



APPROVED MINUTES

DATE: WEDNESDAY 30 OCTOBER 2013

PRESENT:	Vicky Cole	(Chair)	Parent	PSP member
	Dave Neillans		Parent	PSP member
	Derek Simpson		Parent	PSP member
	Ian Smith		Parent	PSP member
	Kim White		Parent	PSP member
	Kath Anderson		Teacher	PSP member
	Calum Blair		Teacher	PSP member

IN ATTENDANCE:	Sarah Ingham	Head Teacher
	Bev Skirrow	Business Manager
	Louise Elder	Parent
	Amanda Herriot	Parent
	Janette Middlemass	Parent
	Julie-Clare Paterson	Parent
	Elizabeth Vischer	Parent
	Mark Robertson	Head Boy
	Gemma Sandie	Head Girl
	Tom Trotter	Local Councillor
	Mary Benson	Clerk

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Linda Bowen, Greg Cookson, Colin Dempster, Alison Hunton, Donald Smith, Lucy Wrinn, Mark Wyllie and Councillor Broun-Lindsay.

2. Bev Skirrow, Business Manager – Update on Knox Finances

Budget - This year the school has 791 pupils, which is a drop from three years ago when the roll was 835. The number of pupils is predicted to drop further over the next few years before it rises again once the planned new housing developments for Haddington are built. Since the school's overall budget is calculated on the school roll, this means that the school is having to deliver the same service with less money. Knox has the lowest roll of all six East Lothian secondary schools, and therefore the smallest budget. The core funding for the school this year is £2,837,158. The vast majority of this sum (92-95%) is spent on staffing costs.

The way that the school's core funding is calculated has changed this year, which has reduced the budget further and there have also been efficiency savings of 2.75% to be made. There is likely to be a further budget reduction in the region of £15,000 next year. As a result, the school is having to be very careful with money; and has had to be quite creative to run the school on the reduced budget

Carry forward - Last year the school had a carry-forward of £41,156. This financial year, the prediction is for a £47,000 carry forward; although this is optimistic and the final figure is likely to be less. However, this can soon change, for example if short-term staff absences occur, where cover has to be paid for by the school. This is why the carry-forward is so important as a cushion against all eventualities.

New spending system - Last year the school introduced a new system for making the non-staffing section of the budget more predictable (see 28 November 2012 minute), with the emphasis on staff thinking of the budget as one big pot of money rather than several smaller departmental pots. The management staff have found the new system much easier to work with – Faculty Heads have to spend their budget by Christmas, which then allows Mrs Ingham eight weeks to decide where any unused money will be spent before the end of the financial year. This means that there is no longer any need for last minute spending to use up budgets at the end of the year, which previously could lead to rash decisions and wastage.

Best Value - The school constantly look for best value for money and bulk purchase equipment where practical. Savings are made where they can be (for example the staff planning diary is fit for purpose but lower quality than the pupil's planner which is sourced outside the Council and is of a higher quality). The needs of the pupils are given priority.

New exams - With the changes to the curriculum due to the upcoming new National 4 and 5 exams, new learning materials have been required. Rather than spend £20 - £30 pounds each for new text books, the school has decided that booklets will be produced in house by staff for use in class for the first few years of the new exams. Once the courses have settled, revisions are likely to any textbook written before the first exams were taken, and so text books are likely to be out of date in a year or two. Producing booklets in-house is substantially cheaper (£3 each) and allows staff to tailor the courses to what they want. Once the new curriculum has been running for a few years, the school will look again at whether to purchase new exam-level text books.

Local businesses - The school tries to support local businesses where it can, although its hands are sometimes tied by East Lothian Council procedures and protocols. If items or services are not available locally, the school try their best to find Scottish suppliers.

Savings - money has been saved in school by:

- streamlining the workforce when opportunities present themselves (eg East Lothian Council's VERS Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme in 2013). VERS applied to school support staff (not teachers), but any posts lost will not be replaced.
- Bulk purchasing consumables rather than parallel purchasing by separate departments.
- Tracking orders to spot commonly purchased goods, which could then be purchased in bulk.
- Closer monitoring of transport costs (Head Teacher's authority is required prior to booking)
- Extra-curricular transport costs reduced by greater parental participation in lift share.
- Use of Council print unit rather than external companies.

- Staff signed up to a Charter to operate any funding in school – greater accountability/increased awareness.
- Parental donations to a wider number of practical classes in Art, Technology and Home Economics.
- Budget holders having a “school budget” approach to spending rather than a “departmental budget” approach – only buying what they need.

What is next for scrutiny?

- Supply staff – value for money
- Furniture replacement – Knox liability or FES?
- Staffing for new timetable June 2014.
- SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) staff release for examination/marking duties.
- Use of Educational Trusts for financial support for pupils
- Bulk production of teacher developed resources for new Higher courses starting in 2014.

The school have to take a cautious approach in the current financial climate. The management team would love to make environmental improvements to some areas of the school, but due to the constrained budget, this is not possible at the current time. However, although the school has an annual budget, the future planning of the management team goes far beyond that.

Vicky Cole noted that the school had made good strides towards efficiency, but wondered if they could become a victim of their own success, by making such effective cost savings that their budget was cut still further. Ms Skirrow said there could be a danger of that, but that the management team would speak up if this occurred. The funding formula for all six high schools is very transparent, so it would be obvious if it were to happen. Ms Skirrow noted that the school see their role as getting as much as possible from the money they have available. Mrs Ingham said that the support of parents in making financial contributions towards practical classes such as Home Economics, as well as car sharing for extra-curricular activities has been a huge help too.

