

Hutchesons' Grammar School Association

Minute of meeting of the School Association – Founders Room,
Monday 14 September 2015.

Present

S3 Kenneth Ritchie (Chairman) (KR)
P2 Martyn Campbell
P3 Alan Hair (AH)
P4 Faiza Khan (FK)
P5 Arlene Rennet (AR)
P6 Wendy Schenini (WS)
P7 Elaine Lonergan (EL)
S1 Audrey Mason (AM)
S2 Sue Redpath (SR2)
S4 Shazma Shafi (SS)
S5 David Hadden (Minutes) (DH)

In attendance

Brian Williams (BW)
Fiona Macphail (FM)
Katy Chisholm (KC)
Susie Rodgers (SR)

Apologies

Ken Greig (KG)
Iain Keter (IK)
Brian MacBride (BM)
Allison Ewing (AE)
P1 Kenneth Kirkwood (KK)

1. Adoption of Minutes – 11 May 2015 - the minutes were accepted as an accurate record. The minutes were proposed and seconded by Shazma Shafi and Alan Hair respectively.

2. Matters raised by parent members.

(In the absence of the Rector, matters raised under this item relating to Beaton Road were covered by BW on behalf of KG)

2(i) Tutoring. The Rector's position endorsed by The Board of Governors and The Education Committee is that they do not see the requirement for extensive private tutoring due to the existing arrangements (including extra group and individual support available) which they consider more than adequate. Despite parental interest in understanding the apparent extent of and reasons for private tutoring, the meeting was advised that the Rector and The Board maintain their view, based on overall results and minimal direct parental concerns. However, after what developed into a fairly robust and heated discussion and in the absence of consensus, BW did agree to discuss the matter again with the Rector. It was suggested that regardless of this, there persisted amongst the parents of children sitting certificate exams anxiety that private tutelage was beneficial, complementary or even necessary. It was further suggested that the Rector might advertise to the parent body the same assurances which have previously been afforded to individuals and this Committee. **(Action BW).**

2(ii) School Productions. BW indicated that school production 'ticket prices' were set to offset part of the expenditure only and that increases were due to normal commercial pressures, not departmental underfunding, and could therefore be expected to continue to rise over time.

2(iii) Money Management/Practical Living. BW responded by stating that SMT was conscious of this aspect of learning and was working to cover this more adequately for pupils in S5 and S6. The curriculum also offered leisure cookery to help in respect of simple and good value cooking for pupils nearing the stage of living away from home.

2(iv) Spectator Facilities (Stands at Beaton Road and Auldhouse). In response to this query, BW indicated that while this was an acknowledged shortcoming, it was not a high priority for significant expenditure in comparison with many other higher priorities. Members noted that in line with the revised senior rugby 'Conference' arrangements, home 'Conference' first XV matches were being played at GHA, which offered more appropriate facilities.

2(v) Pupil Feedback on 'Teaching'. BW indicated that pupils and parents had plenty of opportunities to raise matters in relation to the standard of teaching etc and that some families took these opportunities. Issues raised were addressed as and when they arose.

2(vi) Homework Checking by Teachers. BW indicated, supported by KC, that there was no evidence to suggest that the arrangements for checking homework had been done and to the necessary standard were unsatisfactory. They reinforced that other activities such as scheduled assessments were used to confirm learning outcomes had been achieved.

2(vii) Year Common Rooms. BW reminded members that form rooms were open during lunch breaks and at this time to all pupils from the year to encourage mixing. In addition at lunch and break time many clubs/societies meet, offering further opportunities for mixing and integration.

2(viii) Sixth Year Red Ties. The request for these to be issued free at an assembly was not supported for several practical reasons – including that this process would take a long time and wearing of the 'red' tie is optional.

2(ix) Full Assembly Arrangements. Members were reminded of the discussion at the May 2015 HGSA meeting which set out the current arrangements which are considered to be the most practical for a school of the scale and with the facilities HGS has. The arrangements are confirmed in the published minute of that meeting.

2(x) Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. In response to a question regarding the apparent high cost to Hutesons' pupils participating in the scheme, BW accepted that participation is expensive partly because HGS arrangements are considered to be of a

very high quality and cover a large range of options; it is intended to maintain the standard of the offer.

2(xi) Uniform, Jewellery, Make-up, Discipline. Following a short discussion during which parent members indicated they were not aware of problems on a significant scale, it was noted that there are some concerns regarding these matters but that staff were committed to and are tackling these matters on a case by case basis – one specific request with reference to but not unique to parents of primary age, is to avoid children having ears pierced immediately before the start of sessions or terms to avoid the need for school nursing or teaching staff to provide support.

2(xii) Primary School – Dresses. In response to a question on this topic FM reported that she had been in discussion with staff at Man's World and Campbell's, the stockists; both indicated there were no current stock issues and accordingly there are no plans to change the way in which they are sourced.

2(xiii) Picnic Tables – both sites. In response to this question, the arrangements currently in place appear to offer adequate opportunity to eat outside at Kingarth Street, however BW indicated that KG would explore further this suggestion in respect of Beaton Road.

2(xiv) Nylon Waterproof Jackets. Following a short discussion BW agreed to refer this matter back to KG as there appears to be no opportunity for parents to purchase and provide inexpensive but suitable wet weather sports jackets – this has been an option in the past. It was not expected that if an item could be sourced it would be a mandatory uniform item, however, availability may also address some of the concerns raised under item 3(xi).

