



## APPROVED MINUTES

DATE: WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2014

PRESENT:	Vicky Cole	(Chair)	Parent	PSP member
	Andrew Greathead		Parent	PSP member
	Dave Neillans		Parent	PSP member
	Derek Simpson		Parent	PSP member
	Ian Smith		Parent	PSP member
	Kim White		Parent	PSP member
	Mark Wyllie		Parent	PSP member
	Kath Anderson		Teacher	PSP member
	Colin Dempster		Teacher	PSP member

IN ATTENDANCE:	Sarah Ingham	Head Teacher
	Stephen Illingworth	Depute Head Teacher
	Linda Bowen	Parent
	Louise Elder	Parent
	Amanda Herriott	Parent
	Jon Hunton	Parent
	Caroline McKinnel	Parent
	Janette Middlemass	Parent
	Julie-Clare Paterson	Parent
	Lucy Wrinn	Parent
	Gemma Sandie	Knox Head Girl
	Mark Robertson	Knox Head Boy
	John McMillan	Local Councillor
	Mary Benson	Clerk

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### 1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Calum Blair, Greg Cookson, Alison Hunton, Donald Smith, Councillor Trotter and Provost Broun-Lindsay.

### 2. Mr Illingworth – Curriculum

*Mr Illingworth arrived later in the meeting due to other commitments and this discussion took place during Parent's Matters (item 9). It has been minuted here to correspond with the agenda).*

This item was also discussed at the last meeting. Mr Illingworth thanked parents for their responses to the online parental survey on this issue and gave a summary of the staff's discussions about the number of National 4 and 5 subjects to offer S4 next year.

This year's S4 youngsters are undertaking 8 National exams (Knox has traditionally offered 8 Standard Grades to pupils; while many other schools in Scotland traditionally offered 7). However, Mr Illingworth noted that the burden of assessment throughout the year is much greater for National 5 than the previous Credit Level in Standard Grade. Pupils have to meet a certain standard before progressing to the final exam. Although many teachers previously felt the school should continue to offer 8 National exams; based on the first year of the new exam curriculum, the level of intensity for S4s is significantly greater than before and many pupils are struggling to cope.

A number of secondary schools in East Lothian are considering dropping to 6 subjects at National Level (end of S4 exams). However, discussions with Knox staff and parents suggest that many feel this is too narrow a choice of subjects. Many youngsters at the end of S3 are not decided on what they want to do when they leave school, and 6 national exams (English, Maths and four others) do not give enough of a choice should they change their mind later on and need to rethink their Higher subject choices. The compromise seems to be 7 National exam subjects. This gives a greater choice for youngsters, without overloading them with coursework and assessments.

Dropping from 8 S4 subjects this year to 7 S4 subjects in future years, would free up two periods a week of class time. Staff need to think carefully about how to use this time, so that it is of value to pupils. Through discussions with the different departments within the school, staff are considering whether to split S4 into groups according to their needs during these two periods, as follows:

- A small group of the most able pupils may have a desire to do 8 subjects in S4. Staff feel that they would be able to offer those most able pupils an additional National course in the two extra periods a week.
- Pupils who need extra support in literacy and numeracy, and who may be considering leaving school at the end of S4, could be given extra support in these areas, and training in other useful skills such as interview techniques.
- Pupils who are felt to be not achieving their potential could be given mentoring in small groups with a suitable member of staff.
- Other pupils may benefit from more vocational training and/or courses.
- There may be a possibility to use some of the two period sessions for National exam assessments, possibly every month or six weeks, which would free up more class time for coursework.

It is hoped that these two periods a week could be used to tailor the S4 experience to better meet the needs of individual pupils.

Mr Illingworth noted that a decision would be needed on this soon, as the S3 options would be going out to pupils and parents shortly. Parents said they were pleased that the school were considering reducing the S4 curriculum to 7 subjects (English, Maths and five others) and noted that they liked the idea of the two extra periods being used to fulfil the needs of individual pupils. The school hopes to offer a free choice of subjects for S3 pupils again this year (last year the school successfully timetabled the S4 week so that 97% of this year's pupils were able to follow the courses they wanted).

Mr Illingworth and Mrs Ingham will keep the S4 curriculum under review and agreed to give regular updates to the PSP about it. They noted that what's best for pupils remains their focus.

Vicky Cole thanked Mr Illingworth for speaking to the PSP about this matter.

### **3 Minutes of Meeting of 8 January 2014**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved without change.

### **4. Matters Arising from the Minutes – see item 5.**

### **5. Chairperson's Report & Action Points from the last meeting**

*Agenda* – Curriculum Issues has now become a standard agenda item.

*UCAS Documents* – Mr Simpson has written a summary of the latest UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) documents and will email it to parent reps before the next meeting. **Action DS**

*Activities Week film* – Vicky Cole has advertised the Activities Week film on the PSP website.

### **6. Pupil's Matters**

Head Boy, Mark Robertson and Head Girl, Gemma Sandie, gave a summary of their initiatives in school:

*Book forum* – (an online forum in the school, where text books and past exam paper booklets can be advertised for sale) is now up and running. It will be promoted through the bulletin, and through a slideshow to be shown at registration in the morning, which includes a step by step guide how to use the website.

