



**PHS Parent Council  
31 January 2024  
Peebles High School**

### Attendees

Ellie Johnstone, Chair (Chair)  
Kevin Ryalls, Interim Head Teacher (Head)  
Donna Moretta, Depute (DM)  
Jeremy Lee, Depute (JL)  
Karen Mooney, Depute (KM)  
Alasdair Reid, Depute (AR)

Claire Barrett, Secretary  
Tristan Compton, Buildings Sub-group Lead  
Dawn Johnstone, Comms Lead  
Gillian Moran, Events Lead

21 parents joined the Parent Council meeting.

### Welcome, Minutes & Actions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting,

Minutes of the previous meeting (15 November 2023) were approved with one amendment. Minutes are available on the [phsparents](https://www.phsparents.co.uk) website.

There are a few actions outstanding from the last meeting – the Chair and Headteacher will pick up.

**Action – PC Chair & Head to go over outstanding actions from previous PC meetings.**

### Chair's Update

The Chair gave thanks to Campbell Wilson who has now left PHS, wishing him all best in his new role. The Chair welcomed PHS new interim Headteacher, Kevin Ryalls, who will be in post until Jan 2025. A letter from SBC issued this week was unclear; so to confirm: another Head is taking care of Gala Academy whilst Mr Ryalls is Head at PHS.

There were a number of Christmas events in December which were well attended and very positive, eg social dancing and Burns night at Peebles Hydro.

Attendance at Borders College is moving from Tue/Thur to a Friday.

Prelims were split across December and January for the first time. We'll get feedback on how that went.

### Headteacher Update

The Head thanked the Parent Council and noted he is very pleased to be here, it's been a quick turnaround and a lot has been packed into 2 weeks. Staff have been fantastic & welcoming, with momentum to move forward. Young people fantastic – credit to the school. The school is here to serve the community and contribute to its future.

Partnership Working – Head has met Ellie (Chair) a few times, and wants to continue with this really positive start. Young people will be involved in decisions going forward. This is a challenging time for the school with things to be tackled but looking forward to the return Inspectors visit, to demonstrate progress.

A new start - need to build on strengths. There has been some negativity about the school – but it has many strengths which are sometimes overlooked, eg the relationship with staff is very strong. Need to make sure community is aware of the positive things going on (main point of the Facebook page). Need to move at pace, but need to land things. Focus on some things and do them well.

The Head invited questions from parents as he updated on the following. ***Parent questions are highlighted in bold italics.***

The Senior Leadership Team who were all present, were introduced and their priorities listed:

#### **Leadership – Kevin Ryalls**

- communication with the whole school community
- the clarity of school priorities
- the ongoing evaluation of our work including pupil and parent voice

#### **School experience**

- updating the positive behaviour management policy **Kevin Ryalls**
- the quality and consistency of teaching and learning including sharing best practice **Karen Mooney**

#### **Tracking pupil progress**

- planning learning to support pupil progress in S1-3 **Karen Mooney**
- assessment processes to track the progress of pupils in S1-3 including literacy and numeracy **Karen Mooney**
- strategies to best meet the needs of all learners **Donna Moretta**

#### **Attainment and Achievement**

- literacy and numeracy qualifications **Jeremy Lee**
- using data to plan interventions with groups and individuals **Jeremy Lee**
- coursing and the curriculum **Alasdair Reid**
- skills and achievements in relation to the wider curriculum in and out of school **Alasdair Reid**
- the best possible outcomes for all young people across all levels **Jeremy Lee**

#### **HMI Action Plan**

- Immediate priorities – Positive Behaviour Policy (see below) and Communication Strategy (see below and attached)
- SIF and Letter
- SIF improvements – Senior and Extended Leadership Teams leads linked to How Good is our School? 4 Quality Indicators with Parent Council and Pupil Parliament links as part of these improvement priorities.

#### **Positive Behaviour Policy**

The Head requested parents get involved to work alongside as a sounding board, along with young people from Pupil Parliament.

