



QCHS PC Newsletter

Issue 1

AUTUMN 2017

In this issue:

New Build Progress	1
Academic Achievements	2
Pupil Equity Fund	2
Capacity Time-bomb	3
Parent Pay	3
Community Engagement	4
Equal Opportunities	4

Welcome

As anyone who has ever heard John Wood talk about high school will know, it takes more than a building and group of teachers to ready our children for their adult life - it takes a community.

The parent council is made up of volunteer parents, with the objective of working with and assisting the school. This can take many forms - inputting parental views, supporting the school senior management team, raising the profile of the school and lobbying the council and government.

Whilst we have had some recent significant positive impacts, one area where we feel improvement is required is communication - we have simply not been good enough at sharing information with the wider parent forum.

This first newsletter is a step towards addressing the communication gap.

We hope that it causes you to reflect and consider any input you would like to share with the parent council - particularly around the new school.

Please get in touch via any of the parent council members, use the contact form on the school website, or even better come along to one of our meetings - all meetings are open to all parents.

Neil McIntosh, Chair

The New QHS

Formal planning permission for the new building was submitted in September. Following the informal consultation exercises in June, this will give the community the chance to formally input into the plans.



From a parent council perspective the most pleasing aspect is the unique design which is modelled around pupil needs and based on the school's senior leadership team's vision for education in the 21st century. Design consultants have been appointed and they are fully engaging the whole teaching team at QHS to help ensure the vision is delivered. Alex Crawford, deputy head teacher, has been seconded full time on the project to help drive it forward. The parent council has also been working with Queensferry & District Community Council to ensure that the views of the wider community are considered.

Assuming the planning application proceeds as expected, the main focus of the parent council throughout 2017 & 2018 will be to ensure that the project is a high priority with Edinburgh Council and remains on track to complete by March 2020 - the current school can only accommodate 1000 children and pupil numbers are expected to reach 1037 by August 2020, so any delay would require temporary solutions - something we all want to avoid.

Academic Achievements

One area where the parent council has focussed in the last 12 months is academic achievement. Whilst the data should be viewed over a number of years rather than a single year group, broadly speaking the school is on an upward trajectory and compares favourably against other City of Edinburgh schools. National 5 results in particular are showing a strong upward trajectory.

The parent council have discussed what parents can do to assist further, what role private tutors play, and how the school improvement plan supports academic achievement.

Our conclusion to date is that academic achievement is driven by multiple factors, but one area where we as parents can help is by acting as role models and inspiring children to be their best. As such we are always looking for parents who are able to give up a couple of hours and come in to speak to classes about their life experiences and how education helps provide a base for opportunities in later life. If you are interested in helping with this, please get in touch.

QHS receives Pupil Equity funding based on free school meal take up. Closing the gap between free school meal entitlement and take up represents an opportunity for QHS to receive additional funding

Pupil Equity Fund

The Scottish Government have provided £120m to schools across Scotland, targeted at closing the poverty related attainment gap. Queensferry High receives a (very) small portion of this funding, and the school have used this to supplement pupil support staff.

The pupil council have spent some time discussing - some members also spent time with experts at Edinburgh Council wide events. It is fair to say that we most probably have families at Queensferry where the cost of school trips and extras can be prohibitive. Both the school and parent council are keen to support these families, but appreciate it is a sensitive area.

The Pupil Equity Fund is a prime example. The fund is distributed to schools based on the free school meals take up. In other words, the more free school meals taken at QHS result in a larger Pupil Equity Fund.

The actual gap between free school meal entitlement and free school meal take up at QHS is significant. As a result, these families not only miss out on free school meals, but the school receives a smaller Pupil Equity fund.

School staff have reassured the parent council that free school meals can be arranged discretely, and with the cashless model in operation, the days where children receiving free school meals could be easily identified are long gone.

The focus for the parent council in 2017/18 is to ensure that trips and extra expenses are considered from an affordability perspective. Where appropriate we may consider spending some of our limited funding on things like spare sports shoes to ensure that all children can participate in sports activities in the 3G pitches - whilst we can't provide 800 pair of shoes, a few spares should mean that no-one misses out.

You can play your part too - if your child has outgrown suitable sports shoes then why not donate them to the school? Or if the blazer or school kilt has been worn once and then shoved to the back of the wardrobe, you might like to consider donating this to a local foodbank.

2,374

The number of schools that will benefit from pupil equity fund

£354,000

The largest sum given to any school

£120 m

The total size of pupil equity fund

£1,200

The amount a school receives per pupil claiming free meals

£278,400

The largest sum given to a primary

The capacity time-bomb



Assuming the new QHS is delivered on time in March 2020, the school will be large enough until 2022. At that point the existing catchment area is predicted to see 1221 pupils in QHS, 21 above the capacity of the new school.

