

Minute of the Annual General Meeting of the Dounby Community School Parent Group held on 22 September 2011.

Present:	Georgie Clark	Lorraine Cormack
	Isla Dougall	Geraldine Ferguson (minutes)
	Dawn Flett	Alastair Forsyth
	Katrina Gray	Michelle Hill (Chair)
	Tracey Miller	Corina Taylor

1. Chair's Welcome and Apologies

No apologies had been received prior to the meeting.

2. Approval of Minute of last meeting (26 May 2011)

The minute of the meeting held on 26 May 2011 was approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Correspondence Received by Chair

- i. Two Parent Teacher Association magazines had been received. The Chair highlighted a number of interesting articles on fundraising and passed the magazines on to Dawn Flett as it was felt they might be of interest to the FODS.

There was a brief discussion about the website www.easyfundraising.org, which, it was explained, was a simple way to raise funds for good causes, like schools. Parents can shop online with their favourite stores and raise money at the same time. **easyfundraising** works with thousands of well-known retailers, including Boden, M&S, Argos, Vodafone and many more. These retailers then donate a percentage of the shopper's spend to their chosen cause when shopping takes place through the **easyfundraising** site.

The school had received a very welcome £30 from **easyfundraising** at the beginning of the term due to the efforts of some parents. It was agreed that even though a reminder about the website was sometimes included in the Newsletter, the scheme needed more publicity so that more money could be raised in this way. Some suggestions were: using the school website; using the FODS website; using Facebook; and the school office emailing parents a link to the **easyfundraising** website so that they could set it as their homepage and hopefully be more inclined to register with the site and use it.

- ii. A letter had been received from the Education and Leisure Services Department concerning grant funding and payments for insurance of the group's activities. The letter confirmed that the insurance payment was to be deducted at source from the Council grant to the Parent Group.
- iii. A letter had also been received inviting Parent Group members to attend training on topics such as charring meetings, finance and the role of the Parent Council etc. Lorraine and Michelle were both soon due to attend training sessions that would cover involvement of Parent Group members in recruitment panels, and other relevant personnel issues. Alastair encouraged Group members to consider attending training events like this (and the compulsory refresher courses) as the more members who were trained to sit on these panels the better due to the considerable time commitment involved.
- iv. The Chair drew members' attention to a useful FAQs section and a useful guide to campaigning in the latest edition of the SPTC (Scottish Parent Teacher Council), magazine *Backchat*.

- v. The Chair summarised the minutes of a 'Chairs of Parent Councils' meeting held in May 2011. The theme had been 'Parental Involvement' and two schools had done presentations on the topics 'Healthy Me' and Glow. Attention was drawn to the *Parents as Partners in Learning* pages on the OIC website, including links to the ParentZone and fact files. The minutes also referred to the 2009 ETHOS survey, currently being repeated in Orkney by the Council's Department of Education and Leisure Services.

The Chair also referred to a newsletter from the National Parent Forum of Scotland, which again mentioned ParentZone and included an update on the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

- vi. A questionnaire from OIC had been received as part of a survey seeking parents' views about changes (as part of the Council's cost-efficiency measures) to the way the Orkney Schools Instrumental Service was to be delivered and charged for in schools. The service had traditionally been free, but now a proposed charging structure was expected to recoup about £60,000, or approximately one fifth, of the budget. Most group members felt that, although the costs to parents were likely to remain lower than the Scottish average, they were still likely to prove prohibitive for families with more than one child and might mean that Orkney's strong reputation as a place which produces many excellent young musicians would suffer in the long term.

5. Annual report on the activities of the DPG (2010/2011)

The Chair gave a verbal report on the year's activities, which is summarised as follows:

The year had begun with the AGM on 9 September 2010, with Michelle Hill being elected as Chair and Isla Dougall as Vice-Chair, and with Katrina Gray agreeing to continue as Treasurer until September 2011. At that time Emma Grieve and Andrea Price had been the co-opted members, having been co-opted for one year from November 2009 and March 2010 respectively.

The Group had held three further meetings during the year – one in November, one in February and one at the end of May.

At the end of 2010, due to problems with insurance for fund-raising events, the Friends of Dounby School (FODS) group had become a sub-group of Dounby Parent Group with funds for each group being banked through one bank account. Throughout the year, the FODS had worked tirelessly to raise a total of £5000 to supplement school funds. This money had gone some considerable way towards offsetting some of the budget cuts the school was facing, allowing, for example, some educational excursions to take place without the need for parents and carers to be charged. The September 2011 Newsletter had contained a note of thanks to the FODS for their work during the year.

