

Minutes

Towerbank Parent Group

Date: 10th September, 6.30pm-8.00pm

In Attendance

Ruth Jays (Chair), Andrea Barlow (Vice Chair), Graham Elliot (Treasurer), Emma Dennison (Secretary), Ruth Bowen (Fundraising Lead), Alasdair Friend (Headteacher), Polly Clement, Kirsty Carver, James Lewis, Kyrtsa McDonald-Scott, Sarah Thomas, Jenny Kindness, Joanne Macaulay, Helen Atherton, Onyema Ibe, Trudy McPherson, Andy Anderson, Heidi Proven, Alison Payne, Lesley Lawrie, Rebecca Goss, Peter McElroy, Kerry-Anne Saouter

1. Welcome and Introductions

Ruth explained that the last 18 months have largely focused on getting the right structure in place to allow us to work in partnership with school and have merged the PSA and Parent Council group to form the Towerbank Parent Group, TPG. They wrote a new constitution, taking advice from a parent who writes policies for the Scottish Parliament. A copy of the constitution available to see on the Parent Group website.

The Scottish Government are proposing strengthening/changing roles of Parent Councils so we will watch these developments with interest.

The Parent Group is made up of a committee of office bearers - chair, vice-chair, fundraising lead, secretary, treasurer - and class reps but no-one is excluded.

Class reps/ involving new P1 parents

We are building this network. We need to recruit more class reps, particularly for the new P1 classes.

Class reps act as the link between the office bearers and the wider parent body, raising any issues and attending meetings on behalf of the class they represent.

Anyone interested in becoming a class rep please speak to one of the office bearers or email towerbankparentgroup@gmail.com

Ideas session

The second annual session was held in March. This is an informal discussion session aimed at informing the school plan and identifying parental priorities.

There are a number of tangible improvements in the school which have come as a result of parental influence through these sessions: the library, more use of wildlife garden, loose parts play, greater focus on maths and increased access to the arts through the Scottish Opera performance in P5 and theatre and book festival visits.

Really keen for as many parents as possible to be involved in these sessions as they provide the opportunity to influence and inform the educational offering at the school.

Janitorial review

Thanks go to Andrea Barlow, the current vice-chair, who worked with the school to challenge the local authority's proposals to reduce janitorial provision at the school.

Following intervention by the Parent Group and the school, the council agreed to maintain janitorial provision at the current level.

Internet safety

A very well attended session on internet safety run by Children 1st in partnership with O2 was held in the winter. It was very informative and may be worth considering offering again in the future.

Library

This will be covered in the headteacher's and fundraising updates but I wanted to put on record my thanks to everyone involved in making this a reality in such a short space of time, particularly Zoe Berry who organised the clear-up of the room. Again, the need for a library was identified at the two ideas sessions.

This will be my last meeting as Parent Group chair. Thank you to everyone who has supported me in the role over the last three years.

2. Headteacher Report

Mr Friend started by thanking Ruth Jays and Andrea Barlow for all the work they have done and have made working together with the school easier.

Improvement Plan

Library

At the moment the library lacks books and parent volunteers. The school needs parent volunteers to help carry the momentum of this all forward.

The school has a list of books that should go in the library but there are still some gaps but Mr Friend said he is hoping to get it running by end of this term.

He reiterated that families and school need to work together to get this to the next stage.

Consultations

They are still working out what the best way is to communicate to parent/carers about how their child is doing at school.

The end of school reports are possibly too late to inform parents of how their child is doing. He said he will be asking parents for their view on this and then hopefully make some changes in the next session.

Homework

The school is looking at reviewing the home learning and will be doing an internal review then will discuss with a group of parents.

School Behaviour Policy

Mr Friend said that they are in the process of reviewing the school behaviour policy and expect to have a new policy reading for January.

He mentioned that they are using a book written by Paul Dix to help with the new policies and introducing them. He said he was send a summary of the book and the new policy to parents/carers.

Mr Friend explained that they are observing how children are working with their peers and need to look at how they are learning outside of school.

The school has come up with a list of 50 things they think children should do before leaving Towerbank. There is a mix of activities to do at school and at home. It is aimed to be gradual process from P3 to P7 and not all done at once. There are some blank spots on the list for the children to complete themselves.