'One Pebbles' – Staff – Pupil – Parent/carer – will start after Feb break - assemblies to explain to young people. More consistency is needed across teachers – eg merit texts, some teachers give out lots, others don't... And quicker communication home if behaviour not good.

Recently appointed a Principal Teacher for Inclusion – Sarah O'Neill – looking after young people most at risk of exclusion and developing a curriculum for them.

#### ***How will this new policy be communicated to parents?***

It will be on the website, newsletter from Head to parents by email, assemblies in school.

***School policies – not sure what we are signing up to? Parents not sure where to find these.***

Agreed, these should be on the school website

The Head reiterated this is a starting point. Other policies such as mobile phones, uniform etc will come later.

***Would you consider a learning contract for students to sign? Commitment by young people to adhere to the rules. Same at sports clubs etc.***

Not something I've considered, it's a good idea.

***I don't want my young person to have a mobile but the teacher tells them to take photo of homework on mobile phone?***

They can use an iPad for that. We'll aspire to get consistency on that with teachers.

***In Criminology the young people can't do what they need to do on the iPad - the research can't be done on banned websites.***

The school can't add the sites on themselves, yes that is frustrating.

***Are there ipads/laptops available for a particular class***

Yes sometimes but anything blocked is blocked for any SBC employee. It's extremely difficult to get a site added and requests seem to go into a black hole.

Action – Chair will bring up at PC Chairs meeting to see how other schools get around this.

***Could we have a library with a librarian and books where pupils could go to do research***

Not confident we can guarantee that in the new school. It's a staff member we don't have in the school. (There is a library/reading room in the new school building).

***Is there somewhere pupils can go to access that knowledge (that they can't access themselves)***

There is not that person. That would be within departments, eg researching a certain topic. There are workarounds, adv higher sites have access to journals, but some things have to be researched at home.

***What about additional portacabins?***

I have asked about additional portacabins. I have an update meeting on Friday 2/2/24 and I want an answer on this.

Sarah Duncan and Tristan Compton expressed interest in joining the Positive Behaviour Policy group.

***Communications Plan (Appendix 1 was shared on screen)***

This is a priority from HMI and from parents. Kevin Smith, IT is doing PHS FaceBook updates and website. Parents should be contacting the school for everything (not having to rely on PHS Parents Facebook comms)

***Could you set expectations for response times from school? And what is the best way to contact? What is escalation procedure. Just an acknowledgement would be good. Parents have lost confidence in contact with the school. It will take time for school to rebuild that trust with parents. What about an autoresponse?***

There followed a discussion about communications, summarised as follows:

Head agreed that communications are not working. Better system is needed for enquiries. Office should be central point, providing an autoresponse/acknowledgement then forwarding on to correct place. Tracked and response given.

Chair & parents suggested website could be kept up to date with much of the information sought by parents, thus reducing the need to contact school at all. Eg Calendar entries up to date and with all info required. Parents don't want to add to staff workload.

The school and staff receive a huge number of emails. Some parents' demands made by email are unrealistic in expected response time. There needs to be respect both ways and understanding of what is a reasonable response time.

An email auto response could have common enquiries signposted, and state an expected response time, eg if enquiry is general you'll get a reply at the end of the week; confidential/personal would be escalated up to line managers. Parent Alex Corbishley suggested various processes which had a transformative effect at his organisation.

Parents need to be aware of classification of communications, eg if urgent, use phone not email. If non-urgent, email and get response later.

There was agreement among parents that the Newsletters and FB updates are great.

The Head acknowledged this was a great conversation – it's an opportunity to make this better. He requested parents work alongside the school on this in a short term group: with someone from the office and a pastoral teacher.

**Action: Head requested Alex Corbishley speak with the school Business Manager**

**Action: Parents to come forward if interested in working in the group to help improve Communications**

Mrs Moretta advised that the school Anti-bullying policy is being re-written along with a statement re SBC policy. It has been worked through with staff and young people and will be shared for comments from parents. Once finalised it will be put on website.