Through the attendance of the head teacher at all of the Parent Group meetings during the year, parents had had the opportunity to hear first-hand about any cost-cutting exercises facing the school due to Council budget cuts. They had also been given information about any relevant staffing issues facing the school.

The Parent Group had had the opportunity to find out more from the head teacher about the new Curriculum for Excellence and the school's plans for improving reading, writing and mathematics teaching within the school. Members had had their attention drawn to various official reports that would help them become more informed about the work of the school during the academic year. During the year, they had also been kept apprised of developments

with GLOW and with improvements to school facilities e.g. the play-park and tennis courts, proposed building works and school energy efficiency measures

Members had been able to share with the head teacher their views on such things as parents' evenings, school reports, parking problems and safety issues, and end of term services. In February they had been formally consulted on a new *Policy on Reporting, Consulting and Meeting Parents and Carers*.

During the year, the head teacher had put forward some suggestions for projects that the Group might want to get involved in e.g. ECO schools, a disposable plastic bags campaign and a Read with Children idea. However, progress in this area had been slow as clarification was still needed regarding the required disclosure procedure. It was hoped that any uncertainty could be resolved early in the 2011-2012 school year.

At the May 2011 meeting, Geraldine Ferguson had taken over from Georgie Clark as Clerk to the Parent Group.

6. Approval of Accounts and Appointment of Auditor

Following the Group's decision at the last meeting to merge the Treasurer post with that of the Treasurer of Friends of Dounby School (at the end of Katrina Gray's term of office as Treasurer in September), there had been a slight delay in passing the accounts to Steven Sinclair for examination and audit. Dawn Flett was now willing to act as Treasurer of both the Friends of Dounby School and the Parent Group, and she agreed to arrange for the books of account to be passed to Steven Sinclair as a matter of urgency so that a full account of all income and expenditure for 2010-2011 could be given at the next meeting. There was £430.10 in the Group's bank account and explained that the usual items of expenditure were insurance (which would now be deducted at source from the grant) and the quarterly payment to the clerk. It was confirmed that the monies were there to ensure that no member of the Group would be out of pocket as a result any business done on behalf of the Group. The funds could therefore be used to cover the clerk's expenses e.g. printing or photocopying, or reasonable travel expenses for anyone attending training or other events as a representative of the group. Geraldine said that before the next meeting she would produce a draft expenses claim form for members to use .

7. Election of Office Bearers

Michelle Hill and Isla Dougall agreed to continue in the posts of Chair and Vice-Chair respectively until the end of their term of office in September 2012. Dawn Flett agreed to act as Treasurer for the remaining year of her term of office as treasurer of FODS.

8. Invitation to Co-opted Members

Shenagh Leiper had already been asked to join the Group as a co-opted member; the Chair agreed to follow this up. It was also agreed that Hilary Morell, former head-teacher at the school, would be someone whose opinion on certain issues it might be useful for the Group to have. Alastair agreed to follow this up.

9. Update from Head Teacher

Alastair's update was prefaced with some remarks about the possibility that the Scottish Government was planning to give Parent Councils more control in the way schools were run. He linked this to the need, felt by all present, for the Group to promote itself more actively as a way for parents to have more involvement in their children's education. This led to a brief discussion about ways in which the Group could meet its objectives as set out in its constitution. It was agreed that one way was for members to use, and to encourage non-members to use, all of the channels of communication which were available to them to comment on or query any

aspect of their children's learning or school policy e.g. through use of email, telephone, homework diaries, learning logs, parents' evenings etc.

Alastair then went on to deliver his verbal report to the Group focussing on three distinct areas as follows:

1. 'Tough Times' - what is happening within the OIC Education Services Department

Alastair explained about the Council's plan to reduce the senior management team at Orkney Islands Council, leading to a reduction from 34 to 18 in the number of Chief Officer posts and resulting in annual savings of £1.16 million. The Housing Division was to be merged with Education and Leisure Services, creating a new Executive Directorate (Education, Leisure and Housing) with one Executive Director being appointed to head the new structure.

Alastair was apprehensive about what the implications would be for Dounby Community School once the restructuring of the new Directorate was completed. Some of the functions and roles which were likely to be cut were ones which had proved particularly useful in terms of: effective management of schools by the local authority; the provision of support for Head teachers; and keeping a grip on school improvement issues. He anticipated an unacceptable increase in the amount of admin tasks that head teachers and schools would have to perform and this would take staff away from key teaching tasks.