3. **Treasurer's Report**

Graham Elliot started by saying many thanks to Trudy McPherson for completing the annual audit and signing off as complete.

The figures for the year are as follows:

- We started the 2017-2018 school year with an opening balance of £35,330:29.
- Throughout the year we raised £9251:36 via direct fundraising activities, for example; discos, school fair, Christmas cards, bake sale and school calendar to name but a few.
- We raised a further £6833:06 via other initiatives, for example the School Lottery, Kiltwalk, uniform sales and funding applications.
- We spent £21,255:28 on supporting various initiatives, such as Playspace, trips to the Book Festival and the Lyceum and new school staging to name but a few.
- Our end of year balance was £30943:63.
- A large proportion of the end of year balance is already allocated to specific activities leaving an unallocated balance of £3669:08 at the end of the 2017-2018 school year.
- Note that there are other income and expenses not covered in the key figures above specific to the running of certain standalone groups, for example Samba.

4. **Fundraising Report**

Ruth Bowen gave us an update on the Fundraising for the year.

What we did last year

In September Liz Henderson organized teams of parents and pupils from Towerbank to take part in the sponsored Kilt Walk.

The disco team headed up by James Lewis and Kirsty Carver ran 3 Halloween discos and 3 summer discos for P1 to P7 pupils. For the first time, we involved a disco company to provide the music and entertainment for the summer discos. They were a big hit amongst the children judging by the buzzing atmosphere and feedback.

Another first for Towerbank was the creation of the School Calendar, instigated by Mr Friend, featuring photos of our pupils. It proved to be a big fundraiser with Lesley Lawrie successfully securing sponsorship and advertising space from 12 local companies.

Lesley also took on the role with Jo Wishart of revamping the process for ordering branded school uniform to make it more manageable.

Janet Jones took on the task of coordinating the Christmas card project. Another first was the decision for pupils to create their designs at home as part of a homework option rather than taking place in the classroom. Fewer pupils took part and there was mixed feedback.

The Xmas fair team led by myself, and the raffle led by Jo Spencely, attracted lots of interest and the usual Christmas fair mix.

And another first was the Towerbank school lottery set up by Graham Elliott last November.

Easyfundraising continued to bring in regular income.

Sadly the Spring fair was cancelled (another first) as there were not enough coordinating volunteers to make it happen, despite calls for help.

Proposed plans for this year

A funding plan for 2018/19 was approved at the last TPG meeting and a fundraising target set £11,600

We had a fundraising meeting at the end of last term to make plans for the coming year. The meeting attracted new people keen to get involved.

Plans include many of the same activities as last year: 4 Halloween discos and 4 summer discos for P1-P7, a Xmas fair and raffle, 3 bake sales (one per term), the school calendar, Christmas card project, branded uniform sales, overseeing Easyfundraising and the School Lottery, and applying to the 'You Decide' Fund.

New for 2018/19 is a Ceilidh at Bellfield in January and in response to parent feedback (and another first) is Towerbank's own crowdfunding page set up by Alison Payne.

Owing to lack of space at school to store donated school uniform, it was decided to set up a partnership with Barnados to sell our pre-loved uniform. Belinda Cook organized everything including the sorting and pricing with the aim of encouraging recycling and having accessible, affordable uniform for all, but removing the fundraising element.

Last year was a year of transition from the constituted PSA (which undertook all the fundraising) to the new fundraising group under the auspices of the TPG. With new people getting involved, there is work to be done to improve communication and enable enthusiastic parents like ourselves to get involved in trying out new things as well as running with the tried and tested activities.

As many of you will be aware, I am stepping down as Fundraising Lead but will still remain involved in my final year at Towerbank, co-ordinating the Xmas fair team. However, it remains to be seen who will fill the position of Fundraising Lead going forward.

Our first fundraising meeting of the year is Tuesday 18th September, 7.30pm at the Dalriada. Polly Clements has kindly taken on the job of organizing this. Do come along if you are interested in finding out more and getting involved. Many hands make light work!

5. **Playspace Group Update**

Helen Atherton gave an update on where the Playspace group were at.

Sensory Garden

This had a recent tidy up and replanted middle pot with pampas grass. The plan is to plant more in spring. Helen expressed that they urgently need volunteers to help maintain these raised beds and other green spaces around the school.

