

## **Minutes of the Parents' Council Meeting**

**Held on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2009**

**At 7.00pm in the House Longfield Academy**

**Present:** Alaric Bonthron (AB) - Chair, Simon Beamish (SB) – Principal, Anne Davies (AD) – Principal, Katrina Adams (KA) – Melanie Tomkins (MT) – Secretary, Jane Archer (JA), Stephanie Turner (ST), Sue Gilliam (SG)

### **1. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13<sup>th</sup> October were agreed.

### **2. Update on Actions set**

#### **Transport Questionnaire**

still being processed.

#### **Uniform Questionnaire**

SB said that Sue Crocker – Business Director - has a working party looking at this with members of staff from both Academies. ST asked if there are any students in the working party and SB answered once they have more information it will be going forward to the Student Council. AB said the parents should also be involved in the process; AD agreed and said she would speak with Neil Willis (NW). Discussions followed and SB said at the SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) meeting there was a presentation with regards to uniform and found that Academies all wore blazers and ties which he feels the school will not want to move away from.

#### **Uniform Card**

There may be a Uniform Card being introduced if it becomes a problem.

#### **Swine Flu - information for Parents on the school website**

AD said she would arrange for this to go on and have a piece in the newsletter.

### **3. Anne Davies and Simon Beamish – Principal Update**

SB went through the issues that were brought up at the last meeting:

#### **Megazone**

The PC asked if there could be a parents' session in the new area for them to experience it and to see how it works – AD said that they are planning

to do this in the summer term. MT asked which year groups are using this space at the moment and AD replied that it is mainly Key Stage 3 pupils.

AD then went on to read comments made from the feedback questionnaire: things they did like; the students like working with others from different groups and classes with the chance to work and discuss things in a way that they would not normally do within a normal class, there is a horn that has been introduced when the noise levels get too loud and students like this, there is a countdown clock which they like using and speakers playing low music in some lessons; overall they are enjoying using the new technology, the smart books and the notepads. They have said they like being taught by two teachers and also felt there was less writing – maybe because the teachers are being more interactive during these lessons - things they didn't like; the chairs and room layout, AB asked how involved are the Principals and Staff in the internal design and layout in the new build, AD replied it has already been decided and the staff have had a lot of input AB asked if it was movable and AD said yes it is. SB said looking at the new building there are only 6 rooms in the new build that are double sized classrooms – two in every college – AB said that it is not an issue of how many there are it is to do with an understanding of how these work and that to make sure the grades are still improving and the students enjoy the experience of working in these.

SB said the Leigh had a full Ofsted inspection just before the last half term and they received outstanding, which shows that where we are concerned about the impact of the large classes and given that the Leigh have more of them, they are delivering an outstanding quality of teaching there. KA said whatever Ofsted report the Leigh has you will still find parents, because of the way things were forced on them, will not be valuing it that highly.

AB said that the information should be made ready for parents stating that it is not a proper classroom yet but it is being looked at and worked on, encouraging parents that all is being done to make these work. It is an important part of the process and parents need to be aware of the comments made by staff and students with regards to the new space. KA said we have to keep the confidence that has been built up since the 60 plus teaching proposal was put into place. AB said they need to start advertising that in the summer term parents will be able to get the chance to see these spaces working. AD then went through the list of questions given to staff and students to complete regarding this new space for example; did you enjoy it, how would you judge the learning, give us two

things you like and two ways we could improve it etc the PC agreed these were a good way of moving forward. AD added that the staff say they love the fact that there is technology, it promotes group work and mixed ability groupings especially in Maths, they also like the fact that it generates excitement and fun and that they plan the lessons more thoroughly – AB asked if that is because they feel more exposed and AD agreed – teachers are also able to learn from one another.

### **Parents asked for a diagram to be placed on the website relating to Principal responsibilities**

SB said they would rather not do that because they feel they already have a good system set up whereas any query goes to the school website [info@longfieldacademy.org](mailto:info@longfieldacademy.org) Brenda, who is PA to all three Principals, picks that up, and then directs that accordingly. AB said that the thing that the PC wanted to make clear to parents is who do they turn to if they have any problems with the Principals – we know it is Frank Green (FG) – but parents are not aware of this, also if there is a mediation process before it gets to FG – this is not clear to parents. AD said that if a parent does have a problem with a Principal then they can go to another one to try and resolve the issue first.

### **Staff List to be placed on the website**

SB said it is done and going on in January.

