

GEORGE STEPHENSON HIGH SCHOOL

MINUTES OF PARENTS' FORUM MEETING Monday 16 January 2017

Present: Jennifer Adams-Hall, Clare Atkins, Theresa Allen, Christine Anson, Andrea Brownless, Ian Cook, Wendy Heide, Candy Mellor, Julie Thompson, Helen Tovey, Jill Urron, Helen Williams, Ian Wilkinson, Tracey Anderson.

Apologies: Karen Blake, Jeanette Maghie, Caroline Nugent, Karen Turner, Rachel Westwood, Peter Douthwaite.

1. Matters arising from last meeting

Science GCSE courses

Some parents wanted to know when the decision would be made as to which GCSE Science course their child would be following is going to be made (dual or triple award).

Update: Tracey Anderson passed the query to Andy Williams (Curriculum Leader: Science) to respond to. Individual parents were asked to contact the Science department with any further queries. Following this Andy Williams sent letters to parents of all top set students (those we felt able to take part in triple award). Students and parents were able to discuss this with us at any point during this process and we talked to quite a few parents. We have received all replies from students wishing to take the course and have a cohort of students starting the course on Monday 9th January.

Extracurricular activities

Question about whether the current activities programme is on the website yet. Tracey Anderson confirmed that this is being worked on at the moment as we have had experienced some technical difficulties with the website.

Update: the PE Extra Curricular Timetable is updated on the Extra Curricular activities section of the website and there is an additional 'click [here]' for additional activities available to students further down the same page.

Communications

Query about ParentMail – has it been set up for new Y7 parents and previous issues sorted for existing parents?

Update: Tracey Anderson has liaised with school admin to ensure that information has gone out to new parents to sign up.

Mixed ability teaching

Some parents expressed concern about the move to mixed ability teaching in Science (GCSE) and in Y7. Tracey Anderson explained that we have made the decision to move to this in Science for educational and aspirational reasons. (Andy Williams, Curriculum Leader: Science, has contacted all parents by letter with the rationale behind this). As for Y7, we have had mixed ability teaching in Y7 before for part of the curriculum and have made the decision to move to this for all subjects this year, again for educational and aspirational reasons. The highest performing schools locally use this approach and there is substantial educational research to show that it raises achievement across the board (for example schools in Finland are amongst the highest achieving in the world and do not stream/set students at all). The school can assure parents that we will monitor student progress and achievement (as we always do) rigorously across the year and ensure that teachers are meeting individual needs of all students whilst maintaining a culture of high challenge.

Update: Tracey Anderson passed on parent views to the Senior Leadership Team. Ian Wilkinson has since spoken to several parents individually and written to others to reassure them as well as being available to talk to any parent with concerns at the Y7 parent meeting on assessment in November (no concerns were raised).

Y11 English exam preparation

A question was asked about an initiative in Y11 English lessons where students experience a regular carousel workshop in different groups to focus on various aspects of the English language exam. Tracey Anderson confirmed that this was something that was done last year with Year 11 choosing a set question/area of the exam they wanted to focus on. The English department wanted to start this earlier this year so that everyone had the chance to access the various writing styles of the language paper and have the chance to produce a timed response in these sessions too. The department are focussing on this up to Christmas and will then rearrange groups again closer to the exams. The concept is based on an extremely successful approach used with A-level English students over the last two years, resulting in the best A-level English results the school has ever achieved this summer).

Update: Tracey Anderson passed on comments to Helen Bell, Curriculum Leader: English for feedback. The teacher of the student in question contacted the parent. Feedback from the Curriculum Leader: English is that the initiative has been successful and the students have all produced extra responses under timed conditions because of it, which they have then gone on to DIRT (respond to teacher feedback and make improvements) in the follow up sessions, have had the opportunity to work with different students and had the expertise of different teachers. It has also enabled them to work in smaller more mixed ability groups which was beneficial to all students. As it has been successful the department have decided to continue the carousel lessons and Year 11 had another one the first day back this term. This is now focusing on the literature sections of the exam with them again completing a timed response and then doing DIRT in the final session before half term. These groups will then rotate for a different aspect of the literature exam. All the groups have been mixed up again. We haven't had any students say that they are unhappy with the groupings. As this has been successful with Year 11 we started this with Year 10 for the language paper and the writing styles in November. We have also introduced assessment weeks for Year 9, 10 and 11 to again give them all a chance to produce more exam responses under time conditions.