Benches

Helen explained that the benches to circle the sensory garden have arrived and are scheduled to be installed mid-September.

Shelter

Andy is now going to finish the artwork for the shelter skyline as Steve can no longer do it. This is due to be installed during the October break. Blackboards will follow.

Container

Thanks to Lesley for coordinating Elph (graffiti artist) to paint this over the summer.

Loose Parts

Helen said that these are being used and are very popular with the children. Alasdair says he tries to ensure the pod is opened as much as possible. He also said that he will update playspace if and when we need a donation call out for more supplies.

Blue blocks

These have now been in use and they have received lots of positive feedback but maybe not enough blocks for size of school? Alasdair reported that there are not enough blocks, but that we should see how the current blocks get through the winter before investing in more as they are very costly. Ruth Jays commented that perhaps the library should be a spending priority just now.

Map

James Lewis has offered to coordinate touching up the map (sourcing materials/ painting etc). He confirmed this in the meeting and will get in touch with the National Geographic society regarding this.

Wildlife garden

Helen explained that new beds have been installed in the garden and there are more to go in, replacing the rotten and broken ones. She also said that they have got a gardening club with P3s up and running for the year, which is run by Parent volunteers Tana and Helen every Thursday. The mural designed by P2s last year is to be enlarged and painted by Katy Wilson and Volunteers this week (week commencing 10th Sept).

Future projects

Youdecide money has been announced again and the school are planning of putting in two

bids, one bid to be written by Onyema for the library and playspace are going to make another bid.

Since the meeting we've managed to recruit a team of volunteers to maintain the sensory garden and we'll be holding a meeting at 11am on Friday 21st sept in Miros for anyone interested in getting involved and taking on a project with the playspace committee.

6. Food Focus Group Update

Andrea explained that the purpose of the group was to improve the lunches and dining culture at the school.

Our work at Towerbank started in early 2016 when senior management at the school asked us to partner them in reviewing the school lunch offering. They were concerned that the food cooked at Portobello High and delivered in to Towerbank was consistently not eaten by the children; that children were left hungry and unsatisfied by the catering and that a large proportion of the meals supplied were ending up in the bin.

At the time, there was no dedicated serving area or space to store kitchen equipment. Meals were served in all three halls at school, with temporary equipment wheeled out from cupboards at each mealtime. Washing up and any minor processing of food took place in a tiny room tucked into a corridor, with dining staff changing and storing their belongings in the same cramped space.

What we did about it

Parent-led research ended with a report presented to CEC in May 2016. Findings were significant: the standard of the food at the point of being served was, quite simply, unacceptable. The main issues identified were as follows:

- no adjustments were made to food being transported so some dishes were watery, soggy or over-cooked;
- presentation was poor;
- food was often not at the right temperature;
- portion sizes were not adjusted to account for age or appetite;
- fruit, salad and vegetables were unappealing and unpopular;
- children ate dessert or bread instead of their main meal;
- milk was supplied but never drunk (most ended up being poured away at the end of service);
- 5-6 bags of food and packaging waste every day;
- a lot of teaching staff took management roles in the dining room (but none of them ate the food);
- serving staff were disengaged and process-driven (by necessity).

The response from the council catering team

The response after that first meeting in May 2016 was immediate, with many changes made promptly in the weeks following our report, and a commitment from CEC to continue to review and improve.

Practical issues such as keeping food at an appropriate temperature, gaps in essential equipment and overordering were resolved quickly. The fruit, vegetable and salad offering was widened and presentation improved. Unpopular items such as mixed vegetables and milk were removed from the menu. Portion sizes were adjusted and bread and cake

supplied in smaller amounts. Efforts were made to improve food through different cooking methods and ingredient selection, resulting in generally better meals. A dedicated team serving primary schools was established at the new site of Portobello High School, with a remit to improve the food sent over to Towerbank.

This work from CEC coincided with a complete reworking of the dining space and servery in school. A classroom was converted into a preparation, washing and serving area and an extension to the ground floor hall meant all those eating school meals could be accommodated in one space across the lunch hour. Older children who have packed lunches are still accommodated in upper halls or in the playground.