**Action: parents to feedback on anti-bullying policy when it is issued by Mrs Moretta**

## **HMI Inspection Report/Action Plan**

### ***Re the curriculum - PHS is at the extreme end of narrowing of subjects***

A discussion followed and the history of the debate around choice-points at PHS was relayed. The results of the parent survey previously held by the PC have been sent to the Head who has not had a chance to look at them yet. Parents are keen to revisit this issue.

The Head advised that schools can manage their own curriculum structure apart from the Broad General Education (BGE, S1 – S3) entitlement. He is looking at curriculum narrowing and the S1 choice-point. It would be wrong to undo that at this stage. It can't be done too quickly, and must be planned properly. The Head acknowledged the strong feeling in the parent body about this issue.

Parents noted that if a young person cannot do a subject in school but has private tuition they can be allowed to sit the exam in the school, but this is not widely publicised. Also a better understanding of the consequences of making choices at S1 would be beneficial as it can restrict entry to certain university courses.

**Action: Parents asked to see the previous work/survey results – PC will put link on front page of phsparents website.**

### ***In the Inspection report, the BGE came in for a lot of criticism. What has gone wrong in your opinion and what does the focus need to be?***

Head: The context is that nationally the Senior phase has been a priority, it was always clear from SQA what has to be done. The Curriculum for Excellence doesn't have the same structure & rigour built in, and the system is trying to build that back. Schools have not spent time on that – the Experiences and Outcomes are vast in each subject, schools have been hanging on to preparing for Nat 5s.

Mrs Mooney: this is a priority to work on and improving at greater pace. Curriculum planning to allow us to be confident about our Level judgements, we'll put time in to evaluating our curriculum across the BGE. We have a plan in place to deliver on that. Plan, assess, feedback, report to parents on next steps and grades.

Head: Content is not a concern but tracking needs improvement. We'll introduce more tracking for each year group so we can identify groups of learners. Lowest attainers need to be better, we need to track so we know who those groups are, from P7. That is urgent, we have a plan for that.

When BGE is done properly it does achieve attainment in the senior phase. In BGE we should be racking up the skills, and the content can slot in.

### ***So will we get better tracking reports?***

Well, grades need to be part of that, that is missing (per the Inspection). Effort, behaviour, progress.

Ideally you'll see what your young people are working on and how well they are doing, or what needs improved.

***Consistency is not there. Some teachers send home feedback on what to work on, to be signed by parent, others homework is never marked at all***

Yes there is huge inconsistency. We're looking at feedback, template for feedback and quality. Started using Showbie. Seeing comments linked to a piece of work is valuable and that's where we want to get to.

Looking at consistency & quality of feedback. Standard approach to what that planning looks like, we will look at this as part of inset day. We have to deliver on this, these comments are not a surprise.

### ***Parents get a shock when thought all was ok then prelim is a disaster***

We'll give grades too – will take time to implement. We will evaluate any changes we make.

***For the action plan in place to address the inspection report, how are the goals set, how is the achievement going to be monitored, and how will the SLT ensure that you have control of those goals across the school? There is huge inconsistency....***

We'll have action plans for each of these areas, which the SLT will lead with the Principal Teachers. We're also looking at Agile Leadership

***Having that clearly communicated to parents would be really useful. There is a huge body of support ready, but with clear goals, strategy & monitoring it's easier to use that support.***

Yes, plans will be communicated and put on the website. We have committed and talented staff, we need to pull together and have clear goals, we will survey, etc expect to see improvement.

***Could we have a portacabin for a quiet study space/6<sup>th</sup> floor common room? The insurance money is going to the new school and the current S5/6 will not benefit from this.***

The lack of study space is vexing us all and we're looking at that. HMI told us that seniors not in class was a concern for them. They don't want a space for them to get away to, so not sure a common room is a good idea.

***Some seniors were massively impacted by what's happened and some recognition that they're not going to see any of these improvements would be good.***

S4/5/6 experience – yes we need to improve as quickly as we can. I think they are aware of the strength of feeling in Parent Forum about this. The ideal is an area that's silent and area where you can chat. We have been tasked though by HMI to have young people occupied, doing meaningful things their entire week.

