

Parent Council Chairpersons Network Meeting

Tuesday 28 September 2021

Microsoft Teams

Present:

Councillor Susan McGill
Bryony Monaghan, Interim Head of Education
Judy Edwards, Service Manager Early Years and Early Intervention
Charlene Mitchell, PT Health and Wellbeing and Parental Engagement
Aileen More, Team Leader Resource and Business Team
Fiona Moffat, Children's Rights Officer / Education Officer ASN & Wellbeing
Alasdair MacLeod, Service Manager Senior Phase and Youth Participation
Carolyn McDaid, Service Manager Broad General Education
Morven Graham, Interim Service Manager ASN and Wellbeing and, Principal Educational Psychologist
Mandy Strachan, Aberfoyle PS
Farrah Bett, Cambusbarron PS
Alastair Pickard, Strathblane PS
Kieran Brennan, McLaren HS
Leanne Wilson, School TBC
Andy Fair, St Mary's Bannockburn PS
Glenda Carruthers, Newton PS
Yvonne Harris, PA to Bryony Monaghan



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Welcome and Introductions

Charlene welcomed everyone to session 2021 / 2022 and brief introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

Update from Interim Head of Education

Bryony gave her update, as follows.

It's a busy time in education nationally, with a review taking place currently which will have wide reaching implications. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced on 22 June 2021 the intention to replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and consider a new specialist agency for both curriculum and assessment while also taking forward reform to Education Scotland, including removing the function of inspection from the agency. Professor Ken Muir has been appointed to act as an independent advisor to the Scottish Government to advise on the implementation of the reform that will consider all functions currently delivered by both the SQA and Education Scotland.

This is leading to lots of discussion about how we assess young people in the senior phase in particular and the exam system. The assessment processes during the pandemic have highlighted some of the issues here and perhaps encouraged a renewed focus on the need for development.

National Care Service for Scotland Consultation

There is also an ongoing consultation about the development of a National Care Service, with the question of whether Children and Families Social Work become part of that Service. This consultation is available to everyone to contribute to. Currently, many Children's Services are integrated at local authority level with education and social work for children forming one service. So, many changes are planned for in the coming period.

<https://consult.gov.scot/health-and-social-care/a-national-care-service-for-scotland/>

Investment in Education

The Scottish Government have focussed on education and on childcare in their first 100 days commitments and in their newly announced Programme for Government. These are leading to some increased investment in teachers and support staff, breakfast clubs and free lunches are being extended and, there are plans to develop wrap around care. Amongst other priorities, future further expansion of early learning & childcare was announced in the Programme.

LGBT Inclusive Education Launch

Scotland has become the first country in the world to embed LGBT education in the school curriculum. LGBT Inclusive Education Phase 1 has been launched this week.

The new resources and CLPL will enhance our understanding of LGBT themes and provide practical support to help us further promote equality and diversity and move closer to eliminating discrimination.

Phase one includes:

- an e-module to increase our understanding and confidence
- a range of age appropriate curriculum resources and learning experiences
- support to consider the values and messages we promote through our physical space

The National Parent Forum of Scotland has also produced information to help parents / carers understand LGBT Inclusive Education and how they can help their children appreciate and respect difference in other people.



NPFS info parents
carers.pdf

Covid

Covid continues to be a focus, you will be aware of a change in the guidance and a reduced need to self isolate in wider society and in schools. This has reduced disruption and improved continuity for children and young people and the ability to plan ahead for staff in schools.

Draft

However, there continues to be a high number of Covid related absences, when pupils are positive themselves or for smaller numbers of close contacts, usually community contacts or for some families who choose to keep pupils at home when they are aware there is a case in school.

Local Developments

The consultation on the Expansion of ASN Secondary Provisions has been completed and we are going back to the Children and Young People Committee to seek approval for our plans to be developed to completion.

We are also consulting currently on the proposed closure of Buchanan Primary School after an extended period of mothballing. This consultation is open until 10 November 2021 and we have two public meetings being held virtually on 19 October in the afternoon and in the evening.