2. School staffing, budget cuts and improved facilities

Jude Barnes, Support for Learning Teacher (3 days) was retiring at half-term and interviews for her replacement were due to be held on 31 October. Anne Phillips, Support for Learning Assistant, wished to reduce her days from 5 days to 3 days. On 27 October Nichola Moar, Pre-School Teacher, would return from maternity leave, which would unfortunately mean that Hazel McKinlay's temporary contract would come to an end.

Some staff, mainly admin staff, had had their hours reduced with the overall reduction in hours amounting to 5 hours and also some holiday working hours. Linda Johnston would be returning to the school after her secondment to Smiddybrae; this would mean that the 0.4 admin post which had become vacant due to the resignation of Paula Spence last year would then be advertised.

Cuts to the school budget, which had been highlighted at previous meetings, meant that most vacancies that arose were being filled by temporary appointments only. This made it particularly hard to develop a school ethos, to carry out development work and to embrace fully the new Curriculum for Excellence, as well as being bad for staff morale.

More budget cuts were expected, but on a more positive note improvements to the insulation in the school ceilings were already thought to be making a big difference to the heating bills and should prove to be a good investment. The Bowling Green Project was looking very likely to go ahead bringing with it a refurbished play-park and a new multi-surface play area. On a less positive note, however, due to problems with planning permission and the inability to find a suitable site for the turbine within the school grounds, the wind turbine project would most probably not be going ahead.

3. School Improvement Plan

Alastair summarised the main headings within the latest draft of the school's Improvement Plan, namely Curriculum for Excellence, Self-Evaluation Plan, Learning & Teaching Action Plan and Health & Well-Being and explained how these were all inter-connected. As regards learning and teaching, the focus would be on Maths, which up to now has been taught as a 'scheme', which worked well for children of average abilities not so well for others. Progress in Maths last year

had been below the Scottish and Orkney average. There was also an ongoing Reading Action Plan as reading had been the successful focus of last year's Improvement Plan and developments made then would continue to be built upon with teachers continually adding to their repertoire of teaching tools and techniques.

Two developments were highlighted which were felt to be of particular interest to parents. There is to be a new school policy on Home Learning (i.e. homework) which will give more flexibility to both parents and children to decide when homework tasks were completed, allowing homework to be fitted around each family's own schedule for after-school/evening activities and the work and other family commitments of parents. There was also a plan to move to the use of 'profiles' throughout the school as the preferred way of providing children with a reflective summary statement of their achievement, publicly recognising progress in learning and achievement and challenging, motivate and support all children and young people to achieve their best. A profile is a snapshot of a child or young person's best achievements at a given point in time, which would be a 'live' document drawing together a range of information about a child's or young person's learning journey. It would eventually replace, for all classes, the traditional tick-box style end-of-year 'Report' that had generally not proved particularly popular with either parents or teaching staff.

Under the heading of Health and Well-being, there were plans to look at the themes of food and cooking with children having the opportunity to see vegetables growing in new raised beds and a new Eco greenhouse. A grant for £450 to spend on gardening equipment had been received from the Soil Association. The school was no longer eligible to fly its Green Flag, as Eco Schools had changed the criteria by which schools were judged. The decision had been taken not to try to meet the new criteria but to consolidate the progress that had already been made in the areas on which the school had been concentrating; litter management, biodiversity and energy management.

Parents are welcome to contact Alastair with any questions they might have concerning any of the items in his presentation. Alastair will put the main documents forming the School Improvement plan on the school website in due course.

10. Any other Competent Business

A member mentioned that she and some other parents had concerns about the state of a section of the fencing around the front of the school, which she felt was posing a health and safety risk to anyone passing by or children playing nearby. Alastair was aware that the fence was in this state. The fence is due to be replaced by the local authority in 2013 as a capital works project. Alastair will take steps to ensure that necessary inspections are carried out promptly by the school janitor. The Council's School Maintenance Officer is aware of the serious state of the fence and Alastair has asked that the capital project be brought forward because of the poor condition of the fence.

A member also expressed concern that information about named children displayed on classroom walls, e.g. progress charts and reward charts did not appear to be routinely covered up during events such as Meet the Teacher and parent evenings in order to protect the confidentiality of children. Alastair agreed to look into this and to remind teachers of the need to be aware of any areas where they might breach confidentiality, data protection rules or parent/carer sensitivity.

12. Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting on 24 November 2010 at 7pm.