*S5/S6 Mentoring* – (a mentoring system for S6s to mentor S5s to help support them through the big jump in academic demands between Standard Grades and Higher courses.) This will now be done through study groups (as there are more S5s than S6, so students can't be paired with an individual mentor). Study groups also allow for both teachers and student input and will be promoted through the school notice boards.

*Tri-House Games* – Each of the school houses (Garleton, Lammerlaw and Traprain) have chosen a charity to support and will compete against each other to raise money for that charity through a series of events such as an independence debate, a fun run and a dance mat competition. It is hoped that this event will be continued in future years to create a lasting legacy for Gemma and Mark's time as Head Boy and Head Girl.

*Library Committee* – the Pupil Council team have been having input into the refurbishment plans for the school library.

Vicky Cole congratulated Gemma and Mark on their work to date and noted how impressed the PSP were with their energy and enthusiasm.

### **7. Head Teacher's Report**

*Staffing* - Mrs Ingham gave an update on staffing. There has been a lot of staff absence recently due to illness. Priority for cover has been given to certificate classes and to junior classes where more supervision is required. Mrs Ingham noted parents' concerns and apologised, but noted that the school were trying their best to provide as much cover as possible.

Two interviews for teaching staff in the Chemistry and English departments will be held in the coming weeks; parent helpers to observe candidate teachers in class would be welcomed.

### *News/Updates*

Burns' Supper – The recent KASG (Knox Academy Support Group) Burns' Supper was very successful and KASG made a decent profit from the event. The event was attended by ELC's Head of Education, Darrin Nightingale.

S1 Parents' Evening – on 4 Feb was well attended and very positive.

Half term holiday – school breaks up this Friday (7<sup>th</sup>). Staff return on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> for an in-service day.

Pupils return on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> February.

S3 Information Evening – 20<sup>th</sup> February

S3 Parent's evening – 26<sup>th</sup> February

S4/5 Information Evening – 4<sup>th</sup> March.

S2 Information Evening – 25<sup>th</sup> March.

### *Strategic items*

Staff questionnaire – staff have completed a questionnaire about how they feel the school is running and what the Managers need to improve on.

Pupil questionnaire – staff are pulling together data from the pupil questionnaires and are awaiting the results of the S2 Student Evaluation of Learning questionnaire from the Education Authority.

## **8. Staff Member's Report**

*History* - Miss Anderson took S2 pupils to the John Gray Centre (JGC) in Haddington to an event to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. The school and the JGC have a good working relationship.

*Knox War Memorial* - The school are trying to update their war memorial, to incorporate any former Knox pupils who have been killed in combat since the end of the Second World War. Parents were asked if they knew of anyone who should be included or if they knew of any local historians to contact about this. Advertising through the East Lothian Courier was suggested and Janette Middlemass offered to ask a neighbour who may know.

**Action JM**

## **9. Parent's Matters**

*Prelims* - There was a discussion about this year's prelim results and Mrs Ingham reported that they were as expected or possibly slightly better than anticipated. Following the Easter revision programme and extra classes, youngsters generally raise their game for the final exams. All National 4 and National 5 pupils sat the National 5 English prelim, to give them a chance to see how well they did. However, staff will now have to start being specific about which pupils will sit the final National 4 and National 5 exams in the summer.

*Mr Illingworth came into the meeting at this point and there was a long discussion about curriculum (see item2). Councillor McMillan came into the meeting during this discussion and Julie-Clare Paterson left.*

*Paired reading* – Louise Elder gave an update on the Paired Reading pilot programme in P6 at King’s Meadow Primary School. Parents noted that the King’s Meadow parents and staff were doing fantastic work and hoped that other cluster primaries would follow suit. Mr Simpson and Mrs Ingham noted that the S1 paired reading initiative at Knox was not meant to be a criticism of cluster primaries and said that it was important that all schools and parents work together to help improve reading levels.

Mr Simpson noted that there had been some difficulties in recruiting willing S1s to take part in this year’s Knox Paired Reading scheme. It is hoped that through tact and diplomacy this will soon be resolved.

*Linda Bowen left the meeting.*

*NABs/Prelims* – Parents queried why NABs (National Assessment Bank) assessments were going on during the recent Higher prelims, as they felt this put too much stress on pupils. Mrs Ingham explained that staff had considered that the revision for Prelims and NABs would be on the same coursework; however this will not happen next year. There is an ongoing discussion within the school about whether prelims will be continued next year, as the appeals system has been removed and many feel that prelims are therefore not required and give additional stress to pupils. This will be discussed in greater detail at a future PSP meeting.

*Modern Languages funding* – Mark Wyllie is still following this up and is awaiting a reply to his request for further information. He has sent the information on Curriculum for Excellence to Mary Benson (clerk) for circulation to all parent reps.

**10. Correspondence** – has been emailed to all parents.

### **11. Any Other Business**

*Local Area Partnership* – Councillor McMillan spoke about the new Local Area Partnerships being set up in each East Lothian Council ward which will meet four times a year to create a set of priorities for the community with the aim of creating a bottom-up plan for make East Lothian a better place. One representative from each primary school cluster and each secondary school cluster will be invited to join the partnership.

**12. Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 26 March 2014 at 6.15pm in the school.

<b>Action points</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
Circulate summary of the latest UCAS documents.	DS	For discussion at the next meeting
Speak to her contact to see if anyone knows of any former Knox pupils who have died in combat since the end of WW2, for the Knox War Memorial.	JM	As soon as possible