

Highland Parent Council Partnership Annual Conference and AGM - 2017

Saturday 18th November 2017, Highland Council Chambers, Inverness, 9.30am – 3.30pm

Attendees: A total of 72 parent representatives attended the conference from 49 different schools (out of a total 203 schools in Highland). However, 23 out of a total 29 Associated School Groups (ASGs) were represented, so quite good coverage.

1. 10.00. Welcome & Introduction. Fergus Weir, Chair of the HPCP.

1.1. Fergus Weir opened by welcoming parents and speakers to the meeting and looking forward to an open-minded discussion. Doing the best for our children requires a partnership approach.

1.2. HPCP is there to communicate with and represent parent councils and the parent forum of Highland region. It works in partnership with the Highland Council and the National Parent Forum Scotland to seek consensus and to inform policy at both regional and national level. This in turn helps to feed the priorities for Scottish Education.

2. 10.15. Scottish Government's Education Policies, John Swinney, Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

2.1. John Swinney opened by explaining that Scottish Education is built on three foundations and that all interventions work within these three foundations:

2.1.1. GIRFEC, Getting It Right For Every Child, focuses on the interests of the individual child and working with wider public services.

2.1.2. CFE, the Curriculum for Excellence, is a flexible curricular approach to education that depends on the professionalism of teachers and is anchored around the progress and individual needs of each child.

2.1.3. DYW, Developing the Young Workforce, is a partnership approach between schools, colleges, employers and third sector working together to equip pupils for their future, finding the best outcomes and destinations for every pupil.

2.2. The aim of the Scottish Government is to close the poverty-related educational attainment gap in every part of country with education built on the twin pillars of excellence and equity. Its vision is to use education to overcome the 'obstacles of birth', and this agenda is broadly supported by all stakeholders, John Swinney explained. The reforms proposed in the Government's draft Education Bill are intended to achieve excellence and equity. **The reforms include three main aspects:**

2.2.1. **Regional Improvement Collaboratives** will be set up to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of education, as professional support for teachers and Head Teachers is not always available locally at the required standard.

2.2.2. **Further Empowering of School Head Teachers** will happen via a new Head Teacher's Charter, to give HTs more flexibility to take decisions that are closer to the pupil and matter to education. £120 million in Pupil Equity Funding has been given directly to Scottish schools, allocated on the basis of pupils numbers registered for free schools, to strengthen educational performance where there is a poverty-related attainment gap.

2.2.3. **Strengthening the Role of Parents** in education, so that parents have greater participation and are more actively involved in deep learning. Rather than being 'invited in' on limited occasions, parents will be encouraged to be in school much more frequently and regularly as part of the learning process, will nurture parts of the curriculum, and be actively involved in pupils' learning experiences. For example, in one Primary school, there is a staggered finish so that parents of P1 pupils can attend for the last half hour of the day.

2.3. One of the biggest challenges facing this vision for Scottish education is the availability of teachers. Across the 2500 schools in Scotland there is an average vacancy rate of 1.5%. Recent recruitment drives have boosted the number of candidates going into teaching by 7.5%. Other challenges discussed are covered by the questions below.

2.4. **Pre-selected Questions from Parent Councils answered by John Swinney:**

Q1. How is the reduction in numbers of subjects at National 5 (from 8 to 6) affecting pupil outcomes at Higher – what do academic studies and the exam data say? Kate MacDonald, Inverness Royal Academy.

A1. Curriculum for Excellence aims to deliver a Broad General Education (BGE) with breadth of understanding up until the end of S3. The Government has the professional assurance of the Head of the SQA, The Chief Inspector and the Chief Examiner, that the BGE is sufficiently broad and prepares pupils for going deeper in the senior phase. Also CFE is very much about total achievement over the 3-year senior phase and not individual year conclusions. This year saw over 150,000 passes at Higher, the highest ever, so although pupils are doing fewer National 5s, they are being equipped with deeper learning to secure Highers. The maximum number of National 5s taken around Scotland does vary from 6 to 8 subjects, and schools should be (and will become) freer to take those decisions in the pursuit of excellence and equity, and not simply be dictated to by Local Authorities. The level of prescription to teachers is being relaxed.

Q2. Some employers view the Scottish qualifications as somehow inferior to those qualifications earned south of the border, despite students studying the same subjects for the same time. How can the Government claim parity between the qualifications? Tony Gilfeather, Culloden Academy.

