible appropriate management response.

Checks were made on absence mid-morning with messages sent to parents' phones via the Group Call system and followed up with individual calls where necessary. A risk-assessment based priority system is in place to safeguard children apparently missing from school unexpectedly or without explanation.

Measures to improve the attendance of persistent truants are also in place including referral, where appropriate, to Area Attendance Advisory Groups (AAAG) and the Reporter to the Children's Panel.

4 Composite Classes. Steve Bordwell, Uphall Primary School Parent Council, raised the point that, though current arrangements for composite classes appeared to function well in academic terms, he feared that some children lost out socially. Alan Millar, Education Officer and erstwhile head teacher of Kirknewton Primary School had recently chaired a composite class review group. Alan responded saying that, in general terms, the individual education and social needs of every child were met within the smaller, composite class arrangements. Current arrangements and good practice meant that children need not lose out and, in the majority of cases, positively thrived. Moira Niven, Head of Service (Education Development), promised to raise awareness of good practice at an early meeting of primary school Head Teachers, the next scheduled event falling to be held on Thursday, 5 June 2008.

5 Closure of meeting. Gordon Ford listed the undernoted items that he considered appropriate for consideration at future meetings and looked forward to further items proposed in due course by representatives.

- a) Concordat / Outcome Agreement with Scottish Government
- b) Multi-Faith Schools
- c) ACE
- d) the School day
- e) Parents' Evenings

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.

6 Dates of Next Meetings

- a) 21 August 2008 : Special meeting on ACE
- b) 23 September 2008 : Parent Council and Parent Association Representatives