**Penicuik High School Parents’ Issues 25-04-19**

**Answers from Craig Biddick (Interim Acting Head Teacher)**

1. Attainment has fallen over the last five years

**Answer:** It would be useful to look at a snapshot of attainment based on the February Insight release for last year’s exam – this would include five year trend information. I could do this for the next meeting. The pattern in terms of attainment reflects variability more than an overall drop. A number of factors could affect this but the emphasis in terms of planning for improvement needs to be: curriculum rationale and design, pathways to ensure students obtain the best possible number of tariff points/ have sustained and positive destinations, quality of passes, quality of BGE as preparation for the senior phase, a focus on high standards of teaching practice and good quality assessments and moderation practice.

1. Issue with videos in class /nature of cover work. If videos – follow up / related work

This has been discussed with Principle Teachers and I will monitor over time.

1. Tackling disruptive behaviour.

**Answer:** A short life working group has met to discuss tackling the low level misbehaviour issues in the school, particularly the disruption in classes. After consultation, a new Out of Class protocol has been developed that will support the removal of students from classes who are disruptive. They will be sent to the PT / or senior classes. The system will involve better record

keeping and reaction to patterns of behaviour. Students who are sent out of class will be given

a Friday after school detention for 30 minutes. Failure to do that detention will result in more

serious consequences. Aspects of this will be discussed further with students when the Student Council has been reinvigorated.

Lateness will continue to be closely monitored and Wednesday/Friday detentions given for students late twice or more in a week without good reason.

Assemblies will be held at the start of study leave for S1-3 to reinforce behaviour and full House assemblies will also be held at the start of the new timetable, at the beginning of June to reinforce all rules in relation to classrooms/ corridors/ mobile phones/ break times/ and the

out of class and detention systems and to signal that the habit of the school as a community

will be focussed around respect from the PRIDE values.

As Acting Head Teacher, I will write to all parents in June to back up this invigoration of our rules for behaviour and explain new systems and consequences.

A new Duty Head roster of SMT/ Senior PT’s will be put in place to extend our ability to react to poor behaviour and manage an my specific crises in school. This will prevent escalation of incidents and students wandering.

I have recently introduced new passes for students leaving class e.g. toilet or who have been detained and this is helping in terms of monitoring students out of class.

1. Staffing (long-term sick leave, maternity leave). How easy is it to get short-term staff?

**Answer:** There is currently a national shortage of available supply staff for Secondary schools.

This is historic and is exacerbated by the current overall teacher shortage. There are signs that

due to staffing cuts across Councils that there may be surplus staff in some subjects that

could mean staff available for supply who don’t get permanent jobs. I will regularly update you on the staffing situation.

1. Increasing numbers of pupils needing support and not enough support staff.

**Answer:** There is evidence of more students requiring support across all schools nationally

but what is notable is the variance in the way students are characterised and the nature of

support offered to them in different Authorities The resources available to us in term of

of Learning Support hours has not changed but we do need to cover more students in

terms of general support for learning in classrooms. The biggest challenge and drain on

resources are students who have emotional, social, emotional and behavioural needs

(SEBN). Their needs are complex and need intensive work to overcome. A small number

of students are not ready for fulltime timetables on entry from Primary School. We are

working on solutions to helping some of these students via PEF funding.

1. Course structure in the senior phase. It seems like there is a wide range of subjects offered but, in fact, often pupils can’t do what they would like to because of the ‘column’ structure. So, in fact, choice is quite limited.

**Answer:** As discussed at the last Parent Association meeting we need to change the way we develop the timetable and a small operational timetable team will be formed.

The timetabling changes will need to follow a wider consultation on a new curriculum

rationale and architecture to maximise attainment and achievement and ensure all students have a sustained and positive destination.

1. Increased collaboration with Beeslack. What are the current plans for amalgamating /streamlining the schools? Could the senior phase at Beeslack and Penicuik High be merged? Beeslack and Penicuik High School offer two and twelve Advanced Highers respectively. Why is there such a difference? What are the possibilities for streamlining the timetables or merging the senior phase?

**Answer:** If I am in the acting role at Penicuik High School longer term, I will certainly be planning to work closely with Beeslack to enhance curriculum delivery and provide as wide a range of opportunities for young people as possible. It would not be hard to align curriculum architecture within the Broad General Education and offer a wider range of senior phase subjects. Resources and good practice could readily be shared across the two schools. It may be a good idea to formalise this through some memorandum of partnership that has the support of both parent groups and staff. Joint Parent’s Association/ Parent Council meetings could also be held to look at current issues

1. Tracking and monitoring of pupil progress in the senior phase. Could there be improved processes for this that could these be shared with parents on a regular basis? This would not replace the written report but would supplement - just effort, behaviour, homework and a working grade and target grade - no comment needed.