A2. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) charts, stage by stage, the parity of qualifications. The comparability of qualifications is independently and internationally assessed. The SQA is tested on quality and competence against international standards and these standards have to be passed and maintained. So the Government can see no justification in the claim that Scottish qualifications are somehow deficient.

Q3. Schools vary in size and subject choice; what steps is the Government taking to make the availability and choice of subjects equitable across Scotland? Liz Green, Culloden Academy.

A3. This is an important issue to tackle. The Scottish Government is assisting financially with the development of e-Sgoil, a digital learning hub in the Western Isles, established in August 2016 to provide a wider choice of subjects for pupils across the Western Isles secondary schools. The Government is hoping this can be expanded and broadcast to other areas, whilst also aware that this solution requires fast broadband connections. The classroom and teacher is the traditional model of education but we need to be open to technology to broaden choice.

Q4. The curriculum is constantly changing which is hard for the schools and staff to follow, but also staff and pupils. When is there going to be a time of stability? Jennifer Alexander, Balloch Primary School.

A4. Actually, the curriculum is not changing and no more change is expected. What has been unclear is what is expected for assessment and that has been unfair. There have been various attempts to clarify this and we have gone from Learning Outcomes to Significant Aspects of Learning to Benchmarks. There is a sigh of relief from teachers at finally having clarity. I have been speaking to teachers directly and answers are better now than they were 18 months ago. The other thing is that the curricular areas of Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Well Being have been given pre-eminence over the other 5 curricular areas at secondary level.

Q5. With recent PISA reports suggesting that Scotland's standing in national league tables is in decline, how can the Scottish Government ensure that CFE is getting it right for every child? Even the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, a second language and IT require a suitable infrastructure investment that recognises the challenges across Highland. Jon Greenhow, North Kessock Primary.

A5. Mr Swinney replied that he is a passionate believer in CFE and the primacy of literacy and numeracy. Yes, Scotland has marginally slipped down the PISA league tables but the breadth of education is also very important and this is now recognised in other countries like Singapore. *(PISA means Programme for International Student Assessment. It is a programme for testing 15 year olds in science, reading and maths in 72 countries. On 6th Dec 2016 results from the 2015 testing were published).*

The Government is committed to 100% coverage of superfast broadband throughout Scotland and the Cabinet is meeting to look specifically at broadband expansion.

Q6. The lack of STEM and ICT teachers in Highland in Highlands is a crisis and storing up a disaster for the Scottish economy in future years. Will you – as a matter of extreme urgency – make it easier and faster for schools to recruit teachers from outside Scotland (as Continental Europe does) and break the stranglehold that the GCTS (General Teaching Council for Scotland) has over recruitment of teachers, before the STEM gap becomes unbridgeable? Mark Gunn, Nairn Academy

A6. There is a careful balance to be struck. Recruitment needs to ensure quality teachers. The GCTS is the guarantor of teacher's quality and the Government is not prepared to compromise on quality. However John Swinney did promise to go back and raise issues with GCTS again.

There is some speed up with recruitment via 'Provisional Registration'. There are some new and more flexible routes into teaching. For example the University of Strathclyde offers those with a STEM background entry in August, to be ready to teach by April. Of the 4,000 teaching places offered to 18-22 olds last year in Scotland, entry was 500 places short, so the younger cohort is exhausted. The Government is offering £20,000 tax-free bursaries for teachers recruited into STEM subjects, and the UHI distance-learning programme for teaching is expanding to encourage more home-grown teachers in Highland. Mr Swinney concluded by saying that teacher recruitment is an international challenge and not unique to Highland.

Q7. The low starting salary for teachers compared to other professions is not the best incentive for future candidates; is the Government addressing this? Ann Fletcher, Applecross Primary School

A7. Mr Swinney acknowledged that the shortage of teachers and virtual non availability of supply teachers is an acute problem. The Government is in the process of re-negotiating salaries. Public sector worker salaries have been frozen for a number of years meaning that more staff could stay in employment. The Government is now lifting the pay cap on public sector pay. He closed by saying that people go into teaching more out of passion than for the money, but also recognised the need for fair remuneration.

Q8. How will the interest of small, rural and remote schools in the North Highlands be heard at the regional scale of educational management? John Whitfield, Golspie High School.

A8. Schools need a strong Education Authority to support them. Regional Improvement Collaboratives have been put in place to improve performance; they are not there to reduce control at the school level. The Scottish Government wants schools like Golspie to have access to better resources for improvement and the school to have greater control. The role of Head Teachers will be strengthened via Head Teacher Leadership Academies with the aim of becoming more effective leaders of learning. The aim is not for Head Teachers to become bureaucrats and the Highland Council will still be doing the administrative background and support for Head Teachers and schools.