School catering

One parent asked if the school could provide additional tables/chairs in Giorgio's for lunchtimes.

Update: Tracey Anderson informed the Business Manager and school catering of this request. Unfortunately the school does not have sufficient funds to be able to purchase additional furniture at the moment. However we are constantly looking for sources of spare furniture from other establishments, e.g., council offices/buildings being refurbished, and will continue to do so. We are hopeful that we will be able to source some items over the next two terms.

2. Student assessment updates (IDW)

Ian Wilkinson explained changes to assessment for current Y7 students and the impact that has had on the schools reporting of progress for those students and those who will follow them into the school. (A parent information evening was held in November to brief Y7 parents on changes to assessment and reporting which have been introduced this year). Ian also went on to explain changes to the GCSE grading system for Key Stage 4 students and the timeline for the move to the new system for students in current Y9, 10 and 11. (Presentation slides attached with these minutes).

3. Issues arising from the previous term

- **Parents' issues**

Parent feedback to Ian Wilkinson's presentation included:

- Concerns about whether employers will fully understand the new numerical GCSE grades and what they will expect students to have achieved (especially in English and Maths). This is a national concern and as a school we will continue to work with our employer contacts to help develop a shared understanding.
- Whether the school has considered including a 'currently working at grade' on the new style reports for Y7 and years to follow. Ian Wilkinson said that at the moment we have decided not to include this but will include information on whether students are meeting their expected

level of progress at each point on a flight path towards their expected GCSE outcomes (which are set by the school using aspirational data based on students' KS2 results).

- Concerns for some students at GCSE with regards to the return to a system of end of course examinations and a move away from the modular approach. Tracey Anderson assured parents that we are working hard to provide GCSE students with a great deal of support in terms of exam preparation throughout their time in Key Stage 4 and that this needs to extend down into Key Stage 3 as well.

Additional issues/comments

Positive feedback

Very positive feedback from parents at the meeting about the work being done with Y7 and 8 students on critiquing their work, DIRT (Dedicated Improvement and Reflection Time) in lessons, and the aspirational ethos of the school.

Equally positive feedback about the support for students (and parents) in Maths (Y8) and Science (Y9) – specific reference made to information sent out to parents before Christmas with students' work broken down into topics (Maths) and links to websites for revision support (Science).

ACTION: Tracey Anderson will pass comments on to staff and leadership team.

Y9 exam support

A request for more support for students on revision techniques and study skills in Y9. Tracey Anderson said that all year groups do have some element of study skills built into the morning registration time programme.

ACTION: Tracey Anderson will pass comments on to Achievement Support Leader (Emma Close) and Achievement Support Coordinator for Y9 (Ms Heron).

Parents' Forum PR

Suggestion was made about advertising the Parents Forum using different media, e.g. via ParentMail, Twitter, Facebook etc.

ACTION: Tracey Anderson will be discussing at a meeting this week with the IT network manager. Twitter is already an option.

Student lockers

Is there any plan to bring some of the lockers the school has sourced into use? Discussion about where to put them, who to offer them to etc. as there are not enough for all students and very few physical large enough spaces in the building to house them. Our potential plan at the moment is to offer a small number initially to the 6th form (who do seem reasonably keen to have them).

ACTION: Tracey Anderson to discuss further with Head of 6th form and Leadership Team with the aim to move a number of lockers into the school for 6th form use as soon as possible.

• GSHS issues & initiatives

Curriculum developments

STEM - weekly club, huge numbers, exciting activities & events across the year. Other STEM events since September include:

- Key stage 4 and 5 Villiers Scholars STEM Scholars Workshops across the year e.g. so far students have had several workshops at external Science locations, a Chemistry masterclass & a Forensic Science Masterclass at Northumbria University.
- Science trip to CERN in Geneva October 2016 (6th form).