### **Building update to go on the website**

SB said there is a webcam in place and parents can go on and have a look at the progress.

### **Students accessing Facebook**

SB said that the team were shocked that pupils were getting on FB because these have been firewalled on all school computers. If parents are aware pupils are still getting on this please speak with SB. ST pointed out that most phones can access this now so that is where the problem may lay.

### **Cyber Bullying**

There is a flyer in the next newsletter giving information regarding websites etc for students.

### **School days and terms**

SB then gave the PC a handout with regards to a consultation for changing the school day and school year which is in the process of being

posted to parents for their views. Before beginning the consultation process with parents, the paper has been sent to heads of Primary feeder schools and has also gone through an internal procedure because they wanted to find out from the staff; do they like it, do they have any constructive feedback and what are their thoughts about the next stage from here. Having done that, the feedback from them was positive and it has their support with just one or two queries regarding minor issues. It has also been taken to the Governors and Trade Unions which also have full support. He went on to explain as a normal school they are required by law to have three months of consultations but an Academy is not required to consult at all.

AB stated that after the issues re consultation in the formation of Longfield that route would be disastrous. Any change could impact on families re childcare, parental leave etc and needed to be offered for views. SB went on to say that he was just letting us know that because the school does not want to take that view, they do want to consult for precisely those reasons, we want to get people involved and get their views which is the reason the letter has been written. He went on to explain as a first port of call they want parents to contact the PC as their representatives and issues can be resolved from there [parents@longfieldacademy.org](mailto:parents@longfieldacademy.org) .

SB then went through the proposal to change the school day explaining the reason behind this is they want to have more contact time with students; the legal minimum for an educational week is 25 hours and are looking to extend it to 28 hours. The additional period of the day will be designed around providing enriching opportunities in, for example, PE and Arts, but would also have a numeracy and literacy focus, particularly in KS3. They have shortened the Wednesday so teachers will have time to plan lessons together and to be able to produce quality learning experiences, they do not have this at the Leigh, and Longfield feels this is a flaw, it will give them 2 hours worth of planning and training time for staff to get together every week.

He then went through the school day under the new structure which includes 2 hour blocks which is better in particular lessons such as Art, Sport or Technology. The school day will be the same as it is now apart from reducing the lunch time to 40 minutes with another 2 hour block lessons then the school day will end at 4pm instead of 3.15pm.

At this point SB asked if there were any questions and AB asked how many sports clubs will be in the new structure SB replied

Monday/Tuesday/Thursday and Friday for key stage 3 lesson 6 will be enrichment and that will be the sports clubs, it will be integrated into the school day. KA said that has been a big problem for students that want to do these sports but are worried about getting home after and feels that this is a good idea and the PC agreed. MT asked if the three colleges will still be breaking and having lunch together and SB that one of the things that was not negotiable was to have different lunch and break times. Students will still continue to have these together.

Discussions followed regarding the early finish on a Wednesday and the PC felt that may cause a problem, KA said one idea would be to have a room available that pupils could pay £1 towards for staff cover to enable them to stay on school grounds for longer and SB said they would see what the response is and then manage it from there.

ST then asked on a Wednesday how soon would a parent find out if their child has truanted from school and left early as she has just had a similar experience with her own daughter and as yet have still not had any notice at all from Longfield that this has happened apart from them asking her daughter if her parents know, which is not good enough. AB then said texting parents on their mobile phones would be a good idea and also a good deterrent. KA said that it works well with one of her children and the PC all agreed this would be a good idea to introduce in Longfield Academy.

**Action: Update for next meeting on how the school communicates truancy/detention to parents as communication is an issue and needs to be looked at.**

The PC agreed this would be a good move for the longer school day and the only issue they could foresee would be the early finish on a Wednesday.

SB then discussed the reasons behind changing the school term which have gone through an internal process with the Leigh and has been decided that we stay with the KCC dates. He pointed out that the Leigh's holiday dates for 2010/11 are different from the KCC in February, Easter and October. The only place our proposed holiday dates do differ from the KCC is a two week break in October, the reason being is the term from the start of September to the middle to the end of December is exhausting for the teaching staff as well as the students and feels to have the two week break then would be educationally valid, four of those days in the first week would be inset days for staff.

The rest of the year will be the same as KCC and they would break for the summer holiday on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, which is the same, have a 5 week holiday and students will return on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2011. AB said the issues will be with childcare and in his personal view that any change to summer holidays could impact on families ability to have leave in the summer. AB also pointed out that to put the inset days on the bottom of illustration 2 is confusing for parents and that they should let parents know that the inset days will be the same for each year and will not change as they do now.