Q9. When will the Minister give Parent Councils in Scotland the same powers and roles as Governing Boards in England, so that PCs are not just talking-shops but are relevant and have a distinguished and effective role? Michael Simpson, Tongue Primary.

A9. The National Parent Forum of Scotland reviewed the 2006 legislation on Parent Councils and found there was no broad support for England's School Board Model. Mr Swinney acknowledged that there is a need to clarify Parent Council roles and the relationship between Head Teachers and Parent Councils and that the Education Bill addresses this. From evidence gathered so far, the Scottish Government is of the opinion that parents do not wish to have statutory responsibility for schools. The current consultation is an open invitation for parents to provide their views on the level of responsibility for education they would welcome.

Q10. Highland faces a unique set of challenges to its funding of schools. It has: the largest school estate in Scotland with almost 10% of the total number, but spread over an area that covers 33% of the landmass of Scotland; the lowest population density in Scotland, with very few opportunities to achieve any increase in local revenue or further economies of scale, already having achieved a better than average number of school consolidations and closures since 2001; 45% of its Secondary schools in Poor or Bad condition - and getting worse, not better, with the situation for Primaries marginally better but still well below the national average and not now improving. Highland urgently needs a significant additional cash injection – of the order of £50 million a year for at least 5 years - into the Capital Expenditure available for schools. Is the Scottish Government willing to find this additional resource, and if so, when?

A10. Mr Swinney explained that the Scottish Govt annual settlement on Local Authorities like Highland Council included an allowance for rurality and remoteness, just as the Block Grant from the UK Govt [via the Barnett formula] saw Scotland receive more [115% of the UK average] per person, for similar reasons. He therefore believed that Highland Council was receiving its fair share of Scottish Govt funding. [This assertion was later disputed by Highland Council].

2.4.1. Lack of time precluded other questions, but to cover the topic Fergus gave a brief summing up of the particular rural challenges faced by Highland, noting broadband is disproportionately expensive to put in place across Highland. PEF funding is based on free school meal take-up as the most reliable mechanism, but the Government is open to better mechanisms. Rural deprivation is caused not just by poverty but by poor transport links and by poor subject choice availability at school. There are many issues for education which need addressing in Highland.

2.4.2. Fergus closed by extending thanks to the Deputy First Minister John Swinney, on behalf of all delegates, for taking the time to attend our annual HPCP conference and that his attendance was very much appreciated.

3. 11.15. Outline of HPCP Aims for the Coming Year, Fergus Weir, Chair.

3.1. The HPCP was established in 2015. Every parent and guardian in Highland is part of it. HPCP aims:

- to represent the voice for Parent Councils and the wider Parent Forum across Highland
- to constructively and proactively influence policy and the strategic delivery of a world class education
- to work in partnership with the Highland Council and other organisations involved in the education of children (e.g. National Parent Forum of Scotland, Scottish Parent Teacher Council, Education Scotland etc.)
- to represent Parent Councils and parents in the pursuit of our common aim to help every child be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.
- to seek to find parental consensus to inform education policy at a local and national level
- to ensure important and relevant information is both communicated from Parent Councils and to Parent Councils and the wider Parent Forum across the Highland Council region
- to provide a representative forum to support and feed into the National Parents Forum of Scotland (32 different Local Authorities contribute to the NPFS).

3.2. Parental engagement is needed for HPCP to help Parent Councils and to build a legacy. Office bearers and volunteers all work with HPCP on a voluntary basis towards a better education for our children.

3.3. The Highland Council have been very open, engaging and supportive of HPCP. We are now able to offer video conferencing at our meetings from two different locations. There are clear benefits of this ongoing collaboration between HPCP and Highland Council.

3.4. Communication is key to the progress that HPCP can make in the future. HPCP is having ongoing battles with data protection to get access to parent email addresses that are stored on the school data system SEEMIS. The main problem is that SEEMIS is also used by the other 31 local authorities and all have to agree on any changes to protocol.

