

Hermitage Academy Parent Council

Response to Empowering our Educators Proposal in Principle.

Introduction

Argyll and Bute Council provided Hermitage Academy Parent Council (HAPC) at the end of November with an email advising how pleased the authority were to provide the Council's Collective Leadership Model proposals for schools.

The information contained videos, guides and how to host your engagement session information.

Along with a pre-set feedback forms, as we use today, to select the benefits from the proposals and general text areas for any other benefits, any reservations and finally will the model positively affect the future education of our young people.

No previous discussions were held or offered from the Central Education team nor via our Head Teachers to know this request was going to be issued to PC and any agreement, advice or alternatives to conducting the Consultation on behalf of Argyll and Bute Council.

It remains unanswered why the authority didn't simply carry out its own schedule of consultation delivery, however, duly undertaking our role to engage with our Parent Forum HAPC undertook the task as requested.

Consultation

- **Timing** - For a Parent Council addressing the immediate impacts and concerns at the spike of the Winter 21 COVID the timing of this request, with a deadline of early February, could not have been worse. This deadline left HAPC with concerns to ensure full information was provided, a robust understanding of the proposals and the structure of the engagement piece was fair in its presentation. This included presentations from EIS, Teacher Trade Union to ensure the voice of practitioners and Education Professionals was available to our parents.
- **Deadlines** - Since its first delivery the consultation response deadline has been moved repeatedly, mainly at the request of parent councils and community groups questions on the validity of the proposals and seeking further clarifications. This in itself would demonstrate poor planning, lack of cognitive process and essentially tone deaf to the pressures on schools and families at the time.
- **The Principle of Collectives** - The proposal details have 'transpired' through Q&A sessions, however ultimately the central education team have confirmed the details are not being considered therefore questions on specific schools or collectives are academic. Only the 'Principle' is to be evaluated at this stage. Unfortunately, in all the materials presented by the authority, the Committee process and the methodology of a Proposal in Principle was distinctly absent.

Proposal

- **Reasons for Change** – A number of reasons are provided however the lack of evidence and tangible data is not provided and no such evidence has been made available through the

course of this consultation. This leaves HAPC with little to assure or judge the decision making and considerations that have taken place to arrive at this Proposal in Principle.

- **National Changes Lie Ahead** – They do, as they do for the whole of Scotland. There are no other authorities at a point of national change attempting to embark on a major restructure of their school models and the leadership therein due to the Ken Muir report or the SQA and Education Scotland Reforms. A caution on why no other authority has taken this approach or similar is concerning for HAPC and its parent forum.
- **Declining Population and School Rolls are Falling** – that's not the case for Hermitage Academy nor the feeder primary schools. The area has a number of new housing estates being finalised and our schools will see increasing school rolls without much regard to the school estate and its current capacity. Hermitage Academy and its Helensburgh and Lomond Cluster have some of the biggest schools in the authority. Its worthy of note however many other PCs have reported similarly that their schools are not experiencing a reducing school roll, therefore we return to the questionable modelling the authority used to support this as an authority wide model.
- **Recruitment Challenges** – whilst the more central belt location of Hermitage Academy, other than national subject shortages, recruitment challenges are not the experience of the school. However, it is with the deepest of concern that the remodelling of school structures to an Executive Head Teacher holding the post of 'Head Teacher' and the Head of School within each location holding the post of 'Depute Head Teacher' (per the FAQs SNCT reference) that HAPC fear the dilution of posts and the unique model will result in a stepping stone effect which would ultimately lead to a higher turnover in Head of School posts and the impact of this on the school communities would most certainly be detrimental. It's also worth note that the 'attractiveness' of Head of School roles cannot be evidenced or modelled and therefore is little more than a gamble in terms of suggesting these will be seen as anything other than a 'Senior Depute' by the rest of the Scotland's Teachers. The suggestion that HTs and Depute HTs are on the same scale whilst true, is not accurate in terms of job sizing, therefore the Head of School post will be a reduced salary (which will we assume fund the new middle management layer of Executive Head Teacher) in part. The aim to deliver this model as cost neutral again lacked evidence and the budget modelling was not presented.
- **Demands on Head Teacher's Time** – the data provides that in over 65% of schools there is not a teaching Head Teacher in Argyll and Bute – that is the case for Hermitage Academy and many of its surrounding cluster. HAPC cannot support a full restructure to address these concerns whilst no other options are to be considered, presented.
- **Increased numbers of dedicated teaching staff** – This does not equate to more teaching time, nor additional support in the classroom where pupil attainment is achieved. Reducing the attainment gap and recovery from the disruption of COVID was seen as a key priority and the model provided no evidence that a central management layer will improve this for Hermitage Academy.
- **Sharing of Resources between Schools and flexible use of Budgets** – this is already achieved in HALCO and there is no evidence presented to suggest that it will need a full restructure to achieve this anywhere else in Argyll and Bute.
- **Equity of Resources** – HAPC find it difficult to equate that in order to provide sharing of resources or joint bids for resources this level and extent of remodelling is required to achieve this.

In Summary

The early adopter proposal presented to Community Services Committee was rejected in favour of wider consultation. Hermitage Academy Parent Council welcomes the opportunity to formally respond to the Proposal In Principle for Collective Leadership and the rationale provided by Argyll and Bute Council.

Having undertaken full consultation with our Parent Forum, provided several opportunities from presentations, social media and confidential email feedback, Hermitage Academy Parent Council can find no support within the forum or its elected Parent Council Committee to agree to this Proposal In Principle. The Parent Council would add that the lack of evidence and view the proposal acting in reverse of empowerment of the leadership in our schools which we believe drives improvements, morale and engagement which delivers quality teaching outcomes truly placing the pupils at the heart of the decisions made by our school leaders.

Please accept this response as a REJECTION of the Proposal In Principle with no benefits to be realised.

It remains that HAPC welcomes opportunity for early collaboration and engagement with the Authority to aid the scoping and information gathering to better enable a community and partnership working to deliver positive outcomes for our children, your pupils.

Stella Kinloch (Chair)

On behalf of Hermitage Academy Parent Council