

Aberlady Primary School Parent Council

Annual Report: school year 2017 - 2018



Introduction

Welcome to the annual report from the Parent Council of Aberlady Primary School. This report is written each year by the chair of the Parent Council to provide an overview of some of the important work that we have undertaken over the year.

The role of the Parent Council is to give a voice to all parents and carers (collectively known as the 'Parent Forum'). We work closely with the head teacher and other school staff to solve problems raised by parents; to help make decisions that affect parents and children; and to communicate the school's aims and practices to parents.

Remember that you are welcome to attend any meeting of the Parent Council. Alternatively, if there is a problem you want discussed or a suggestion you would like to make, you can approach any member of the Parent Council about it. We are always keen to recruit new members of Parent Council and we recommend it as a rewarding, enjoyable and useful activity.

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Overview of our activities in 2017 - 2018

This year was an unusual one, with three one-off activities taking up a good deal of time.

- We took over the responsibilities of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), which until now has carried out all fundraising activity at the school.
- We contributed responses to a series of Scottish Government consultations on the funding and management of schools.
- We produced a summary of the school's budget, which will be an annual activity.

More detail of these activities is provided below.

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Parent Council membership 2017 - 2018

The members of Parent Council and their roles in the past year were as follows:

Chair - Damien Noonan
Vice chair - Kathy Allan, Alison Walker
Secretary - Lesley Kennedy
Treasurer - Kirsty Usher
NBCAP rep - Helen Bradley
Fundraising rep - Joanna Ratcliffe

Class representatives:

Nursery - Karen Polwart
P1 - Alison Walker
P2 - Louise Potter and Lyndsay Wilkie
P3/4 - Helen Bradley
P4/5 - Anna Holland
P6 - Hilary Matthews
P7 - John Smart

Other members:

Fraser Robertson
Helen Maule

We have had a fantastic group this year, and I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to everyone for their hard work. A fond farewell to long-serving Parent Council members Kathy Allan, who had to step down as vice chair, and John Smart, whose daughters are now both at high school. And a warm welcome to Jo Ratcliffe and Kirsty Usher, who joined from the PTA.

In September, we took the decision to publish the email addresses of class reps so you can now contact them directly. Look on the school website or the noticeboard in school.

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[Parent Council meetings 2017 - 2018](#)

The Parent Council had six meetings in 2017 - 2018 (September, November, January, March, May and June) and an Annual General Meeting in early September.

Pam Currie, the head teacher, was able to attend every meeting and we would like to thank her for her energy and enthusiasm, her commitment to constant improvement at the school, and her encouragement of as much parental collaboration as possible. Carn Peaston, the principal teacher, was also able to attend many of the meetings, for which we are very grateful.

We would also like to thank councillor Jim Goodfellow, who attends meetings regularly and is a source of much helpful advice, and councillor Jeremy Findlay who was able to attend our meeting in March.

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PARENT COUNCIL ACTIVITIES 2017 -2018

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Parent Teacher Association (PTA) merges with Parent Council

Both the Parent Council and the PTA were aware that best practice is to include fundraising activities within the Parent Council. Many of the committee members sat on both bodies and there was an opportunity to streamline and reduce duplication of effort. As such it was a mutual decision to merge the PTA with the Parent Council.

Individuals who will act as 'leads' for all the year's fundraising events and activities are in place and working well, therefore the role of Parent Council will just be to keep an eye on things and flag any issues to gain support to resolve. We have also taken over responsibility for the accounts and for discussions with the school about how the money is spent. Kirsty Usher joins the PC as treasurer and Jo Ratcliffe as fundraising rep.

We would like to give a massive thank you to everyone who has contributed to the PTA over the years, raising extraordinary sums of money for such a small school. Per pupil within the school, we raise more than any other primary school in East Lothian. This has ensured that, for example, there are more than enough Chromebooks to go round. We'd especially like to thank outgoing chair Jen MacPherson and secretary Alison Walker, as well as Kirsty and Jo, for their sterling work.

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Scottish Government consultations

Members of Parent Council put a great deal of time and effort into responding to two major consultations this year.

We were frustrated by the lack of detail in the Scottish Government's proposals, which made it difficult to produce an intelligent response. We got the impression that one of the aims of the proposed reforms was to take control of education away from local authorities; this would not be a good outcome in East Lothian, where the work of the council's Education department is widely respected, and we feared a shift to the kind of system that has proved disastrous for many schools in England.