3.5. HPCP is however making progress and here are some of the achievements so far:

- www.highlandpcp.org.uk is the HPCP website and a source of information;
- HPCP is now a registered charity;
- HPCP has a member who sits on the Highland Council People Committee;
- PC Email (Gmail) is the best way to keep in touch and will be upgraded soon so that HPCP can reset passwords and form mailing groups more easily;
- HPCP meets quarterly (at least once each term) at Highland Council HQ;
- Conference and AGM occurs annually in the autumn;
- Surveys and consultations are answered by HPCP;

- Council Committees;
 - Policy shaping.
- 3.6. Aims for the coming year so far include:
- Submit consolidated Highland parental responses to Government Education consultations;
 - Continue to increase the communication engagement to more parent councils and their wider parent forums;
 - Increase parental visibility of and responses to local authority policies.
- 3.7. In conclusion many hands make light work of increasing communication. More parent councils reaching more of the parent forum will increase parental engagement.

4. 11.30. Highland Council Delivery of Education across Highland. Bill Alexander, Director of Care and Learning.

4.1. **Introduction.** Bill Alexander opened by thanking John Swinney and parents for attending the conference, also thanking the committed parents who have stuck with the setting-up and running of HPCP and to Fergus Weir for attending ICT and policy meetings at the Council. The Highland Council aspires to work in partnership with Parent Councils. Bill then went on to thank the young, well rounded, good, passionate human beings that are the pupils in Highland and re-iterated that the Highland Council is in no way complacent about the quality of education across Highland. Highland Council is one of the highest performing Local Authorities in education on most measures year on year. There is a focus on the breadth and depth of education, and closing the attainment gap.

4.2. **Attainment Gap.** In rural authorities there is a very significant attainment gap. The poor in Inverness and the poor in Highland perform worse than the poor in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. This disparity is replicated in health and other sectors of communities.

4.3. **Management of Schools Programme.** The greatest challenge the Council faces is the sustainable provision of education across 203 schools that range in size from just two to over 1200 pupils. This is the Management of Schools Programme. Whilst it is not a Council priority there may still be a need to rationalise schools. Managing 203 schools across an area that is one third of Scotland geographically is very different to the other city Local Authorities. Long-term the Council is committed to sustaining education and supporting head teachers and schools to deliver a high standard of education.

4.4. **Head Teachers.** Head teachers face a heavy workload and the pressure is huge, so are hyper-sensitive to Government Reforms. Head teachers are above all leaders of learning and teaching, and adding finance and admin to their workload is too much. The details of Head Teacher support under the new model are still being developed.

4.5. The Council aspires to delivering a rich, diverse and broad curriculum across Highland. ICT is only one solution and both collaboration and new routes for teacher and Head Teacher recruitment must be addressed too.

4.6. **Governance.** The Northern Alliance is a voluntary collaboration between 7 local authorities (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland, and the Western Isles) working within and across local authorities to improve outcomes for young people. The proposed Education Bill puts this

collaboration of the willing into legislation. Our region will be the Northern Alliance, plus Argyll and Bute. Whether collaboration and empowerment needs a law to enforce it is another question.

4.7. **Budget.** Resources continue to be a fundamental challenge. After 8 to 10 years of austerity there is no more to squeeze and the pips are cracking. There are further severe budget reductions ahead. The budget settlement will be made on 14th December 2017. The Council is expecting a £33 million cut next year and the 5 year prediction is a cut of £160 million out of a total budget of £550 million. Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) helps but it is very small compared to the cuts.

4.8. Capital spending (school building etc) requires the Council to take out loans. For every £1million the Council borrows they have to pay £100k in loan charges which increases the budget deficit. The capital programme will need to reduce to £55 million which is half what was spent this year and presents a very significant challenge.

4.9. **ICT.** ICT-based learning is going ahead with expansion and the chrome book roll out is commencing at Millburn, Dingwall and Portree with infra-structure refresh occurring in the same order. Updating broad band has not been straight forward, but the Council is back on time scale.

4.10. **Childcare.** The Scottish Government is committing to funding a doubling childcare provision by 2020, but in Highland it will cost more. The final setup is likely to include a much stronger partnership approach with communities and parents, yet very few strategic committees have a parent member so far.

4.11. **Questions from the floor answered by Bill Alexander:**

Q1. The new Education Bill places emphasis on support for Head Teachers as role models. We are facing the loss of Head Teachers under the new cluster proposals. How does this fit with the Scottish Government's vision for education empowering Head Teachers? Duncan McDonald, Alvie Primary.

A1. These are challenging issues. The Highland Council is at one with the Scottish Government on clustering schools. We cannot recruit HTs and many are temporary. It is not sustainable to have 174 HTs. Class commitment combined with the new Head Teacher role are not sustainable. The alternative to clustering is to close schools. The Council is looking community by community towards a fulltime HT (ie no classroom commitment for HT) model. There is a 3 year programme ongoing. Phase 1 went back 3 times before a consensus was reached. Phase 2 will start in August 2018 and Phase 3 is more complex.

