

Minute of a General Meeting of the Dounby Community School Parent Group held on 22 November 2012

Present: Alex Clark (Chair) Lorraine Cormack
Anna Davidson Geraldine Ferguson (Clerk)
Alastair Forsyth (Head Teacher) Katrina Gray
Michelle Hill Amanda Kirkness
Shenagh Leiper Suzanne Lyon
EmmaJane Rendall Margaret Sinclair
Corina Taylor

1. Chair's welcome and apologies

Apologies had been received from Isla Dougall, Dawn Flett and Tracey Miller.

2. Approval of minute of last meeting (13 September 2012)

The minute of the AGM held on 13 September 2012 was approved as an accurate record, proposed by Margaret Sinclair and seconded by Lorraine Cormack.

3. Matters arising

The chair confirmed that an amendment had been made to the last minutes to record the fact that a sincere thank you was extended to those office bearers whose term of office had come to an end, namely Michelle Hill, Isla Dougall and Dawn Flett, and also to Steven Sinclair who had examined the accounts in time for the AGM.

4. Correspondence received by chair

No correspondence had been received.

5. Invitation to co-opted members

It was confirmed that it would be in order to invite Shenagh Leiper to remain for a further year as co-opted group member. Shenagh accepted the invitation and it was agreed that the agenda for the next meeting would include a short talk from her on children and healthy-weight issues. This had been originally scheduled for that evening's meeting, but had been squeezed out due to the volume of other agenda items.

6. FODS update

It was explained that this item was to appear as a regular agenda item as FODS were a part of Parent Group (in order to meet conditions around insurance of FODS events). This regular agenda slot would give them a chance to provide updates on their activities.

7. Matters arising from Head Teacher's Report for November 2012

Headteacher activity

In response to a question from a parent about the after-school badminton club run by the headteacher on a Tuesday, parents were reminded that the information on extra-curricular activities (e.g. netball, football, Scripture Union, Youth Club) had been given to parents earlier in the year either by email/letter or via the Dounby Community Centre handbook, which was available from the Centre's reception area.

ICT

Alastair was asked for an update on how the promised new policy on school internet safety was progressing. He confirmed that this was currently being worked on as part of a process of self-evaluation of the learning and teaching of ICT skills and knowledge. Internet safety would form an integral part of a new programme of ICT learning across the school. In the meantime, access to computers was directed by teachers, and sites such as YouTube were used by teaching staff and as directed by teachers, with supervised access.

Building and grounds

Alastair confirmed that a lot of people had been complaining about the problems with the automatic doors and about access to the building for disabled people. He asked for one last opportunity to try to get a response from the relevant OIC officers before Parent Group took the matter up with local councillors.

Alastair explained that some monies were available (carried forward from last year's maintenance budget) to redesign the area behind the school reception desk. This would give staff in the small office a better line of sight to the reception area so that they could see who was coming in the door. The work would involve removing the wall between the small room and reception so that the area would be more practical and benefit from improved security.

8. Standards and Quality Report for discussion and approval

The Report was discussed, with Alastair pointing out that overall the school was moving in the right direction, although there was still room for improvement. In academic achievement, pupils were doing better than the Orkney average according to the school's data, although this was difficult to judge because of the change in the measurement of pupil achievement in Curriculum for Excellence. A lot of work had been done around the teaching of mathematics as this was the area targeted for improvement after the previous SQR. It was critical to ensure that children had a good understanding of arithmetic at an early age and this had been the focus throughout the year. In addition, a lot of money had been spent on ICT equipment and on children's books in order to build on improvements made in these areas in the past few years.

The report was duly approved, with Corina Taylor proposing and Michelle Hill seconding.

9. School Handbook

Links to the electronic copy of the updated school handbook had been emailed to all parents together with a link to the government guidance on what should be included in a school handbook. The group looked through some hard copies of the handbook and discussed whether it might be helpful to include information on the school complaints procedure. This led to a discussion on ways in which parents and carers could raise concerns, or simply ask questions and enquire about their child's progress. Alastair reiterated that parents were encouraged to phone, email or come personally to the school in order to raise any issues or arrange a longer meeting with himself or a class teacher. There were also the learning logs, parents' consultation evenings and the meet-the-teacher events, as well as the termly letters and the regular newsletters. There were mixed feelings on whether more access was needed to teachers for both informal and formal discussion about children's progress. Alastair confirmed that he fully took on board one parent's comment that there was a big jump between nursery and Primary One in terms of the amount and quality of information that was available to parents.

10. School website

It was agreed to revisit this agenda item once all parents had had a chance to visit the current school website and think about how it could be improved. In the meantime Alastair would look into how, when and by whom the work on the website would be carried out.

11. School playtime – initial discussion

Alastair explained that for some time now the staff had been working on ways to introduce more purposeful play to the playground. FODS had assisted in this work by providing the finance to purchase some equipment such as scooters and pogo sticks. School had also facilitated children who wanted to take their own playthings to school, e.g. scooters and unicycles, as well as smaller items such as skipping ropes, footballs dolls and toy trucks. The group discussed children bringing larger items, e.g. scooters to school and some concerns were

raised about things getting broken, one-upmanship and children feeling hard done by if they did not own the latest craze. Concerns were also expressed about things getting broken and safety on buses, e.g. in the event of an accident. There were felt to be inconsistencies in the way school transport drivers dealt with request to carry toys and so Alastair offered to look into that. Alastair pointed out that there had been some good learning outcomes from the initiative, e.g. children learning to share and to allocate toys fairly. Discussion then turned to ideas for more innovative play, e.g. ideas such as Scrap for Play, a scheme whereby treated industrial waste such as crates, fabrics, planks of wood, rope, etc. is made available to children to encourage creative play, e.g. den-building. Alastair had seen this scheme introduced at Glaitness School in Kirkwall and felt it was worth considering.

It was then confirmed that the play equipment on the Play Park was reaching the end of its life and that the area would now need renewed with hopefully additional resources being provided for the community. The children had been consulted and swings and a slide appeared to be the preferred new equipment. Alastair confirmed that the school had a pot of money set aside that could be used to purchase swings (approximately £3,000). Another idea was to develop the present tennis court into a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA). This would still maintain the option for tennis to be played but would allow football, basketball, netball and other games to be played as well.

It was agreed to form a small Play Park Working-Group which would consult people like Catherine Diamond at OIC, who had done a lot of work on the use of natural materials in play parks on the continent, and also the people involved in the new Birsay play park, who might also have some innovative ideas. The Group would also explore sources of funding e.g. Awards For All and sportscotland. Alastair, Corina Taylor, Anna Davidson and Geraldine Ferguson agreed to sit together on the new working- group.

12. Healthy-weight issues – Shenagh Leiper

It had been agreed to postpone this short awareness -raising session until the following meeting.

13. Any other competent business

14. Date of next meeting

There being no other competent business the meeting concluded at 8.40 pm after it had been agreed that the next meeting would be held on 21 February 2012 at 7pm.