We were also confused that some of the proposals, notably the establishment of Regional Improvement Collaboratives, were already taking place at the time of the consultation.

In June 2018, at the start of the summer holiday, the Scottish Government announced that it was dropping its education bill, although it still intended to carry out some of its proposed reforms with the agreement of local authorities. There is talk of pushing through measures on 'empowering head teachers' which we found to be among the most controversial and potentially harmful of the proposals.

'Fair Funding' consultation, September 2017

<https://consult.gov.scot/empowering-schools/education-governance-fair-funding/>

'Empowering Schools' consultation, January 2018

<https://consult.gov.scot/learning-directorate/education-scotland-bill/>

School budget report

In January 2018, Mrs Currie raised concerns about the the school's budget which would mean that next year she would not be able to provide the same level of support for learning as in previous years.

In response, we decided to produce an annual report explaining how much money the school receives from East Lothian Council and how it is spent. The report was sent out to parents in February.

It reveals that the vast majority of the school's budget goes on staff, and the bulk of this cannot be affected by the head teacher. Opportunities for the head teacher to make savings are very limited, and the budget for support for learning is vulnerable.

One useful effect of our budget report was that it drew the attention of councillors to an annual saving that head teachers are required to make, which councillors were not previously aware of.

Happily, Mrs Currie's concerns about the effects of the budget on additional support have been assuaged by various favourable circumstances. However, we continue to monitor the situation.

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Parent queries

One of the main duties of Parent Council is to pass on to the school any problems and suggestions from the parents and carers. Here are some examples of queries that have come up in the past year.

- Pupils should be able to change into trainers for 'Walk a Mile'.
- Children, including younger siblings of pupils, should not play with car tyres or ride bikes or scooters in the playground at drop-off and pick-up times, because of danger to others.
- 'Fruity day' snacks should be able to include something more substantial (and non-fruity) for children who need a lot of fuel.
- The 'Mathletics' website sometimes misbehaves.
- Many of the Active Schools sessions are not available to Aberlady pupils (this one has been raised with East Lothian Council but has yet to be resolved).

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Other Parent council activities this year

School Improvement Plan (SIP) - the SIP is central to the school's approach to just about everything it does. A new version was submitted to the council and the Scottish Government in June. Next year we will translate the SIP into a family-friendly version.

Parental engagement - we reviewed the East Lothian Parental Engagement Strategy 2017, which filtered through to parents in the form of a leaflet distributed by the Council. Parental engagement is a priority for ELC and for the school since its importance to the

achievements of children in school is well evidenced. We will continue to address this area in the coming year.

Homework - the school's homework survey did not receive many responses, but the school is now attempting to refine its approach to homework and make it easier for parents to monitor what their children are doing.

Learning Journals and reporting - we've been helping the head teacher assess the usefulness of these systems. A new system of termly progress reports will be put into place in 2018 - 2019.

Pupil Council - the Parent Council now receives regular updates from the Pupil Council so we can monitor the children's concerns. This includes a review of the school charities chosen by the children.

'Positive Relationships' behaviour policy - we have been keeping an eye on how this new policy is working.

'Safe route to school' markings - we were monitoring progress on these until they finally appeared in the spring.

20mph speed limit - following the Climate Friendly Aberlady project, the Parent Council has stated its support for a 20mph speed limit through the village.

New housing - we monitored progress on planning up to the start of construction in January 2018. We intend to work with the developers on possible benefits for the school as construction proceeds.

Construction work on new housing - we received several reports of potentially dangerous vehicle movements during school arrival or departure times and have been in touch with the developers to ensure there was no repetition. Anna Holland has monitored disruption caused by the building work and acted as liaison with the developers.

School extension - we have been checking on progress of plans for an extension to the school to accommodate extra demand when the new housing is completed. We are expecting to see detailed plans in December 2018.

Outdoor nursery - we've been keeping up to date with the new building. Planning is all approved but there is currently a hold-up with approval from the inspectorate.

Nursery teachers - there have been concerns from parents over the fact that there are now no nursery teachers, only nursery nurses. The head teacher is confident that staffing in the nursery is working well.

Communications between school and parents - we've been trying to improve this in any way possible, the main ongoing problem being that for technical reasons, only one parent receives communications from the school. Another small issue that came up was how parents can contact a teacher if they need to: basically, just email the school.