**Answer:** The SEEMIS student management system could be better utilised to inform parents within the senior phase S1-4 and this could be reviewed in terms of the current reporting cycles in school. We need to investigate other possible management systems – including On the Button (OTB) which is proving very successful in terms of use at Beeslack HS. In particular it offers better tracking and monitoring of students attainment and achievement alongside pastoral information.

This will need to be part of the schools improvement plan for next session**.**

1. Timing of reports and parents’ night. SSTA states that "The parent meeting should be managed so as not to coincide with the reporting process as parent teacher dialogue is crucial in supporting learning." These were very close for S4 in 2019.

**Answer:** This will be reviewed by the calendar group working with Ross Jamieson

1. Could communication between the school and parents be improved upon in some way?

**Answer:** I suggest that we move to carry out a brief survey with parents – e.g. survey monkey – to look at how they perceive the overall communication from the school and what tools they

would like to be used. We need to look at: what information/ how and when as well as cost –

benefit. The new SEEMIS Group call text /email system will be cheaper but we should also think about the use of social media platforms that a large number of parents can access and use regularly.

1. What are the school’s plans are for the future? The school seems to be 'treading water' at the moment, with no clear plan or focus. Cornbank Primary always communicates well with parents and has a clear vision and plans for the future.

**Answer:** There will be a renewed focus on strategic leadership in coming years based on self evaluation and evidence about what works best. Work will need to be focused on certain quality areas such as self evaluation and evaluation of impact through data, well being, equity

and inclusion and learning and teaching. To support this there will need to be a concurrent focus on operational management and improved structures and resourcing e.g. student information management systems. We also need to ensure that students and parents have a

full voice in the work of the school

1. Creative thinking – when teachers are off, could there be a bank of parents and local talented people who would be happy to run classes – rather than a DVD being used.

**Answer**: In Scotland you aren’t able to put unregistered adults in front of classes as teachers and they must have PVG. We need to think of parents as offering an opportunity for 'additionality' e.g. mentoring, assistance with literacy and numeracy, trips etc... We should explore this further.

1. The new permanent Head Teacher will need vision, enthusiasm to take on a project and a likelihood that they will stay for 4/5 years. A reassurance that the new Head Teacher will not be seconded to another Midlothian school.

**Answer:** I would agree the candidate does need those attributes. This post has now been

advertised as 23 month acting role which will give stability and would not involve that individual being seconded anywhere else.

1. Increase communication with parents. Can we break the barrier of direct email communication with teachers? Perhaps parents could be given the email address of their child’s guidance teacher.

As for question 10 response.

1. There are a number of teachers recognised as ‘inspiring’; the key is for the new Head to be ‘inspiring’ and for him/her to encourage that in all teachers.

**Answer:** Inspiring and passionate teachers who are fully committed to our ethos and to young people are a must if we are to continue to develop and improve in line with the aspirations for Scottish Education. A clear focus will continue to be developed on our core business of learning and teaching. Staff members at Penicuik High School are very committed to students and work hard to engage and motivate all learners. We will continue to capitalise on this commitment and professionalism

1. Positive feedback should be as much of a priority as negative feedback. The merit process isn’t regarded as highly motivational for all. The use of positive feedback postcards could be encouraged.

**Answer:** I agree that the current merit system is not necessarily seen in a positive light by students and /or staff and we need to work with them to find a system that does motivate them to perform to a high level. I don’t think a merit system should reward for merely doing

what is expected but should be aspirational and reward going above and beyond. Review is planned for next session.

1. How many S4 pupils take advantage of study leave? It seems to be a bit self-fulfilling e.g. if pupils think that their friends will be off then they see no reason to go to school but if no-one could take time off then they might be happier to go to school.

**Answer:** We follow the guidelines laid down by the Education Authority and based on national

practice. Officially students doing five or more National 5 subjects are entitled to leave with parental permission. All of these students have asked for permission. Some other parents have requested leave for those doing less than five National 5 exams. Students doing less exams are

entitled to take leave the day before and the day of the exam. Students will be supported if they come to school but due to other activities during the Exam period an alternative programme runs from 6 May onwards. This year some student doing only National

5 courses are doing an extended work placement which fits in with their current school programme.