***Mr McMordie has given a lot of opportunities to S6 to do activities (faculty ambassadors etc) but in between you have to go somewhere, so the lack of space puts them off coming in at all. Please advocate for a solution for this year's S6 students***

I will but if we don't get another portacabin we will have to move on. Faculty ambassadors/leadership positions has to be part of their timetable.

***My young person's S2 CDT class is touring the school looking for a classroom***

**Action: Parent to advise Head the detail of this**

***My young person's house time class teacher expressed that the reason the school was not good/excellent was the kids' fault. What feedback will be given to teachers on how the report is fed back to young people?***

Head: Lines have not been given to teachers to communicate to the young people. Everyone can read it and discuss it. Inspectors do not give feedback to individual teachers. We're trying to get a balance, we all have messages from the Inspection, we are pushing things hard and taking folk with us, and we're doing things that are challenging to some folk in the school. That's up to me, set that tone as best I can.

***Parents nights – S1 one is right at the end of the school year – there's not much you can do with the feedback as it's so late in the year.***

JL: We will be happy to review parents nights – with some parents – we could have a look at what could be moved, everything has a repercussion on something else. We've already increased appointments due to frustration about that.

**Action: parents get in touch if interested in working with school on reviewing parents nights.**


***Current S4 have never had an in-person parents night***

JLee: Yes that's right, the transition has meant that has happened. Senior ones are online now.

**New School Update was not covered due to lack of time.**

**The meeting closed at 9.30pm**

## Appendix 1 – Communications Strategy

<p>Communications Strategy</p> <p>31.1.24</p> <p>V1</p>		<p>Wisdom Compassion Integrity Justice</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Communication to parents/carers</u></p> <p><u>Immediate Action – individual or group text, phonecall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Groupcall text for absence period 2 and period 6</li><li>• Groupcall text/phone call for absence each period if on 'First Instance Register'</li><li>• Phonecall for any injury, serious situation</li><li>• Transport updates*</li><li>• School closure*</li></ul> <p><u>Action/Important FYI – group email then on website</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Merits texts</li><li>• Negative behaviour to individuals</li><li>• HT Updates incl new school updates*</li><li>• Email for trips, vaccinations, course choice, consent forms*</li></ul> <p><u>FYI</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facebook page*</li><li>• Newsletter*</li></ul> <p><u>*Website</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School information 'library'</li><li>• School handbook</li><li>• School policies</li><li>• Calendar</li></ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Communication from parents/carers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Default is through the school office unless communication channels established</li><li>• Default is office will direct to Pastoral Teacher</li><li>• Email FAO will be sent to the line manager initially</li><li>• Bullying policy</li></ul>		

Please get in touch around any of the issues raised at [phspc@outlook.com](mailto:phspc@outlook.com)

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## Helpful Info/Reminders

### Parent Council Meeting Dates for 2023/24

Wednesday 13 September 2023 – in person  
Wednesday 15 November 2023  
Wednesday 24 January 2024  
Wednesday 20 March 2024  
Wednesday 24 April 2024  
Wednesday 12 June 2024 (AGM)

### Post Holders

Chair – Ellie Johnstone  
Vice Chair – Tristan Compton  
Secretary - Claire Barrett  
Communications Officer – Dawn Johnstone  
Equalities Lead - Lorraine Murray  
Event Coordinator – Gillian Moran  
Friends of Peebles High School SCIO representative - Eric Nightingale  
Property Working Group Lead – Tristan Compton  
Taskforce Coordinator – post vacant

We welcome interested parents & careers on the Parent Council as general members or working group members. We simply ask that you try to attend meetings regularly. If you would like to be an ordinary member or join a specific working group, please email your details to: [phspc@outlook.com](mailto:phspc@outlook.com)

Any parent or carer interested in supporting the Friends of PHS charity with running fundraising activities should get in touch at <mailto:FriendsofPHS@outlook.com>

**Website:** [phsparents.org.uk](http://phsparents.org.uk)  
**Facebook:** PHS Parents – can contact us via Messenger  
**Twitter:** [@PHSparents](https://twitter.com/PHSparents) [@PeeblesHigh](https://twitter.com/PeeblesHigh)