<https://stirling.gov.uk/news/2021/september-2021/public-consultation-opens-on-permanent-closure-of-buchanan-ps/>

A consultation is likely following the next Children and Young People Committee on a review to our placing request practice which will lead to some changes to the policy underpinning that work.

Four areas of priority for education are a focus for the Stirling Council Covid Recovery Plan, which are underpinned by a range of improvement activity at local authority and school or nursery level.

- Improving the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Targeted support resulting in attendance, literacy and numeracy improvements where data shows the most significant gaps.
- Improving positive destinations for young people.
- New qualifications pathways created as a result of digital opportunities.

We talked about mental health at the last meeting and these are themes that we can bring here for discussion in future if that is of interest to you.

Q Alastair raised concern around Covid warn and inform letters and the fact that letters are only being issued every 10 days. He asked if there was anything that could change?

A Bryony advised of the change in guidance during the first few weeks of term. This was in consultation with Scottish Government. Aileen advised that there had been a change to letters recently and we had moved from a generic warn and inform letter to a more specific information letter that asks anyone who has been classed as a low risk contact to take a lateral flow test before returning to school. These new letters will not go out every time there is a positive case. There are conversations that take place between the school, Link Officer and Aileen as to timing of issuing any further letter.

Carolyne advised that from last week a new letter was being offered more frequently. This is not the national approach but certainly is the Forth Valley approach. New letters are more frequent.

Q Farrah asked if the letter says how many positive cases there are and if different letters are being issued?

A Aileen advised that the template says a case but the letter can be changed if there is more than one case in a class. We cannot confirm the number of cases, the letter would just say case or cases. Carlyne advised that this was so as not to breach confidentiality.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Fiona Moffat, Children's Rights Officer for Stirling Council gave an update on where we are with this in the local authority and where we are in incorporating this into our work. Fiona advised she was happy to have conversations with wider parent groups if required.

Fiona asked what everyone's knowledge was around UNCRC. Kieran advised that UNCRC meant nothing to him. Everyone was in the same boat and confirmed it was new to everyone.

Fiona loaded her slides. UNCRC stands for United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNCRC is an international agreement. It sets out the rights of children and young people up to age 18, regardless of race, religion or abilities. The agreement tells governments what they should do to protect children and their rights.

UNCRC fits under the umbrella of human rights. Children carry vulnerabilities and it was decided that a specific set of special rights was needed for them.

A young person is classed as a child is up to the age of 18 in terms of the UNCRC.

Within UNCRC there are 54 articles that cover a whole range of areas, such as the right to be listened to; the right to go to school; the right to be able to play; the right to be able to relax; the right to good health and the right to a clean environment. These are just a few of the 54 articles that are very far reaching.

To help with understanding of the 54 rights, it is often talked about in terms of three Ps of the UNCRC – provision, protection and participation. What we have done in Stirling is created our own organisers then taken these three areas and slotted the 54 articles under these three headings so when having conversations we think of protecting, listening to and developing learning and thinking. This is our Stirling model for this.

Since 1989 the UK have been firm supporters of the rights of children and as a nation we work hard to uphold the rights of children. In Stirling we are always mindful of the rights of children. Upholding children's rights is a model of good practice rather than legal boundaries around this, but it was felt by current Scottish Government that we need to take this one step further and bring some legality around the rights for our children. We are currently looking at the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill which was voted for unanimously in March 2021 and will be going live in November 2021. When started talking about this it seemed a long way off but now the incorporation date is very close. What does incorporation mean – is the shift between good practice and bringing into arena where it is law.

When the UNCRC becomes part of the law in Scotland, the Scottish Government and public authorities must protect the rights of children and young people. Children and young people can complain if they think their rights aren't being protected. A court could tell an organisation to change what they are doing if the court agrees that they are not protecting children's rights properly. This moves beyond good practice and into us showing what we are doing as a local authority.

