

Meeting Minutes

South Morningside Parent Council Meeting

Monday 29 April on Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Parent Council Members

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|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ange Robinson | Louisa Dall |
| Jack Bruck | Bobby Pathak |
| Thom Kenrick | Andrew Leiper |
| Dan Farthing | Helena Castro |
| Sarah Whitty | Ellie Maizels |
| Elisabeth Quinn | Lizzi Kenrick |
| Neale Dutton | |
| | |
| Grant Gillies* | Maureen Murray* |

The SMPS Parent Council is made up of the above parent voting members in attendance (with one apology for today's meeting - see below- and four who did not attend) plus four non-voting staff members.*

Councillors

| | |
|-----|--|
| N/A | |
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Parents/Carers, Teachers & Guests attendees

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| Helen New | Kate Liversidge |
| Vivien Beyer | Lauren Lambie |
| Eilish Stimpson | Maggie Dwyer |
| Jane Petty | Marc Vendrell |
| Pvsjrd (name TBC) | Charlotte |
| Reuben Carr | Andrew Park |
| Shona Dewar | Anne Doherty |
| Fiona | Craig Fraser |

Welcome, attendees and apologies - Ange Robinson (Co-chair)

- Louisa Dall introduced the meeting and read out the apologies: Clare Forsman, Pam Ferguson, Elaine Jones, and Hannah Oertel.

Review/approval of previous meeting notes - Sarah Whitty (Secretary)

- The meeting minutes from March 4th were approved.

Chairs update - Louisa Dall (Co-chair)

- Our current chairs Louisa Dall and Ange Robinson will be stepping back in effect this summer following the AGM. Pleased to announce that Andrew Leiper and Bobby Pathak have volunteered to step up as co-chairs. Other nominees are still very welcome, and they can let Louisa and Ange know directly at chair@sm-pc.org.
- Co-chair focus since the last SMPS PC meeting:
 - Accommodation: Working with school leadership on the plan for P1 and P2s. No formal decision yet.
 - Toilets: These will not be done this summer. We're working with the council on what can/can't be done, and are looking at school improvements for the entire year. There will be a face-to-face meeting with the school on 30 April 2024 with the council to show them around and see what can be done.
 - Playground: There has been good engagement with the playground and accommodation committee, and funding requests will come.
- Any questions?

Headteacher's update - Grant Gillies (Headteacher)

- Toilets: Mr Gillies met with Daniel Johnson with respect to the toilets and he wrote an email there and then to get things done. They are absolutely grim and we hope this carries a bit of momentum forward.
- Huge thanks for PC funding:
 - Trim trail: Example of P7s who queued "round the block" for the trim trail. We've made an assumption that this is for younger children - however the P7s love it as much as anyone! Huge thanks to the Playground committee for the zones, trim trail, and a special mention to Vivian who has tireless work on the plants in the background. The playground looks like a different place. Huge thanks.
 - Scottish Opera: what a difference funding makes! The visit from the Scottish Opera was amazing. It was open to all children at SMPS - very high brow and high quality. And it was astounding watching the kids perform. Permeates everyone including year 1s and 2s. Huge thanks.
 - Trips: it's great that we can facilitate a "no questions asked" approach to help subsidise so there are no barriers for children to attend.
- Staffing:
 - Mr Gillies is currently looking at next year's staffing. He looks at where we want staff to be and gives them three choices. We want happy staff, and this means helping them get the classes they want to teach. We try to give the first or second choice. At the moment there are lots of temporary contracts in Edinburgh city council, so we are not allowed to advertise. Roles are filled by surplus teachers. There are 55 of them in Edinburgh and this process is centrally done. It has its pluses and minuses (e.g. minimal interviews).
 - Deputy heads: we'd like to have two deputy heads. Elaine Jones is directly linked to Suzy and Flora Stevenson. Alison McCarlie is three days a week Deputy Head on Mat leave, due back in June. There is also Dr Murray and Pam Ferguson, acting PT for Pam and Laurie Lambie down at Canaan Lane. Pamela Ferguson will lead P1 and she does all the transition with the nurseries. She'll be in charge of that. Supported by Lauren.
- Classes:
 - The move to having P1s/P2s up at Comiston Road on a Friday has been a big success. We've adapted and this week we made changes on Friday to the way it works. It

works really well - for example the P7s adore having them up. Lots of support for them around the school. It is also great to have all staff in the staff room. It makes a measurable impact. Mr Gillies is working with the City Council to look at the spaces available for next years' P1s and P2s.