Q2. Fortrose is now in Phase 2 of the clustering review and there has been no engagement with Parent Councils. Jon Greenhowe, North Kessock Primary.

A2. All ASGs will be included in discussions.

Q3. It is fine to have long-term plans for teacher recruitment, but what about our children now who have no teachers? I have no confidence in the short-term provision of teachers. Our school is missing basic teachers for Maths, English and ICT. Lucy Lallah, Inverness High School.

A3. STEM subjects are the most challenging and ICT is especially challenging. There are only 6 ICT teachers across the whole of Highland and the Government doesn't help. ICT learning and provision is increasing but learning and teaching in a blended way still needs teachers to support the process. Working with the Western Isles e-Sgoil has its challenges, as they use a system not supported in other schools. Once courses like ICT disappear from a school, they are more difficult to re-introduce and timetable. There are no easy answers.

Q4. The Government consultation on proposed new legislation for education talks about a Head Teacher's Charter with statutory Duties. The Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) have responsibilities, the Councils have responsibilities and Parent Councils have voluntary duties. What do we challenge in all this and where is the accountability in the new model? Kate McDonald, Inverness Royal Academy.

A4. There is massive agreement across Scotland about the priorities of pursuing excellence and equity, and empowering Head Teachers and Parent Councils. The 'next steps' in June 2017 was looking more like centralisation with the Regional Director for the RICs working for Education Scotland. Now that has changed and the Local Authorities are appointing their own regional leader who sits on the Education Work Force Council. Unfortunately the recently-appointed lead for our region has now been appointed the new Chief Inspector of Education, so a new appointment will need to be made. The new Head Teacher's Charter is a piece of legislation and the duties are worrying. Fortunately, the duty to close the poverty-related attainment gap has been removed, but other duties remain, including the duty to engage with Parent Councils and the Parent Forum.

Q5. Teacher recruitment is a crisis and across Scotland 1000s of teachers are missing. Could schools be empowered to recruit teachers more widely and not via the General Teachers Council for Scotland (GTCS)? Jo Horwood, Fortrose Academy.

A5. There is a balance to be struck between quality and provision. In England there is a programme to train teachers in 6 weeks. In NE Scotland there is a fast track programme to get Oil Industry staff into STEM subject teaching and there will be more schemes. Aberdeen City has over 100 teacher vacancies. Highland has 20 hard-to-fill posts and 80 vacancies due to overlap and delay in appointment. Supply has slowed up and the situation will get more challenging not just in teaching but other professions too. There are no easy answers.

Q6. Where is the Highland Council up to on Virtual Classroom teaching and what is the plan? Alison Clarke, Invergordon Academy.

A6. So far online teaching provision has been opportunistic and in future it needs to be far more strategic. The Council is increasing investment and there is now a dedicated post. Just over 100 pupils are undertaking e-learning across Highland, including in Maths and English; this is a blended mix of e-learning and teacher time.

Q7. Will asymmetric timetables be introduced to Highland Primary schools ?

A7. There is no compulsion centrally to move towards a 4.5 day week at Primary level; the choice is optional and often predicated on transport contracts. Some primaries are moving to a 4.5 day week, but not always on a Friday. The Council has made it compulsory for Secondary schools to move to a 33 period timetable as it makes collaboration across schools easier, especially for e-learning.

Q8. Firstly, the 3-18 integrated (campus) model and clustering can both work very well with the right leadership in place, and I have seen this both in the UK and overseas, so parents do not need to be afraid of the concept. Secondly, with regard to closing the attainment gap, past experiences effect parental will to cross the threshold into schools. A structure for parents to help other parents would be beneficial for investing PEF funding in family learning, obviously with appropriate boundaries and checks in place. Highland Council and schools need to be more proactive in asking parents to help, and Mr Alexander can push this point with his team and HTs. Mark Gunn, Nairn Academy.

A8. Acknowledged; a potential path for greater parental involvement in home-based learning and support.

Q9. How is raising attainment in the early years going? Jenny Alexander, Balloch Primary.

A9. There is massive evidence that the early years are crucial. There is big emphasis on the Emerging Literacy Programme in P1/2. This is a very developmental model with building blocks rather than wrote learning. Also crucial is the quality of the home environment, a child's attachment and the love they receive. That is why the Highland Council has an Integrated Service Approach that works to intervene before school.

Q10. How are pupils compensated when things go wrong? Now the NABS are removed, what checks are in place to allow the quality of that student to be assessed and can the SQA come in? Margaret Sinclair, Kinlochleven High School.