From a Stirling perspective this means working with our partners in Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (FVWL RIC) – Stirling, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and West Lothian – working as a group around UNCRC ensuring education establishments are supported in the UNCRC incorporation.

We are in process of developing a child friendly complaint toolkit to allow children and young people to make a complaint if their needs have not been met. We are currently at the very early stage of developing this toolkit and are in the process of gathering evidence and research around models of participation to see how best to support our young people. We are consulting with young people, head teachers and social work colleagues to get the toolkit right. We are also developing Stirling's Pledge which is a commitment to all of Stirling's children and young people around the protection, promotion and fulfilment of their rights.

Young people are going to be the creators of the Pledge with help from officers and colleagues across services and partner services taking the principles of a rights based approach (UNICEF Model) and what is Stirling's position around this in terms of how we are thinking of the articles, organisers and protecting how this all fits into principles. Creation of this Pledge is to have first draft by end of this academic session and this is going to become our commitment to all of Stirling's children and young people and how we protect, promote and fulfil their rights.

- Q** Mandy advised that Aberfoyle PS had lost their lollipop person and surely this is a right that children should be protected as the crossing is at a really dangerous corner and it is a four way junction. They don't know how to fight to get another one in place.
- A** Fiona will check UNCRC articles around safety and protection and speak with Bryony to find out more about this. Rights are not going to be aligned immediately and concerns around safety need to be addressed.

Mandy confirmed that any help would be very welcomed. Aileen advised that she is aware of this and that she will pick up with the Facilities Management Team to find out what is happening with replacement for the lollipop person then update Mandy.

If anyone would like Fiona to come and speak to wider parent groups, please advise Susan Mitchell at parentcouncils@stirling.gov.uk.

Consultation – Devolved School Management (DSM)

Aileen advised that a review of DSM is currently underway in all local authorities in Scotland. Aileen asked if anyone knew about DSM and the answer from everyone was no.

Aileen gave a background to DSM. It was introduced in 1993 to enhance and improve the management of resources at school level. This was reviewed in 2006 and 2012 taking into account the changing economic and financial climate for both local authorities and the Scottish Government. In June 2017 the Scottish Government consulted on changes to DSM as part of the wider "Fair Funding to Achieve Excellence in Equity in Education! Consultation. The purpose is to reflect and integrate with Education Reform Programme and priorities emerging from the Scottish Government and COSLA Education Reform Joint Agreement of June 2018. The main aim is to provide a framework for all local authorities to use that is clear, concise and transparent and allows parents and young people to understand how budgets are made up.

The principles and aims are – subsidiarity and empowerment; collaboration; accountability and responsibility; clarity and equity. This is to make things easier and for there to be one standard approach. There are very varying levels of information shared on DSM.

The Scottish Government started this before Covid and authorities were tasked with reviewing and sharing by April 2020 but Covid put a stop to this. The aim now is that there will be stakeholder engagement around autumn 2021 and we will take the review to the Children and Young People Committee in early 2022 with implementation of the revised DSM by 1 April 2022. This is a national timescale for all local authorities.

Q Farrah asked if this review will take into account that issues around Covid will continue for some time to come or will there be an assumption that we will be clear of Covid in the future?

A Aileen advised that the DSM does not touch on this. It sets out staffing structures and budget that is shared with schools.

Q Farrah asked about composite classes and keeping with friends in straight classes along with adhering with Covid restrictions.

A Aileen advised that this was not part of the DSM review. DSM sets up structures on how resources and budgets are controlled and informs decisions. Additional resources due to Covid were made available to us in order to support children over and above normal staffing levels.

Bryony advised that the plan is to continue to address long term issues with Covid but not necessarily through DSM.

Q Farrah asked if teachers cannot sit down and discuss what they are doing and students are not allowed to mix when restrictions are tight, if classes are split, how is this maintained in order to make sure students in mixed classes don't fall behind?

A Carlyne advised that when there were no Covid restrictions, composite classes within schools would have opportunities to get together in year groups, ie play times, craft afternoons. With Covid this has been more difficult because classes have been in separate bubbles. This is no longer in place, however schools are working to minimise contact across classes. Schools are having to be creative about this and some have done things remotely. We hope mitigations will continue to reduce risks and allow opportunities for these things to resume.