- Sports day:
 - Sports day will be Friday 7 June. They are incorporating events that we had last year. On Thursday afternoon 6 June there will be competitive races, with Sports Day on Friday and a picnic immediately afterwards.
- Outdoor learning:
 - Hats off to Vivien and outdoor learning - we're cancelling for upper stages. It's an hour-long commitment. Elaine wrote to parents recently however we got only 10 parent volunteers. Please volunteer if you can!
- School improvement review:
 - In this Friday's newsletter there is a link to the form and areas we want to develop next year. These can be skills that we want to engender in our kids for next year. We want to set the right pace and challenges, and provide tailored education for everyone. The consultation is out this Friday.
- School app:
 - We've now put all school events on the app calendar as well as meal plans. We have 450 downloads to date.
- Call for donations:
 - The school is creating zones for the playground, and welcomes donations: Games, paper or craft hut - could be used with some interior things if you have any ideas like bean bags, board games, paper crafts, writing sets. For kids who want a retreat for a bit of peace. Please let Grant know if you have anything to donate.
- Uniform:
 - We are going through the process of trying to make ties cool again - at the moment students dress down in P7 but then need to dress up when they go to secondary school. Trying to encourage people to wear ties, and build a bit of culture and a clan at South Morningside. For example, house ties push the importance. We want to promote smartness and readiness as 95% of our children go to Boroughmuir.
- ASC and breakfast club:
 - Spring Oscars is working with the Care Commission to see whether they can expand the breakfast and after school club into Greenbank Parish Church, which could allow them to grow 30 places from 70 to 100.
- Questions/comments from Parent Council members & answers from Mr Gillies:
 - School attainment is the highest it's been in the last eight years -we should call that out as that is something important. We're post covid, have a new headteacher, and teachers make an impact.
 - Maureen is leading this work on checking the attainment.
 - Deanbank - is there anything that you want in regards to Deanbank / P1s / P2s if that is a possibility? Would they ever go to Deanbank? Also, we've heard that Deanbank might not be ready in the summer. Is that a rumour that you've heard?
 - P1 and P2s would be retained at Canaan Lane for a further year. Or they come up. P7s will be down to 2 classes next year. Just waiting for clarification on that. The council meeting tomorrow is good.
 - I've had a tour of Deanbank and was told that it would be ready by the end of May. It doesn't look ready, and you need to get staff in by the end of this term, not just before school starts.
 - Are there other people who are in negotiation with the council?

- Yes, Peter Gardner and Robbie Crockett look after the Estate. Deanbank is not built for P1s and P2s. Comiston Road is a Victorian building and this also is not. Deanbank is a building built for P4, P5 and P6. Mr Gillies works for the Council and supports the decision they make.
- Louisa and Ange: we've written in support of our opinion. In part it may well be that discussions around accommodation may have delayed things (e.g. Canaan Lane push for improvements). If we hadn't kicked up a fuss we'd be in Deanbank.
 - Those teachers who were decamped from Deanbank in 2019 would be at Deanbank for 1-2 years so on balance it wasn't best. We'll make anything work - it's the staff and ethos that make a difference.
- ACEL (Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) is the highest in the history of the school for P1, P4, P7. Mr Gillies will share in the newsletter.
- Reading resources: Mr Gillies will look into this as he's pretty sure we have more "reading books than WH Smith".
- P1s will be prioritised for ASC space at Canaan Lane - these are capped and SMPS will have an equitable share.

Finance update - Jack Bruck (Treasurer)

- All the accounts are up to date. The meeting pack includes the latest financial position. Really amazing things for the kids in the school.
- Thanks to the outstanding efforts of the fundraising group:
 - Winter fundraising generated over £12k this year - Xmas party, Halloween disco, quiz night. 56% increase over recent years.
- Teacher allocations have been really thoughtful pieces that make a difference to children's classes. Make teachers aware and take advantage. Staff claiming is really above and beyond.
- Paid about £3k for a range of items - prefect vest, speakers, make contribution to the trim train £10k = benefits the whole school. Following up from the last PC meeting, yoga mats, etc. are being costed.
- Pleased that we can support clubs. Clubs are healthy, with a small surplus at year end. They are intended to break even. Thanks to club conveners.
- Nice surprise: historical catch up of Virgin Money that we didn't expect. £350 donated from the Christmas Fun Run.
- Questions/comments from Parent Council members & answers from Jack:
 - Craig Fraser is chasing the accounts for 22/23.
 - The Parent Council will also continue to fund the Virgin Money initiative (every child gets a £5 loan to set up an entrepreneur system). It doesn't operate at a loss. Andrew/Bobby can take this on.

Subgroups updates

Accommodation update - Andrew Leiper

- Toilets: they need cosmetic upgrades, new flooring, etc. Bit disappointing, Ange put it in writing to commit to the council to get steps and dates. In two week's time we are hoping to get the work for the summer. In four week's time, the phasing of the work. Ensuring we have written confirmation so the works don't evaporate.