Attendance figures - not including sickness, these are lower than they should be at Aberlady, primarily because of parents taking children out of school for term-time holidays. Since attendance is used as a measure of a school's performance, this affects our performance figures. We are working on ways of improving attendance.

'Early Learning and Childcare' consultation, June 2018 - we looked at this Scottish Government consultation but we found it was largely about funding, whereas our interest would be the delivery of nursery provision.

East Lothian Council draft policies - we reviewed draft policies for Additional Support Needs and Managing Distressed and Challenging Behaviour, but we found that these were technical documents for experts and not accessible to parents.

East Lothian Council transport strategy consultation - we submitted a response to this in May 2018. We feel that there is a danger that the regional strategy will concentrate spending in the so-called 'development corridor' along the A1 and neglect coastal areas; we believe there is a great need for improved 'active travel' infrastructure locally.

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East Lothian Association of Parent Council Members (ELAPCM)

ELAPCM meets roughly twice a term and is a chance for all Parent Councils in East Lothian to meet with council officials and councillors, including councillor Shamin Akhtar, convenor of the Education Committee. We usually manage to send someone to the meetings. A few of the items addressed this year are:

South East Improvement Collaborative - one of the Scottish Government's education reforms, this is happening even though the legislation has not been passed. East Lothian is very focused on school improvement and seems to be coping well with this new initiative.

Language provision (1+2) - we were updated on this by Ann Robertson, 1+2 Development Officer at the council. Essentially the idea is that all children will learn in three languages: their own plus two foreign languages. There will be full teaching in one foreign language (French) and involvement of a second (for example, German or Mandarin).

Payments system - we were informed that the new system for online payments, which will include lunches as well as school trips, is being implemented at a number of schools as a trial in the summer of 2018 and will be rolled out to other schools during the autumn. At time of writing there is no news about when it will reach Aberlady.

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North Berwick Community Area Partnership

This local initiative of East Lothian Council is able to spend money in the area for community benefit and we are keen to be involved in it. We send someone to most meetings (thanks to Helen Bradley for taking this on). However, in the past year there has been nothing of particular interest to report.

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Fundraising

In June 2018, we reported that about £4,000 was currently available from PTA fundraising activities. The school would like to spend the bulk of this on materials and equipment to support science and technical learning.

Summary of PTA income, July 2017 to June 2018

Profits from events and activities

Iron Man triathlon catering	275
Cup cakes, freeze pops	558
Sports Day	264
Fireworks	1,277
Creche	128
Scooters / name tags	135
Easy Fundraising	204
School clothing sales	203
Donations to PTA	270
Autumn Fair	3,293

Expenses

General expenses	292
Subscriptions	115

Total funds raised 6,204

Donations to school

Leavers' ties	78
Hopscotch Theatre	425
Mathletics	600
Owl's Nest	200
Chromebooks, Christmas panto, science resources	2,600
Nursery Lego	162

Total donations to school 4,056

Balance going forward 4,163

Parent Council meeting dates 2018 - 2019

The proposed meeting dates for this school year are as follows:

Autumn term - September 26th 2018; November 14th 2018

Spring term - January 16th 2019; March 13th 2019

Summer term - May 1st 2019; June 12th 2019

All meetings are held on a Wednesday at 7pm in the school coffee room.

Among our priorities for next year will be: the Ballencrieff cycle path; 20mph speed limit; the school extension; the new outdoor nursery; homework; and parental engagement, including engagement with other family members and the wider community.

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Supporting the Parent Council

How you can get involved

We always need to recruit new members; you do not need any particular experience, nor do you need to take on a specific role. All you need is an interest in the school and a willingness to work alongside Mrs Currie and her staff to achieve the aims of the school. Please talk to any Parent Council member if you would like more information.

Alternatively, you are always welcome to attend any of our meetings. The dates are given above and an agenda will be sent out by the school before each one.

If we are to represent all parents, we need your views and opinions or suggestions for discussion topics. Contact us as below.

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Contacting Parent Council

Email us at: parentcouncil@aberbaldy.elcschool.org.uk

Contact your class rep: see the noticeboard in school or look on the school website and talk to your class rep in the playground or email them direct.

Talk to me, the chair; Alison, the vice-chair; or Lesley, the secretary in the playground.

Send us an email via school, or drop us a note at the school office.

Thanks again to everyone involved in helping to govern and support our school over the last year.

Damien Noonan
Chair
September 2018