- Science fiction week (week beg. 5th Dec) – a range of curriculum activities linking Science and literature plus extracurricular events such as a Sci-Fi film night on 3 nights after school and Sci-Fi fancy dress on the last charity day.
- Senior Maths Challenge 8th Nov 2016.

MFL

- Spanish trip (October).
- Parents into Spanish evening (7th Nov).
- A-level languages Study Days at the Tyneside Cinema.
- Mandarin Club for Year 7 ran for 13 weeks after school last term and it was very well attended. Chia Lin is hoping to continue this club in the summer term.
- Y11 French and Spanish breakfast study sessions – a new revision club for the Spring Term (Thursday mornings from 8-8.25am). Students can bring their own breakfast and eat while revising, with support of MFL teachers. If they attend 4 sessions they get a free breakfast on the 5th!

Performing Arts

- New Curriculum Leader for Performing Arts since September – Miss Brookbanks.
- Y7 choir up and running.
- More music tuition/instruments being played, brand new set of drums delivered.
- Christmas Concert, Carol Singing at shopping centre.
- Aladdin (March performances).
- TICE experience workshops for some of our students - TICE stands for 'This is Creative Enterprise'. It is a non-profit organisation which creates partnerships between schools and local employers across a range of creative industries. The TICE experience consists of several different 'stages' which students can progress through.

Design Technology

This year is the year of the snow dog! We were asked by Gateshead council to design a Snow Dog as part of the Great North Snow dogs' 2016 exhibition. The competition was to design an Anime style snow dog and the prize was a graffiti workshop with artist Frank Styles. One of our students' designs won & the prize was for her and 3 other students, together with Ms Hope, Curriculum Leader for DT, to attend a place at a workshop on Friday 14th October at Gateshead Library. The evening started by looking at Art work and then the students designed their own stencils and created graffiti style t-shirts (sadly on the night they had planned to make a mini Snow Dog outside with graffiti spray paint but as it was in the library, due to health and safety restrictions, they couldn't spray inside, so they made t-shirts instead). The students really enjoyed the night and learnt a lot about textiles and how graffiti could be used in textile design. Our thanks also go to the parents who came along and took part.

Hospitality BTEC

This is a new course for Y10 this year. On Monday 21st November the students visited a new inn on the revamped Quayside in Blyth. The Commissioners Quay opened in time for Blyth hosting the Tall Ships event this year and has four floors with over 40 bedrooms. On arrival the students had the opportunity of a tour, looking at the different bedrooms available, the bar and food area and also the kitchen. This was an opportunity for the students to see the Hospitality Industry first hand. Speaking to the Head Chef, students also learnt about the demands of working in a busy kitchen environment and using locally sourced produce. In the New Year we have other trips planned with the students and are taking the opportunity to visit other hotels in and around Newcastle as well as Sachin's Restaurant. The next unit of work for the Year 10 students is coursework based and focuses on 'Working in the Hospitality Industry' and we are keen to get them out to experience real life examples as much as we can.

Sport

New Curriculum Leader for PE – Mr O'Dea.

Many more clubs, competitions & sporting opportunities up and running since the start of the year. Extra-Curricular Clubs - so far PE have ran clubs in Rugby, Netball, Basketball, Gymnastics, Trampolining, Cricket, Dance, Dodgeball and Football.

Successes include:

- Trampolining - 6 students qualified for regional competition, 4 qualified for national competition.
- Rugby League - Year 7 & 11 involved in taster sessions in lessons with Newcastle Thunder, culminating in attending a tournament at Kingston Park.
- Football - Year 7 football team got to the semi-finals of Rotary 5 a-side competition and progressed to finals night of League Cup. Also currently 2nd in league. Other teams progressing well in cups and leagues.
- Gymnastics - Show in October which was well attended by parents.
- Netball - Involved in Year 7 & 8 Central Venue League performing well against other schools
- Dance - 2 dance shows coming up in March at Whitley Bay playhouse.
- Cross Country - 7 Students through to Regional Championships at Temple Park, having performed excellently at NT competition at Churchill playing fields.
- Badminton - KS3 boys & girls both qualified to regional stage of competition.
- Pupil success - Mathew Ralph selected for Northumberland Under-15 Rugby team; Kyle McMorn winning 2 golds and 2 silvers at Kickboxing World Championships.