- Playground: huge thanks to Vivien. He's running classes and has done all sorts of planting and gardening within the playground. He'd organised all the compost to be delivered. It's looking great.
- Playground meetings: Postponed meeting to this Friday with the playground group. Elisabeth did a presentation. It's an overarching master plan of what we want to do. Andrew might be able to draw that together for Friday. Would be great to get fundraising for that plus for some gardening equipment.
- Louisa requested funds for £290 for four water butts around the school to collect rainwater plus watering can, jute rope to collect water, and netting. This was voted on and passed by the PC.
- Trim trail: Louisa says we had a placeholder for £10k for the trim trail however it costs £22k. The school has asked if we can fund more towards it. Are we happy to fund up to £22k total? Any comments or thoughts?
 - The group had a discussion about the total costs, ensuring our accounts are healthy and whether we are likely to replicate successes of fairs, discos, quiz, etc. The fundraising team shared that some folks leading these efforts are stepping down or did them as favours (e.g. Dougie and the quiz).
 - The PC would like to have a good understanding of the accounts helps us all have a meaningful conversation around allocating funds. And also, more understanding around the budget of the school.
 - Mr Gillies shared how he's saving money - e.g. carrying forward 1.5% of all budget. He shared that the budget that is playable is £12k once you take out all operational running costs. Staffing is just under £1m. Only way you can save money is staffing. Next year we will put money into staffing. Won't have luxury. Don't have a lot of money.
 - The PC raised whether we want to fund the money this year or next year? Questions around P5 ipads (£12k approx), staff sick cover expenses (£1k a week approx) were discussed.
 - Is there an option to delay the decision until we know how much we can transfer the maximum and the PC pay the rest?
 - Mr Gillies clarified that there are two school accounts. One with £34k carried forward (which is kept on purpose). The school account has a static budget for operational costs. It is not impacted by the carry forward. Mrs Gillies is carrying forward the maximum.
 - The PC voted and approved the £22k in principle (which is £22k total, not an extra £22k).
 - Jack said we have an available spend of £48k. So then our spend goes down to more like £35k once we've factored this in.
 - There was a plea from one PC member not to give P5s iPads 😊
- Vivien also posted a message in the chat: *On the gardening front, we have two projects coming up: a plant and maybe fruit & veg shop ; the other a gardening club (1-2 hrs/week). Having a little wee shop at the gate, posters and banners might help communications-wise?*

Comms – Ellie Maizels

- Question on whether they should make a flyer and hand it out at the summer fair. Worth the effort? Would anyone like to help put one together for this year, for the AGM? A mini annual report? This could include the difference the PC made this year - plus a list of questions to prompt discussion.
- Ideas:
 - Banner at the school gates with QR code

- Parents council at the events with the parents (eg the Easter service)
- P1 tea and coffee stand
- Flyer in the South Morningside pack with loads of information in it - eg QR codes and “here’s a list of five things you can do”.
- Lauren Lambie is running the new P1 families picnic in the community fields. This would be a great opportunity to recruit new parents. Coffee mornings have the biggest turnout.
- Whatsapp and Classlist have been successful - e.g. SMPS community group on Whatsapp. Can we do more there?
- Reach out to local nursery parents?
- Personal approach is needed.

Fundraising - Elisabeth Quinn

- Coming up is the Summer fair - there will be stalls including the second hand bike stall, plants, baking. We need volunteers! Get in touch with Elisabeth to let her know.
 - Ask: Summer Fair is not yet on the school app - can that be added?
 - Mr Gillies will pick this up.
 - Lauren Lambie will put forward staff who can help - she’ll email the fundraising team.
- Mr Gillies raised the point of Alumni and how we haven’t tapped into that network. Can we encourage alumni to come on the 8th - and set up the janitors house as a time capsule. Students could host school tours.
- Johanna is leaving Halloween disco - looking for someone to take that on.
- Elisabeth is stepping down from the fundraising team next year.
- We need more people helping out. Making it possible to run everything.
- Iain McCloud has volunteered to do a race night - he did this for North Merchiston. He needs to know the best way to do this. The Fundraising team will get in touch with Iain.
- Elisabeth is stepping down at the AGM.

Clubs update - Louisa Dall

- Clubs are made to break even, and we fund those children who aren’t able to attend. If P2s do come up to Comiston Road, we will need to make changes to how clubs are run.

Transport - Thom Kenrick

- No updates.
- There was a reference to the school travel transport plan in a recent council meeting. Has the council been in touch with the school? Mr Gillies shared that there is no update from us and Neil chased it up last week.

AOBs

- Request from Lauren Lambie for coach funds for Vogrie Park trip for P1 & P2s to mark the end of their time at Canaan Lane. P1s are not going to Imagine this year. P2s are going to imagine. Funding could be used.
 - Action: Mrs Lambie will send Louisa a request and the PC will vote offline for it.

- Delay Smartphones: Saving it for an offline discussion or the next meeting based on timescales given Hannah could not attend today.
- Chanter club: Need bagpipes for the children. £1-£1.5k each. Three kids need pipes, so she's applying for a grant through Scottish schools piping and drumming and trust. Just a heads up that she's applying on everyone's behalf. Everyone is supportive.
- Delay Smartphones:
 - One parent flagged that the PC should align with the Scottish system on digital usage. Also to consider - is the education board happy with it? Is this something we're comfortable putting through the community? Worth thinking about it as a PC.
 - It was then flagged that Hannah had presented it to the PC before, and we are more than happy for people to bring ideas to PC discussions to hear it and come to a conclusion.

Ange Robinson closed the meeting at 20:51.