Q Farrah – not just on a social level but also on learning level and equity between classes?

A Carlyne said that the hope would be that teachers are still doing joint planning. Additional resources have been devolved to schools which has mainly been used for additional staffing.

Q Alastair asked if Aileen covered janitorial staff?

A Aileen confirmed that Facilities Management Team covered catering and cleaning, janitorial and school crossing patrol. Aileen is the link for the service.

Alastair wanted it noted that the janitor at Strathblane PS was retiring and that what a great asset he has been to the school and how much he will be missed by everyone and that they would appreciate finding another Peter.

Q Alastair asked if this role cannot be advertised until he has left? What about remote janitors?

A Aileen will pass this on. She worked closely with Peter on various occasions and advised that the team will try very hard to get another good fit for the school.

Glenda mentioned about the parent organisation called Connect which Stirling Council have a subscription to for all parent councils. This is a very good resource.

Judy hoped that new members received communications from parent council email box. Connect is a great resource to support parents. Information has already been sent out about training available and the services they provide. Judy advised if you have not received information, email the parent council box and ask for all information from the start of term to be resent. Susan Mitchell, admin, has made contact with schools to find out if there are any new chairpersons.

Councillor McGill thanked everyone for their presentations and said that it was nice to have a comprehensive view which was really interesting. Bryony thanked Councillor McGill for her attendance.

Q Farrah asked if it was possible for Stirling Council to give parent councils advice around what they are able to do with regards to events etc as not sure what allowed to do with restrictions that are in place.

A Judy suggested that it was best to discuss this with head teacher at school. As a service, each time there is an update in guidance for schools, we provide local guidance for schools and nurseries. This is a fast changing picture. Head teachers will be able to guide what can happen in school and on school grounds and maybe revisit in a month's time as it is a changing landscape.

Bryony said that planning ahead is not easy with regards to events just now.

Q Alastair had a query about IT issues and the Strathblane network as it is a constant battle for teachers having to go home to have meetings and kids trying to do work with Chromebooks. This is all depending on band width.

A Alasdair advised that Chromebooks were provided during lockdown and in an ideal world, the infrastructure would have been in place before then to support them. We are in the middle of a procurement exercise with two main contractors which is an ongoing process between the Council IT and Procurement teams. This will take a few months to get in place. BT are providing a solution for the western village primaries and remote device are in place to allow all Chromebooks to be used in school as they should be. BT are planning site visits and hopefully this will be in a matter of weeks. This is very much a priority. We are working hard with our IT team to get a short term solution and more importantly a long term solution to the problem.

Alastair said he was aware it is a frustration but good to hear that we are dealing with it.

Q Kieran also echoed problems with connectivity. He noted ongoing work at McLaren HS to replace roof tiles and felt on roof just now. Open Reach are now prepared to upgrade connectivity using the scaffolding in place until roof is put on. The Parent Council are concerned that the roof is in an exposed position with coming into winter. Teachers are having to go home to get into meetings.

A Bryony confirmed that we are taking this extremely seriously and know it is a problem. She advised that it has been identified that growth money was required and significant money was agreed at time of financial pressure because of how significant this issue was to get fixed. We are now making improvements at a rapid pace.

Alasdair advised that we have spent months getting connectivity for McLaren HS and then scaffolding was put up and told a couple of weeks to do the roof job. Cable may be able to put through another part of the building and would like to assure everyone that we are doing everything we possibly can to move this on.

Judy advised that we are planning to develop the Stirling Platform for Education and Community further to add a hub for parents to access information and resources. Charlene will be in touch with more information about this. An ASN hub, early years hub, primary hub, secondary hub and digital hub for teachers to access are already in place.

Charlene thanked everyone for attending and asked that if they want anything added to the agenda for next meeting, to let us know as soon as possible when Susan sends the email out looking for agenda items.