A10. Evidence of attainment is recorded by teachers. The Management of Schools Programme aims to address equity, but there are challenges in rural areas.

Q11. My child in P1 has had 7 different teachers which is not a good start to education. What can be done? Gledfield Primary is clustered with Everton and the HT does 3 days teaching. Sheila Lall, Gledfield Primary.

A11. Highland Council is looking at partnership working between schools and we have permanent supply teachers to fill in too, but the situation is difficult.

5. 12.30. Highland Parent Councils Case Studies.

5.1. Culloden Academy – Fund raising for theatre lights, by Liz Green.

- Raised £17k for new theatre lights.
- Parent Council grants saved over X3 years.
- Ward discretionary grants from X2 different Council Wards.
- Smartie Challenge – parents filled tubes with 20p pieces.
- Teas/ Coffees/ Baking/ Raffle with donated groceries/ hampers at school events.
- Awards for All application for up to £10k.
- School Angel Charity for Schools member for online shopping.

5.2. Nairn Academy – Careers and Learning Pathways Event, by Mark Gunn

- Originally a Parent Council-organised event held every second year, but now an annual event held in November.
- 2016 event saw over 50 local organisations and companies attend; expecting more in 2017.
- An Inverness company Dynam produced a glossy brochure for us for the event – all were taken on the night!

- The initial list of organisations was built by the Parent Council. Eilidh Edgar, Employer & Education Coordinator from DYW (Developing the Young Workforce) helped with more contacts.
- Exhibitor requirements (power, presentations etc) were determined, plus information on the exhibitors gathered for the brochure.
- The school had stands for different subjects, so pupils could talk to both subject teachers and employers. These stands will be better collocated in 2017.
- The 2016 event included the School Information Evening for S3-S6 Course Planning, with stands for subject choice information. Space was limited – in part a fundamental problem with the poor design of Nairn Academy. Overall a successful event with a real buzz on the night (6.30-8.30) and about 400 people attending, and good feedback from most employers attending.
- Nairn Academy Parent Council is funding the 2017 brochure, and doing much of the in-school set-up, with the school doing the admin (eg contact & tracking).

5.3. **Dingwall Academy – Parent Council organised Christmas Fair, by Sam Blyth.**

- Dingwall Academy PC hosts the largest Christmas Fair in the Highlands.
- Over 120 stalls.
- Charities.
- Small business.
- Entertainment.

5.4. **Farr Primary – Parent Councils for Farr ASG – How We Became a Cluster School, by Abigail Hardwick.**

5.4.1. Schools in this locality comprise Altnaharra Primary (now empty), Far High School (72 pupils), Farr Primary (25 pupils), Melvich Primary (22 pupils) and Tongue Primary (21 pupils). These are all now one cluster school. To visit all the schools is a round trip of 85 miles, taking 2 hours and 30 minutes. This was the timescale of events:

- Easter 2015, the proposal to cluster these schools was first suggested as the schools were having difficulty recruiting management positions; this was rejected by the Parent Councils.
- Easter 2016, parents were told that the cluster was going to happen, but 'everything is on the table' as far as management arrangements were concerned. Some people took this to mean that the status quo was also on the table – it was not.
- Autumn 2016, there were transition group meetings to discuss what would it look like, but these collapsed due to the severe reservations felt by some PCs in the group who could not see the benefit of clustering and wanted to stay as they were. Discussions got heated and very difficult at times.
- January 2017, the Parent Councils lobbied the Education Committee (ECAS) to delay the decision due to a proposed management structure for the cluster that the PCs felt was unacceptable

- March 2017, ECAS agreed with Parent Council proposals.
- The Parent Councils agreed the minimum management structure that the cluster could cope with was one HT, two Deputes and five Principal Teachers. What went to ECAS originally was one HT, one Depute and three Principal Teachers. In March 2017 ECAS agreed that the cluster could have the two Deputes and five PTs as proposed by the Parent Councils.

5.4.2. To date the appointments are as follows: The HT and two Deputes are appointed. Two PT have been appointed, one for Farr and Melvich Primary, and one in Farr High School. Tongue Primary lacks a PT – having been the only school at the start of the process with a permanent HT. Farr High School has vacancies in French and Support for Learning.

5.4.3. **The take-home messages from this experience at Farr are:**

- Clusters are coming to a school near you!
- Collaborate with other schools.
- Don't take no for an answer – if it won't work, it won't work.
- Get creative with advertising for posts.
- Lobby (all) Highland Councillors with your issues.
- Be up to speed on the new shape of Parent Councils and share your experiences.