SSMR - Ian Smith asked if the last year’s authority-wide Secondary School Management Review had affected the budget. Ms Skirrow said it did, but that huge savings were not being made. Any conserved salaries were paid for directly by East Lothian Council, so the money no longer came through the school. However, most new staff coming into the school are now unpromoted posts.

Mrs Ingham noted her huge thanks to Ms Skirrow and said she was one of the best value for money members of staff. Vicky Cole thanked Ms Skirrow on behalf of the PSP, both for her role at the school and for her interesting and informative presentation.

Elizabeth Vischer, Tom Trotter and Bev Skirrow left the meeting.

3. Minutes of 2 October 2013

The minutes of the last meeting were approved without change.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Annual Report – Mrs Ingham has brought a copy of the Annual Report for PSP members. (See also Item 7: Head Teacher’s Report)

5. Chairperson's report and action points from the last meeting

PSP website email alert sign up link – Ian Smith has emailed David Gilmour (ELC IT dept) for advice about this and will chase it up in a couple of days if there is no progress.

Modern Languages funding – Mark Wyllie was not able to attend this evening; so this action point will be carried forward to the next meeting. **Action MW**

ePortfolios – Mrs Ingham will invite Mr Greenaway to attend the next meeting (27 November) to update the PSP on ePortfolios and Tracking & Monitoring.

Email contact details for queries – Mrs Ingham has confirmed the email contact details in her Head Teacher's Update on the school website.

Activity packages – Mrs Ingham is in the process of forwarding more detailed information to pupils about Activity Packages for next May's Activities Week.

Activities Week film – Mr Simpson and Mr Blair made a film for the website, but there have been technical difficulties with uploading it. This will be resolved as soon as possible. **Action DS/CB**

6. Pupil's Matters

Vicky Cole welcomed Knox's Head Boy, Mark Robertson and Head Girl, Gemma Sandie to the meeting and thanked them for coming along. They gave a summary of the ideas they are trying to implement this year:

Book sales - Gemma and Mark intend to set up an online forum in the school, where text books and past exam paper booklets can be advertised for sale.

Mentoring – Gemma and Mark are starting 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.

Displays – Mark and Gemma will be meeting with Faculty Heads to see if the displays on the noticeboards around the school can be updated. The PE department have a Sports Hall of Fame display, but Mark and Gemma intend to create a general Hall of Fame using three noticeboards in the social area. It will feature pupils who have excelled in other areas, such as academic achievement or music. A pupil of the month is also planned for which staff can nominate pupils.

Mrs Ingham meets with the Head Boy and Head Girl once a week and described them as a very dynamic duo. The Head Boy and Head Girl are supported in the pupil leadership team by 4 depute Head Boys/Girls and three Heads of Houses.

Parents suggested a "you said, we did" board, so that pupils could see what the pupil leadership team had taken on board and done for them.

Vicky Cole congratulated them on their great ideas and thanked them for coming along to the meeting.

Gemma Sandie, Mark Robertson and Julie-Clare Paterson left the meeting

7. Head Teacher's report

Staffing - Mrs Ingham gave an update on staffing. She thanked Louise Elder for offering to help out with lesson observation during the interviews for the permanent Computing Teacher post which will take place on 7 November.

News / Updates:

P7 Open Evening – The P7 Open Evening on 29 October had been very successful.

Knox Newsletter – A Halloween edition of the Knox Newsletter will be coming out within the next week.

Quality Improvement Evaluation Visit 1 – will be on 31 October. Mrs Ingham thanked Mr Simpson and Mr Blair for all their hard work on this.

S4 work experience – begins on 18 November.

Progress / curriculum:

Mrs Ingham distributed a copy of the draft Annual Report for parents to take away and read. Any comments should be sent to her as soon as possible. She noted that the exam results listed in the report were pre-appeal.

Strategic items:

Curriculum Group – has been set up by Mr Illingworth to look at how the school develop and implement changes to the curriculum.

Handbook – is in the process of being pulled together.

Demographics - The management team have been charting the demographics of the school and would like to share them with the PSP at some point. There was a brief discussion about some of the figures and parents noted that they would like to discuss this matter in more detail at a future meeting.

8. Staff member's report – no items

9. Parent's matters

Reading – Mr Simpson asked parents to pass on any suggestions they had for promoting reading in the community. **Action All**

10. Correspondence –

Email correspondence with parents – Musselburgh Grammar School's parent council have contacted all East Lothian secondary school parent councils to ask if they communicate with parents by email. This was discussed briefly and Mary Benson will feed back to them by email. **Action MB**

Good practice – Val McIntyre (East Lothian Council's Education Department) has emailed all parent councils to ask for examples of parental involvement good practice in schools. This was discussed and Vicky Cole will feed back by email. A response is also requested from the Head Teacher. **Action VC & SI**

11. Any Other Business - none

12. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 27 November 2013.

Action points	Who	When
Inform Mrs Ingham when the website link to sign up for email alerts for updates is available on the PSP website so she can publicise this to parents.	IS / SI	As soon as possible

Forward information on modern languages funding to Mrs Ingham.	MW	As soon as possible
Invite Mr Greenaway to attend the next PSP meeting to update the PSP on ePortfolios and Tracking & Monitoring.	SI	For the next meeting
Upload Activities Week film to the school website.	DS/CB	As soon as possible
Pass on suggestions for promoting reading in the community to Mr Simpson	All	As soon as possible
Email response to Musselburgh Grammar PC re communication with parents.	MB	As soon as possible
Email response to Parent Council mailbox re parental involvement good practice.	VC/SI	For 20 November