

CHS Parent Council – Chair’s report for AGM, 2 Nov 2023

The Chair’s report is always a good opportunity to consider what we as a Parent Council have done over the last year, but as it’s also my last AGM after 4 years in the Chair I’ll also reflect briefly on some of the key challenges and achievements over this period (pretty turbulent times!)

Since our last AGM in October 2022, we have held 7 meetings, including (in March and June) our first in person meetings since we moved onto Zoom during Covid. It was lovely to meet face to face and catch up with people again, but we know that online meetings are also useful in allowing some parents to attend, who would not otherwise be able to join. Alternating these options (or looking at hybrid meetings) might be best going forward.

We have had variable attendance at meetings, ranging from just 4 parents up to 17. The low numbers at some meetings has been disappointing, for a school of some 600 pupils. This is despite sending out messages to all parents and carers before each meeting, encouraging engagement. It might be worth surveying parents to explore the barriers to attendance – whether this might be format or timing of meetings, or some other factors.

Over the course of the year we have worked closely with the school to support work on pupil wellbeing and on the revision of the school vision and values. We also submitted a response to the SG’s National Discussion on education. A major consideration for parents is accessing information on pupil homework and we will re-visit this topic tonight.

One of our PC priorities has been to support the school in enhancing the ‘fun’ side of school life after the Covid years and we were delighted that the fantastic music and drama departments were able to produce a school show again (Sunshine on Leith) – excellent performances and a real celebration of talent. PC supported the event through providing refreshments and this was also a valuable fundraiser so we can support other activities in the school. Further fundraising activities will be needed during the year and we will touch on this further following the Treasurer’s report.

As I said, before I close, I’d like to highlight some key points from the last 4 years:

- Covid has obviously been the biggest issue facing for all schools over this period. CHS adapted incredibly well to the challenges, especially through provision of live education in the later stages. Parents obviously played a key role in supporting education through this period and the Parent Council supported this with online meetings and passing on parent concerns and suggestions to school. Lots of lessons learned but hopefully not a situation we will need to repeat, and still dealing with challenges in terms of impacts on pupil attendance and wellbeing (nationally).
- Another recent challenge was last year’s bullying allegations and the accompanying media interest. Whilst most parents and pupils were quick to defend the school, there was also recognition that some of the behaviours being raised within the complaint (such as use of sexist or racist language) are likely to be an issue in most schools and in wider society, and are topics that were already of concern to many Parent Council members. In response to the allegations, PKC carried out a review of school culture, processes and practice around bullying and harassment and PC fed into this. The resulting review report was clear that there is no culture of bullying in the school, but outlined areas for further work, including a new anti-bullying policy which the Parent Council helped develop. We have also introduced a regular agenda slot on anti-bullying and pupil wellbeing to provide clear focus on this important issue. The recent PKC update review report suggests that the school continues to make progress on these issues.

- Website - Through the generous offer of parent Gillian Rose's professional expertise and time, we helped to develop the new CHS website and this is now a really useful resource for parents, pupils and school.
- Mobile phone policy – Again, this has been a very useful collaboration between Parent Council and CHS. A working group led by parent Alison Ritchie was active in supporting Mrs Fotheringham in developing consultation options, which ultimately led to the successful introduction of the new phone rules. Evidence on the influence of mobile phone use on mental health and learning of young people continues to evolve and we hope this topic will be regularly reviewed and rules re-visited.
- Curriculum review – since 2018/19, the Parent Council have raised concerns about CHS narrowing of subject choices from S1 to S2 (which is earlier than in all other PKC secondary schools). We have repeatedly pushed for this issue to be re-considered and contributed to meetings with parents of P7 and S1 parents. We were delighted when it was recently confirmed to us that this will now change and pupils now in S1 will not narrow down their options until the end of S2. We consider this a major step forward in breadth of pupil learning options and are really pleased that the Parent Council views on this have made a difference.

Finally some thank yous:

We greatly appreciate the involvement of the head boy/girls in our regular meetings and would like to express our thanks to Gemma and Ben for all their hard work last year on behalf of the school. The committee is looking forward to working with Jenny and Igor in the year ahead.

Huge thanks to all the school staff team, but especially the senior leadership team and John Donnelly for their hard work and constructive approach to engaging with the Parent Council. And lastly many thanks to the PC committee (especially to Clara, our fabulously efficient secretary who is also stepping down this year) for all their input and support. Best wishes to the new committee and to ongoing success for Crieff High School.

Cathy Tilbrook, Chair CHS Parent Council