Upcoming events - Year 7 & 8 Rowing competition, Boccia tournament, Key Stage 3 Badminton, Rugby Union Festivals.

All of our PE info/results etc. are on the department's twitter page - @gshs_pe if parents would like to follow them.

RE

The Y8 Sikhism day was Monday 26th September and students had a half day visit to the Gurdwara (the Sikh temple in Newcastle) in preparation for them studying Sikhism in RE this term. Students spent three lessons in school, learning about Sikh beliefs, the Sikh Gurus and the starting of the Khalsa. At the Gurdwara, students had the opportunity to experience sewa (Sikhs helping and volunteering as a way of showing their belief in the equality of all people and a respect for all life-they gave us food and drink which they offer to all visitors), they got to see the diwan (prayer halls) and heard the rajis (musicians) play. They also did some stilling/mindfulness activities and spent some time talking with Sikhs and had the opportunity to ask them questions. In the end, only about 30 students did not go on the visit-they stayed in school and did a project for the afternoon about the Gurdwara; they researched Gurdwaras using a SOLE question as a starting point and then built a model of one in small teams.

Coming up this term – RE Holocaust Memorial Day for all Year 9, MFL week, Numeracy week, Reading week.

Extracurricular activities

Young Person's Question Time

Y10 students took part in the second NT young person's question time. The panel was made up of Norma Redfean, Mayor of NT, local councillors and representatives from the police and NHS. Students grilled the panel with a range of questions written by young people across the borough, including students from our school.

Children's Commissioner Takeover day

13 Y7 students went to NT council for the day in a wide variety of different roles across the authority as part of Takeover Day. Takeover Day is a fun, hugely successful and exciting children and young peoples' engagement project which sees organisations across England opening their doors to children and young people to take over adult roles.

It puts children and young people into decision-making positions and encourages organisations and businesses to hear their views. Children gain an insight into the adult world and organisations benefit from a fresh perspective about their work.

Dimensions Day 1 for Y7

As part of the Year 7 iLearn course, the students were challenged to create a 'pop-up' exhibit for The Discovery Museum. They spent six weeks developing historical skills such as source interpretation and analysis and were given the opportunity to study various aspects of local history (coal mining, urban change, jobs etc.) before then choosing what they wanted to investigate further. The Discovery Museum gave some students access to their archive and the students used the internet to gather more information. They worked in large groups (8-10 students) to create their exhibit and each student had a role (e.g. Project Manager, Archive Diarist, Exhibition designer, Researcher). On Wednesday 7th December, the students spent half a day at The Discovery Museum. They displayed their exhibit and spoke to members of the public about what they had been studying. They also critiqued each-others exhibits. Parents were invited along and a number of relatives supported the students (approx. 30, but not actually counted!).

Since the exhibition day, the students have evaluated their exhibit, reflected on the learning habits they have developed, provided feedback on the unit and written an article for North Star.

This term they will be investigating Fairtrade and will be challenged to educate others about Fairtrade by:

1. Creating a Fairtrade Book which can be given to parents, primary schools and members of the public
2. Designing, creating, advertising and running Fairtrade activities during a break time in their iLearn classroom.

Golden Ticket week

First winner of this year – a Y10 student! This is our termly whole school reward initiative. All staff have one Golden Ticket to present to a student of their choice for a range of different things – positive attitude to learning, overcoming challenges, helping others, service to the school community etc. All ticket holders go into a prize draw for a £50 gift card.

Senior Citizen's Party

Ran again (at Killingworth Club) by our 6th form students and many of our staff. Even bigger numbers than last year! Entertainment from GSHS students.

Charity events

This year's whole school charity is Luke's Life Legacy – so far we have raised just over £5000 towards our target of £10,000.

Plus: staff and students got involved in the Shoebox appeal.

Bradley Lowery Xmas card event – Y7 and Y9 students wanted to do this and we had a local radio station visit the school who interviewed some of the students.

School Environment Updates

No major works last term, however an extensive programme of repairs and maintenance was carried out.

4. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 2nd May 2017