SB said the Senior Leadership of the school is 100% behind the parents that the holidays should stay the same as the KCC. They have a guarantee from the Leigh Trust that future Academic years will be decided as a Federation and we will not be forced to fit in with them. AB said he thinks October will be an issue with people and KA said she too thinks it will be an issue but on a personal level she likes it because she too thinks that the terms from September to Christmas are too long.

AB said going back to the earlier conversation with what to do with the students for the Wednesday afternoon we are now looking at a full week. KA said on the other hand it will be better for people to manage inset days in blocks instead of the odd days as we have now. AB then pointed out that speaking as they do with the 'Federation' it looks like we are being drawn in by the Leigh and parents will see the wording and think the worst. ST said that she thinks parents will look at this and feel that at the moment there are some differences but feel that gently we will be taken up the same route as the Leigh.

General concerns/views relate to 'clone schools' and a lack of parental choice in the area was one of the key factors in agreeing a differing approach at Longfield. The Leigh is out of sync with every other school in the area including the Grammar schools and it causes people concern. The link up was a Federation not a takeover, it is two schools working together in collaboration that does not mean to say they have to be the same thing.

AB stated the view that Longfield does not want to be the same as the Leigh and the group do not accept that we have to go to the Leigh parents to get their view of any change. The PC agreed with this.

AD said we are all stakeholders of the Leigh Trust; we are a Leigh Trust school, as the students are, also the University of Kent because they are

associated with the Leigh. AB said the Trustees were very clear that we would not have to go to the same timetable, JA said that we were told that we would stay in line with the KCC for a number of reasons i.e. other Primary schools, feeder schools, holidays and universities we need to run in line with them and this was the argument we had. They need to come in line with us and not the other way round.

SB said they are happy to put that in the paper and the published KCC calendar so that parents can actually compare, the PC agreed. AB said that an explanation should also be put in as to why the school feels that a 2 week break in October is necessary. KT said an explanation of the inset days should also be there, and then parents know when the inset days are. SB said it is very constructive feedback and thanked the PC.

SB then summarised and stated that we haven't automatically fallen into line, they think this is the best way forward and nothing is published beyond here either here or at the Leigh. Any future term dates will be decided together and although the PC have a different view, his view since working here from April is that FG is not the kind of person that comes in and tells us how to do things, he really is not like that and it is not the way it is run. We do have two Academies under one Governing Body, doing things differently.

AB said he has been speaking to the Governing Body and his concern is the understanding with some of the issues relating to the parents. It has to be very clear that this is a distinctly different group from what there is at the Leigh and that is why the Development Group is in place to manage that process; to have this school looked at independently. The PC agreed with this.

KT said an idea for the extra week in October could be, with certain age groups of children, is look into the extended schools option of talking to organizations and saying; were having a break here we could let you have a facility what can you provide for those children. The PC agreed on this.

SB asked if the PC have enough detail so that if parents were to come to us and ask questions we could answer them sufficiently and AB said that he thinks that they should end the letter to reflect the fact that the PC have discussed a number of parental concerns and would encourage them to liaise with the PC. SB thought this was a good idea.

#### **4. AOB**

##### **Feedback from the Work Experience Meeting**

KA said there were quite a lot of parents who contacted her after the work experience for year 10 meeting last week to say the meeting was poor and that work experience was proving to be a hopeless exercise; the evening was not the positivity they were looking for and what they expected, it was very negative. AB said the information was poor and that the bulk of the meeting could have been done by letter, there were a lot of mixed messages and confusion from the meeting. JA agreed with this point. KA said overall the feedback that she has been given is that the placements have become so limited that the actual value of it isn't any good anymore. AB asked if it is a legal requirement for students to do work experience and SB said it is not a legal requirement but it is a statutory requirement for schools at key stage 4 to provide opportunities for enterprise learning SB then thanked the PC for those views and said he would feed those back.

### **Questionnaire**

AD then spoke about the questionnaire that will be sent out to all parents to be filled in one per student on how they feel about what is going on at Longfield Academy and how they feel we could improve on this. Parents will get several if they have more than one student at the school. The school value as many responses as they can get and urge parents to please complete them and return them as soon as possible.

As there was no other business the meeting finished at 8.45 pm.

**Date of next meeting**

**Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2010  
7.00 pm in the LRC  
Longfield Academy**