

## Parent Council

It has been another busy and challenging year for the Royal High School Parent Council, working in partnership with parents, staff, learners and the wider community, in a session which has felt, at times, dominated by ensuring the voices of parents and carers were heard in a range of consultations on the future of education in Scotland.

In school, we've enjoyed working together with Mrs Walker and her leadership team, and have collaborated on a range of ways to further develop parental engagement at the school. In addition to increased communications via the school's e-mail newsletters and social media feeds, our partnership with the school has included parental representation in the appointments of senior staff, including the school's new Business Manager.

For a number of years, the top issue raised with the Parent Council has been the safety of young people when crossing Queensferry Road. Many times, the Parent Council has made a range of suggestions to the City Council as to how safety might be improved, including alternative crossing points and methods, speed limit adjustments, new signage and traffic light re-phasing. This remains a top issue for us, and we continue to press all external stakeholders for progress. I would thank Parent Council member Tony Newell for leading some of our recent work in this area.

Other "in school" matters this year have included discussions on health and wellbeing for students, including posture when using iPads, and how to best work with parents on recognising signs of substance abuse or dangers posed online. We heard concerns from parents about the "broadbanding" of school students for Maths and English in S1 and S2, as opposed to a previous system of streaming students by ability in these subject areas. While some parents were very supportive of broadbanding, others remain concerned that for the most able pupils, the pace and challenge in a broadbanded approach will not be sufficient. We heard helpful detail from Mrs Walker on how the school is working on the Scotland-wide priority of closing the attainment gap, and as a parent body remain highly supportive of the school's interventions to ensure that poverty is not a barrier to full engagement in life at the Royal High.

Changes to City Council systems led to a number of parents ceasing to receive the always welcome e-mail communications from the school. We think communicating with parents is vital, and will continue to work with the school to ensure this is resolved. It is worth stating that this is simply one issue against a background of continuing IT infrastructure problems the school has faced. With the high number of year groups now being taught via iPads, a robust IT infrastructure is essential. We have pressed the City Council throughout the year to fix the problems, and will continue to do so. Further, at City Council level, we met with local authority officials regarding the current catchment review in West and South West Edinburgh. While we broadly support the notion that the Royal High School is full and therefore any new building at Cammo will be zoned to an alternative new catchment school, we remain concerned that because any alternative new school does not currently exist, the Royal High will become the de facto catchment for any new house-building, despite our capacity issues. We also encouraged parents to engage with the Council's consultation on school holidays in Edinburgh. Given the potential impact of any changes in holiday structure on "exam season", it is always important that the voices of high school parents and carers are heard.

Beyond Edinburgh, the "year of consultations" required considerable Parent Council focus on our response to the Education Bill consultation. The proposals looked at possible reform to powers of headteachers, the role of local authorities, the role of parent councils, how student voice is best heard, and the future regulation of the education workforce. Broadly, the Royal High Parent Council supports reform: we believe that headteachers are best placed to run their schools and that they should be empowered to do so. We support the removal of local authorities from the decision-making process over education in schools, and we will seek in the Bill a "right to be consulted" for parent councils on major school policy decisions. Our full response was circulated to all parents prior to submission to the Scottish Government, and all feedback was supportive.

We also responded to the Fair Funding government consultation – focussing on future funding for schools. Here, we argued for school funding to come directly from the Scottish Government, rather than via a local authority filter where education spend must compete against other local priorities. The Government’s Presumption to Mainstream consultation also sought responses this year. The Royal High School Parent Council shared parental experiences of inclusion in education, and this, together with the other two major consultation responses outlined above are all published and available to all parents and carers. Finally on making views heard, we encouraged parents to engage with the Safer Streets Bill consultation, which is considering a reduction in speed limits on roads across Scotland.

We have continued to maintain relations with all of our local councillors, our MSPs and MPs, the city’s North West Locality Group, the cluster Primary Parent Councils, and the media, including giving interviews on the Education Bill. We also maintain strong links with the RHS FPs, and I thank David Williamson (FP Chair who stood down in the Spring) for his continuing interest in issues which impact on RHS life. I look forward to working with new Chair Ian Cowie.

Going into the new session, I would expect the Parent Council to focus on continuing to represent parental views, of course maintaining our campaigns regarding road safety and responding to the anticipated publication of the Education Bill following this year’s consultation, and we’ll look to support the school over commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RHS presence at Barnton. I would encourage all parents and carers to keep in touch with us throughout the year, and to join us as a parent rep if you can. You can find our details on the school’s website.

In closing, I would thank all our parent, staff and co-opted members this year for their time and commitment to the Parent Council – every parent and carer on the Parent Council gives their time as a volunteer and it is hugely appreciated. Thanks to Liz Leslie for her excellent work as Clerk this year. Special thanks to Pauline Lindsay, who has volunteered her time to the parental groups for many years, including as former primary school Parent Council Chair; to Stewart Smith, who has been Parent Council treasurer; and to long-serving member Alan Kirkpatrick. I’d also thank David Simpson for all his positive engagement with parents in his service at the Royal High. All four leave our school community this summer. I’ll miss their wise counsel and I know they leave with our very good wishes.

Luke McCullough  
Chair, The Royal High School Parent Council