5.5. **Charleston Academy – Pre-loved Uniform by Kate Morris.**

- The Parent Council collected uniform from School leavers at the graduation. This was all washed and neatly presented at school events for donations. The Parent Council raised £60 this way.

5.6. **Inverness High School – Parent Council Logo Design by Kate Morris.**

5.6.1. Inverness High School Parent Council designed this new school logo:

- As a means of increasing our visibility;
- Depicts clearly what a PC does for those who respond better to visuals than text;
- Features on all promotional materials (leaflets, business cards, chocolates and pens);
- Is given out to P7 parents in five schools in our ASG during the transitional period; and
- Also features on our roller banner and all of our correspondence.



5.6.2. Remarkably, this logo as a marketing tool has resulted in a 95% increase in parental engagement with our Parent Council in the last 4 months across a broad demographic!

6. **13.00 – 13.30 Lunch.**

7. 13.45 – 14.45 Regional Area Workshops with about 12 parent reps attending each region:

- North – Chair John Whitfield - Golspie High School
- Mid – Chair Sam Blyth – Dingwall Academy
- South – Chair Kate Morris – Charleston Academy
- West – Chair Andrew McKenna – Lochaber High School

8. 14.45 – 15.15 Open discussion to look at outcomes from the four regional workshops, looking at areas of concern, success and priorities for the future.

8.1. Concerns and Challenges.

8.1.1. South Region points raised included:

- Declining Parent Council membership and lack of continuity between office bearers if everyone leaves at the same time;
- Fund-raising is becoming an increasingly dominant focus of Parent Councils as school core funding becomes increasingly inadequate and lack of clarity about how Parent Council funds can and can't be used;
- Too much being expected of Parent Councils made up of volunteer parents and concern that the duties described in the new Education Bill will ask PCs to do more and more and put parents off joining Parent Councils;
- Clustering of schools being railroaded on to communities and imposed rather than being fully and openly consulted upon.

8.1.2. Mid Region points raised included:

- Resources and lack of funding impacting education;
- Equity of staff ratios and subject choice very variable across schools;
- Parental engagement continues to be low;
- Teacher recruitment problem is impacting on educational outcomes (eg subjects removed from curriculum, teachers leaving mid-term/year and pupils failing exam).

8.1.3. West Region points raised included:

- Fund-raising is putting a strain on local business'
- Lack of clarity between what Parent Council funds and what school funds;
- Inverness is not a very easy venue for schools in West Region.

8.1.4. North Region points raised included:

- So many of the basics are failing;
- Lack of teachers;

- Crumbling buildings;
- Lack of IT infrastructure;
- Busy parents not willing to engage and therefore not an active part of the school community;
- Some Head Teachers not willing to pass information on to PCs and parents;
- Education Bill is full of big aspirations, afraid that it is set up to fail.

8.2. **Successes – what is working**

8.2.1. South Region points raised included:

- Involvement of Pupil Councils – consult with pupils and invite pupil councils to PC meetings, so that their voice is heard;
- Council Elected Member engagement – invite them to PC meetings;
- Separating Fund-raising function and Policy functions within a Parent Council has worked well for many schools;
- Communication and advertising what the Parent Council is doing is key – do surveys, use post-it notes for good ideas at parents evenings and link with other schools in ASG.

8.2.2. Mid Region points raised included:

- Fundraising is a successful activity for Parent Councils and engages parents;
- The passion and commitment of parents involved in Parent Council.

8.2.3. West points raised included:

- Benefits of partnership working;
- Communication and using gmail – email is the best form of communication;
- Having Parent Council members at Parent's evenings.

8.2.4. North Region points raised included:

- Sharing experiences;
- 5 out of 36 schools (attending the Conference) is better than none; we are here, we care and are trying really hard to help.

8.3. **Priorities for the Future**

8.3.1. South Region didn't get past concerns.

8.3.2. Mid Region points raised included:

- Better Communication with wider parent forum , between PCs and within Region;
- Partnerships and forging strong ASG links;

- HPCP Regional meetings;
- Fundraising good ideas and best practise on HPCP website.

8.3.3. West Region points raised included:

- Use the HPCP website more for uploading useful stuff;
- Consider alternative HPCP meeting venues;
- All school roads should be considered Primary Routes for road-gritters.