2(xv) Promotion of Respect for Teaching Staff. BW indicated that having pupils stand as teachers entered classrooms seemed a retrograde step. KG had indicated that he believed the current arrangements for achieving this were more appropriate than the proposal.

2(xvi) Canvassing Feedback from Pupils. In response to a request to introduce canvassing, BW and FM reinforced the current arrangements which included a suggestion box and school and pupil councils. There are differing views on the anonymity of such communication, with the School wishing requests to be clear as to their source however, parent representatives are inclined to making the giving of names optional when providing feedback.

2(xvii) School website – criticism of currency/accuracy. The members were informed that the upgrade is still ongoing but that the intention is for a launch around the end of this calendar year offering a website which is more easily updated by Development Office staff and much more easily accessed and navigated by pupils, parents and other visitors, in the hope of making the website a more effective means of communication to which users will be inclined to return.

3. Rectors report.

3(i) SQA Exam Results – BW advised that while a few final minor adjustments may come, the basic figures showed the School had presented 185 candidates for 912 Higher exams (4.93/candidate) and on that basis was the 3rd largest in Scotland. 66.3% of the passes achieved were at A grade. 61 pupils had achieved 5 or more A grades with 28 achieving 6 and 2, 7 A grades. It appears the only school with a higher % of A's per candidate was St Columba's in Kilmacolm, which is a much smaller school at around 1/3 the size of HGS. The current results table is on the school website. The S4 performance is not yet fully clear although there are initial indications of 100% pass at 'A' coming through. It is expected that KG will have final results by the next meeting.

3(ii) Fund Raising Telethon. This initiative was trialled in Summer 2015 using S6 leavers and other recent FPs, who underwent professional training and then carried out a 3 week programme contacting FPs to establish if they were able to assist with financial support for general use or in relation to specific projects, including Bursaries, a replacement piano and facility improvements at Auldhouse. No figures were given but the exercise appears to have been very successful although the outcomes are being reviewed to decide on the way forward. It was noted that due to the success of this fund raising event and other events during the 2014/15 session, funds had been secured for the replacement concert grand piano for the Walter and Helen Ross Assembly Hall.

4. Primary School Report. FM gave a short summary of the key events at this early stage in the new session. She highlighted the appointment of Mrs Amanda Wilson (from Heriots) as Head of Lower Primary to replace Mrs Hatfield who had recently retired. FM also reported on the new arrivals into P1 and further noted some 20 new entrants across the other primary years. Several other events were mentioned. Members were also informed of the installation of 2 new heating boilers and some upgrade work in the Infant playground which had taken place during the summer. Further play area upgrade work is scheduled for the October week.

5. Governors Remarks. BW reported that the initial meeting of the current session took place last week and that 2 new Governors were due to take up their roles very shortly. Finally, he paid a brief tribute to the perspicacity of David Dobson who following 10 years' service has recently stepped down from the Board.

6. 1957 Group. SR reported on the challenge of supporting Sports Days and the cost when arrangements were cancelled as a result of the inclement weather. She also reported on a very successful Uniform Sale – the first of this session. SR reported that the 1957 Group had £11k in the bank and had contributed around £40k to school projects over recent sessions. Despite this and with an AGM scheduled before the end of September, it looked more than possible that the 1957 Group may cease to exist. SR reported extreme difficulty in getting a nomination for Chairman and adequate parental

support thereafter to support and run the events the parents and pupils enjoy. It has already become clear that there will be no Winter Fair this school year.

7. HGSA AGM. The parent representatives noted the date (Tuesday 20 October). Parent member vacancies automatically arise each year in P1, P3, P5, P7 and S2, S4 and S6, though some of these vacancies may be able to be filled by retiring parents who are able and willing to continue into a second term – a letter of invitation and seeking support is to be drafted for issue to all parents by the Chairman. Parent reps discussed the location in light of the Kingarth Street Open Day arrangements and agreed that the Chairman suggest the Drama Building as a suitable alternative venue. A number of areas for group activity/presentation were discussed including sports arrangements and parental engagement/communication and fundraising – the Chairman was remitted to agree a suitable option with KG with the proviso that the session required to be by the school and about the school and not an external matter.

8. Sub Committee Reports

8(i) Social – discussion deferred.

8(ii) Constitutional – in the absence of BM, KR indicated that he acknowledged the work undertaken so far but was also concerned at the volume of work still to be undertaken if a comprehensive proposal was to be able to be put to the AGM. To this end it was agreed that the parent reps would meet again on Monday 5 October as part of the Constitutional Sub Committee and in the meantime, MC, EL and DH would continue to give BM as much support as they could.

8(iii) Careers Convention. KC reported that they were on track having started the profiling of S4 pupils (2 form classes nearing completion). KC also mentioned that the Telethon (item 4(ii)) had allowed the school to identify a few additional consultants to use during the event next year.

(Although this minute is included at this point, this short discussion took place immediately following item 8, on the conclusion of which, non-elected members (BW, FM, KC and SR) withdrew from the meeting.

9. AOCB. None.

10. Meeting dates. 20 October (Tuesday – AGM), 9 November (Monday). No discussion took place on frequency as this will be covered by any proposal to change the Constitution.