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Parent Council Chair

Dear Parent Council Chair

Update on Education Officer Remits

It was a great pleasure to hold engagement events for Parent Council Chairs recently in Alford, Stonehaven and Mintlaw and I am delighted that around 80 Parent Councils from across Aberdeenshire were represented. At the sessions we covered a variety of topics, but one area I focused on was the changes nationally in relation to developing an empowered school-led system.

In discussions with Head Teachers following these sessions, it was agreed that I would write to all Parent Council Chairs to provide an update in relation to staffing within the central team which supports schools on a day-to-day basis.

Over the past year the team of Quality Improvement Managers and Officers who provide support to schools has significantly reduced as a result of savings we have been required to make to the extent that there is no longer sufficient capacity to have one QIM/QIO per cluster. This team provides the following essential support;

- Day-to-day support for schools and Head Teachers on behalf of the Director
- First point of contact within the local authority for Head Teachers
- Support to schools with self-evaluation, improvement planning and inspection preparation and follow-through
- General advice to schools in relation to curriculum, learning and teaching etc
- Recruitment of senior school staff
- Responding to parental queries (although these should always be dealt with at school level in the first instance)
- Investigating and responding to parental complaints about a Head Teacher (all other complaints should be dealt with at school level)
- Passing any relevant, serious issues from schools on to the Director, Heads of Service, Councillors and the Communications team
- Leading investigations into staff competency, capability etc
- Leading strategic areas of development

- Representing Aberdeenshire nationally and regionally in relation to specific areas
- Attending Parent Council meetings as required to support Head Teachers
- Preparing reports and briefings for ECS Committee as requested/required

As a result of the reductions in the central team, it is no longer sustainable to expect the same level of service, so as a result of this we have re-prioritised the focus of the whole team.

The list below indicates who sits in the current team and which clusters they are linked to;

Officer	Cluster
Deborah Masson	Aboyne/Banchory (17 schools)
Marian Youngson	Alford (14 schools)
Fiona Cruickshanks	Banff/Mintlaw (21 schools)
Paul Rooke	Ellon/Meldrum (24 schools)
Irene Sharp*	Fraserburgh (13 schools)
Mairi Manson	Huntly/Turriff (23 schools)
Andrew Ritchie	Inverurie (11 schools)
Peter Wood	Kemnay/Peterhead (18 schools)
Angela Wotherspoon	Laurencekirk (8 schools)
Anne-Marie Davies MacLeod	Portlethen (6 schools)
Kay MacDonald	Stonehaven (12 schools)
Moira Lawson (part-time)	Westhill (5 schools)

*Irene is currently working full time at Fraserburgh Academy until the end of the school year due to staffing shortage. Audrey Hendry, Lead Officer (Early Years) will provide any additional support to the cluster required during this period.

The other officers in the team who have no cluster responsibilities are;

Rhona Jarvis	Parental Engagement and Support Hub Aberdeenshire (PESHA)
Maxine Booth	Quality Improvement Manager (Learning Estates)
Audrey Hendry	Early Years Strategic Lead
Carron Douglas	Principal Educational Psychologist

This team reports to Vincent Docherty, Head of Education. Each member of the team also has strategic and corporate remit in addition to their cluster lead role and these evolve as national and local priorities emerge and evolve. As a general rule, the team will focus on their schools remit for three days per week, leaving two days to focus on strategic tasks and priorities, albeit workloads will fluctuate across the year.

I would respectfully ask you as Parent Council Chairs to consider the points below and to discuss within your Parent Councils;

- Within the new national Head Teachers' Charter, Head Teachers are senior officers of the local authority and as such, should be the first point of contact for all queries in relation to their schools from parents/carers. Should a parent wish to make a complaint or query, this must be addressed to the Head Teacher. The central service will only respond where the complaint or query is about the Head Teacher.

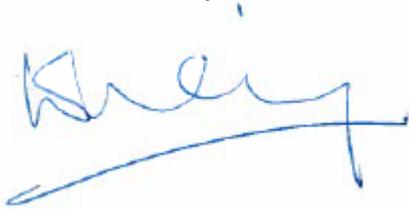
- Where parents have queries in relation to other elements of the Council's business, for example, for Property and Maintenance Services, then the Head Teacher will pass these on so they can be dealt with appropriately
- The team does not have the capacity to send QIMs/QIOs out regularly to Parent Council meetings as currently happens from time to time. Again, Head Teachers are senior officers of the local authority and as such are empowered to provide the local authority position on matters. QIOs will only attend for particularly serious matters agreed between the Head Teacher and the Director/Head of Service. They will continue to meet Parent Councils to discuss appointment procedures for senior school staff as they do at present.
- The team has in the past attended parental meetings alongside the Head Teacher to discuss individual children and young people in school settings. This will now have to be an absolute exception to the rule as the team does not have the capacity for this. Again, the Head Teacher, as a senior officer of the local authority, will be able to present the local authority view to parents.
- The most important role of the QIM/QIO is to support schools to secure improvements in performance and as such, priority will be given to supporting schools in the greatest need – for example pre and post inspection support and newly appointed Head Teacher support. The team will use our central data base (using relevant Quality Indicators) to identify the schools in need of the most support and other schools will continue to get most of their support from other Head Teachers in their cluster and elsewhere as we develop our self-improving schools work.
- When an inspection is announced this will always take precedence and other things may have to slip for some time to allow the appropriate level of support to be provided to our schools at that time.
- Positive and proactive relationships between parents and schools are essential. We aim to treat all parents with respect and fairness and we expect this to be reciprocated. Unacceptable behavior directed towards school staff will not be accepted and will be reported and dealt with accordingly. We would ask for the support of Parent Councils in continuing to encourage positive relationships between home and school.

I trust the information in this letter is clear and I would ask you all for your support in our efforts to provide the best possible service to our schools within the current resources we have available to us. We are continuing to review our structure within ECS and this position will continue to evolve over the months and years ahead and I am sure Head Teachers will keep parents informed of any changes.

I attach for your information a copy of our leaflet "Parents and Accountability" which I would invite you to share with parents not only within your Parent Council but also with the wider parent body within your school. This has been produced following the "Big Conversation" which took place with parents across Aberdeenshire and outlines what parents can expect of us as a service and also what we expect in return.

Finally, I would like to once again thank everyone who attended the recent engagement events for Parent Council Chairs, it was great to meet so many of you. Hopefully those of you who were unable to attend will be able to attend any future engagement events we organize. Parental engagement is a key priority nationally and the same is true for us within Aberdeenshire. We are very grateful to all of you for all you do for and on behalf of the parent body in Aberdeenshire.

Yours sincerely



Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services