The City of Edinburgh Council believe this is fine. 21 extra pupils is manageable and everyone should be able to squeeze in. The parent council have some concerns around this, as the 1200 is a notional capacity and shared spaces should not be lost to classroom space in such a new school.

However it is the following year, in August 2023 that the capacity issue really starts to bite. By this stage there will be 1300 pupils and 'squeezing in' is no longer a viable option. Whilst projections are like any forecast, 2023 is now less than 6 years away. The children who will attend QHS then are already sitting in the feeder primaries. Whilst the number may vary slightly depending on who moves into and out of the community, it is clear that the number of pupils at QHS will be larger than 1200. Anyone who pretends otherwise is playing a game of sticking their fingers in their ears and hoping the problem goes away.

So what happens in 2023 and what steps are underway? Unfortunately not very much.

An informal consultation around the catchment area and potential new high school for West Edinburgh is due to begin imminently. Even if the outcome of the catchment review is that Kirkliston should be re-aligned to a new West Edinburgh High, the problem is only solved if a new West Edinburgh High is ready by August 2023. If not, the problem is not a Kirkliston one, it is a problem for the whole existing Queensferry catchment area, and it begins in 2023 with the problem of what to do with an extra 100 pupils.

Recent history suggests that average High Schools take 7 or 8 years from the point of statutory consultation commencing to being ready. We have less than 6 years to go, possibly less than 5, and the informal consultation is just about to begin. No site has been identified for the potential new school, with the previous assumption of land at Edinburgh Business Gateway having been questioned by the Scottish Government. Representations have been made to Edinburgh Council who believe that time is still on their side. Let's hope they are correct.

The parent council, along with the 4 elected councillors will continue to press for the catchment review and new West Edinburgh High to be at the top of Edinburgh Council's priorities.

Parent Pay

Many parents will already or soon be using parent pay rather than cheques for school expenses such as trips.

The parent council had and retain some concerns around the administration cost of this scheme. Whilst the private organisation levies a small fee (1.5%) currently, the concern is around whether this may rise in future.

Unfortunately, regardless of payment method, the levy applies. Even if you pay cash or cheque, the school are still charged the 1.5% admin fee, as the school office staff must now bank the cash or cheque and enter the details via the ParentPay site on your behalf. The main exception is school meals, where no admin fee applies.

From a school perspective, they will quote costs inclusive of this 1.5% and in most instance it will be negligible. But on longer trips abroad, the amount will be a factor.

The parent council are joining forces with other parent councils in Edinburgh to ensure that future changes take into account affordability for both families and schools.





Community Engagement

QHS Parent Council is one of the most active parent councils in the wider community.

Of most relevance is the link with Queensferry & District Community Council which has a representative on the parent council, and vice versa.

This allows topics of interest to the wider community to be aired and allows the parent council to call upon the support of the Community Council where appropriate.

Two good examples of this in the last year have been discussions around community drug misuse and provision of swimming facilities in the new QHS.

On the first of these, the link with the QDCC enabled members of the community to come into the school, to see the environment and to allay fears around social media gossip.

On the second, the links helped drive a meeting with the Edinburgh Council Planning Convenor to consider upgrading the swimming pool in the new school from 4 lanes to 6 lanes.

There are strong links with Kirkliston Community Council too with one parent being a member of both organisations.

On a wider Edinburgh basis, QHS parent council is one of the more active on the North West Education forum. We use this forum to press home any issues where other schools may be suffering similar issues. A great example was the wifi provision in schools during 2016 - although QHS was probably impacted more than any other high school, using this forum to highlight our concerns and have others share their experiences led to a quicker resolution.

Equal Opportunities

One of the roles of the parent council is to provide feedback to the school. Sometimes it is invaluable for the school to hear perceptions direct from parents. For example, in the last year the parent council have questioned whether school trips with limited spaces should be allocated on a first come, first served basis as there are a number of reasons why some children may be disadvantaged by this method. As a result, more 'names out of hat' approaches are now being used. A very small but simple example of how powerful feedback can be.



Diary Dates

- Next Meeting - Wednesday 25th October 2017 - 7pm
- Wednesday 7th December 2017
- Wednesday 31st January 2018
- Tuesday 20th March 2018
- Thursday 17th May 2018

All parents are welcome at our meetings, and minutes are uploaded to the school website if you want to keep up to date

Contacting the Parent Council

Any member of the parent council can be contacted directly if you know them, otherwise we have a contact us form on the QHS website, under the Contact Us>Parent Council and an email address: qchspc@gmail.com

Neil McIntosh (Chair), Martin Bennett (Vice Chair), Mark Elder (Treasurer), Alison Hancock (PSA liaison and cluster rep), Carolyn McDonald (QDCC rep), Jo Jo Sutherland, Kieran Shaw, Louise Middleton, Mel Kinchant, Melanie Ross, Pete Whitehouse, Stuart McLean, Wil Tunnell