8.3.4. North Region points raised included:

- Get the tick-box sorted so that Parent Councils can have parents email addresses;
- Teacher recruitment needs more inspiring campaigns;
- Head Teachers need to be made more accountable;
- Make school finances more transparent;
- Schools should trust parents and engage with them.

9. 1515 - 1525. Conference Summing-Up and Conclusions

9.1. Fergus Weir summed up by saying that better communication and sharing ideas sits at the core of what Parent Councils and HPCP do. Every Parent Council has a generic gmail address and HPCP needs to ensure that school PCs have access to that. The tick-box data consent for parent email addresses is so far only authorised for P7 enrolment forms. We really need that data entry for every school year, but that requires agreement between all 32 Local Authorities as personal details are held on a SEEMIS database. Long term, it would be great to have an open 'Mumsnet' type link between parents.

9.2. On teacher recruitment Jim Steven concluded by saying that advertising standards are set nationally. There is no extra budget for advertising. There are no extra teachers out there. The Council has looked at giving golden handshakes to new teachers, as Highland GPs get, but the Council Chamber turned it down on the basis it opened a can of worms, why teachers and why not social workers etc?

9.3. The reality check is where will extra wages come from? The Care and Learning budget has been largely protected until now but that will not continue. The Council has Boards of Governance and any decision making is a slow process.

10. 1530. Conference AGM – Chaired by Kate McDonald from Inverness Royal Academy.

10.1. There are certain office bearing positions that the AGM needed to vote on and these were all done swiftly as follows:

10.1.1. **People Committee Rep** – Sam Blyth, Dingwall Academy will stay in post

- Proposed Kate McDonald and seconded John Whitfield with unanimous vote.

10.1.2. **NPFS Rep** – Fergus Weir, Chair HPCP will stay in post

- Proposed Kate McDonald and seconded Victoria Franklin with unanimous vote.

10.1.3. **HPCP Secretary** – Mark Gunn, Nairn Academy proposed (as Liz Green, Culloden Academy standing down).

- Proposed Fergus Weir and seconded Sam Blyth with unanimous vote.

10.1.4. **HPCP Treasurer** – vacant and likely to be needed in the future, but not required.

10.1.5. **OSCR coordinator** - will be undertaken by the new Secretary Mark Gunn

10.1.6. **Regional Reps** - Looking forward it would be ideal to have more Regional Reps for HPCP, eg six for each Region, giving each rep six to ten neighbouring school Parent Councils to liaise with. It may be that it is more efficient to have a single “cluster” Parent Council for one ASG in some areas. None of this needs to be voted on – it is up to Parent Councils to decide what they want.

10.1.7. **Constitution.** HPCP is now a registered charity, and to comply with this para 2 and para 7 of the HPCP Constitution needed to be amended as follows:

- Revised para 2 to read: The aim of the Highland Parent Council Partnership is the advancement of education, which will be achieved by the following methods: [remainder of para, lines 2.1 to 2.7, unchanged].
- Revised para 7.4 to read: Should the Highland Parent Council Partnership cease to exist, any remaining funds will be passed to a charity linked to education.

10.1.8. These changes to the constitution were proposed by Kate McDonald and seconded by John Whitfield with a unanimous vote in favour.

10.2. **Re-structuring of HPCP.**

10.2.1. For details of the HPCP re-structuring proposals go to the HPCP website link <http://www.highlandpcp.org.uk/hpcp-functions-and-organisation-proposals/>.

10.2.2. The document at the **link** was presented at the Conference to offer delegates the opportunity to consider if the HPCP was doing what it should be doing, and was organised in a way appropriate to its aim and objectives. The proposals do not require any changes to the HPCP Constitution.

10.2.3. The Conference view was that the proposals made sense and offered greater clarity on what the HPCP was seeking to achieve. It was also felt that the proposals could be of use to Parent Councils in understanding and developing their own role(s), and how PCs could best interact with stakeholders - for example in understanding and using the different communication and influence channels available to them at local and regional or even national level.

10.2.4. Further feedback on the proposals is welcome, and the intention is for the document to remain a "living document", open to revision and update as needed.

10.2.5. Finally, parents are advised to read the parent guide and consultation available on the Scottish Government website: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00527167.pdf>. This is the Empowering Schools document – a consultation on the Provision of the Education (Scotland) Bill, launched on 7 November 2017.

10.2.6. Parents are advised to consult and respond to the consultation and/or feed back to HPCP by the mid-January 2018. **The deadline for submissions is 31 January 2018.**

10.2.7. Many thanks to all those who attended the HPCP conference.

Liz Green 22/11/17