What's happening now

In the two years since our first major piece of work on school lunches, and the resulting seismic shift in food quality, the food focus team has regularly monitored the quality of school meals and met with the council catering team to discuss further improvements. Much has improved, but there are still issues:

Meal quality

In both our original report, and in subsequent reviews, we highlighted that certain menu options do not travel well, with their appearance, texture and taste suffering as a consequence. Although there have been improvements in some dishes, these issues remain, and some dishes are still significantly affected by being cooked, kept warm and then transported; pasta bakes are overcooked, stodgy and contain vegetables indiscernible from the pasta, 'sizzling' fajitas are soggy and unappetising, bean enchiladas are tough in texture and bland to the taste, and chips and potato wedges are still not crispy.

Salad and vegetables

Although the selection and appearance of the fruit and vegetables is vastly improved, children sometimes don't get a choice in what they eat (and consequently throw uneaten fruit away). The salad bar is in a tucked away position, not replenished and contains some odd choices for primary school children (chip-shop pickled onion anyone?). Some children in a rush to get to the playground throw away whole pieces of fruit, believing they cannot take fruit outside.

Staffing

Although catering staff now work in much better conditions, their role is limited and defined by processes. The council catering team have told us that encouraging children to eat is not part of the onsite team's role. The staff are also at a disadvantage because they have not been involved in the preparation and cooking of the food they serve, so they cannot take any pride in or feel any responsibility for it.

Waste

There is still an issue with waste, especially as we have no recycling facilities on site.

Access

Food deliveries are made by minibuses that drive across the playground. This puts further pressure on a limited site. We suggested a workable solution to this: the creation of an alternative entrance to the rear of the building for deliveries. Despite earlier assurances that this had been costed and was going to happen, it now seems CEC have changed their minds.

What's next

We feel that we have come as far as we can with changes to the preparation and delivery of food off-site and for things to improve any more then investment in preparing food on site needs to take place. We believe that both the challenges presented by cooking off site, and a staff who have no ownership or investment in the food at school, can be resolved by cooking on site, in a kitchen built for Towerbank.

We took this to the council catering department earlier this year. Despite earlier meetings suggesting this might be a possibility, they were not positive. We dismissed a 'feasibility' study they had produced as it only looked at one expensive and invasive option, not at workable solutions for a challenging site.

However, we also invited all our local councillors to lunch at school. They thought it only fair that we should have a kitchen on site, like the majority of primary schools in Edinburgh, and tabled a resolution at a recent council meeting to investigate part-cooking food (at the very least) on site. This was passed, and an investigation will take place soon. This is enormous progress considering that in our first meetings even having a salad bar on site was seen as outrageous!

As for the other issues, we are:

- Continuing to pursue the catering team for waste facilities and an alternative access point to the school;
- Planning to get the children involved in establishing 'rules' for the dining room (for instance, can they help themselves to water or take fruit outside to eat). We are also looking at whether we can make it practical for them to get their own cutlery and dispose of their own food waste.
- Carrying on our conversations with the CEC catering team to make sure the food is as good as it can be given our current facilities.

For parents...

- if your child tells you they don't like a dish it might be because it is soggy or overcooked, not because they are being fussy. We dismissed a lot of our children's complaints about food before we tasted it ourselves! It is hugely improved and some of the meals are very good, but there are exceptions, so it might help to quiz your child on what they like.

If you want to get involved in the Food Focus Group then please get in touch with Andrea Barlow on barleymowrites@outlook.com. The team will be meeting again soon to make an action plan for involving the children and pushing the agenda with the council catering team.

7. Election of Office Bearers

At the AGM all office bearers need voting in and then seconded.

The election was as follows:

Chair – Joanne Macaulay was nominated and seconded

Vice-Chair – no nominations

Secretary – no nominations

Treasurer – Graham Elliot was nominated and seconded

Fundraiser Lead – no nominations

Kerry Anne Sauoter put herself forward for becoming the Lead person for Library.

Onyema Ibe asked if anyone would like to take over the role as Representative of Towerbank for the Community Council. The job involves going to the community council meetings every month and various other meetings on top of this. Andy Anderson expressed some possible interest in this.

8. Any Other Business

Andrea suggested that we keep on top of Parent/Carer training for teacher recruitment. Some parent/carers have already done the course but we should look at getting more people trained in this.
