

Broughton High School Parent Council Q&A session, Thursday 20th August 2020

Please note that the situation regarding Covid protection in schools is evolving rapidly, so do check the school's website to keep up-to-date with the latest information:

<https://www.broughton.edin.sch.uk/>

Meeting notes:

Rozi Thomson (Parent Council): We have one hour with the teachers to ask what we can in the time. We will capture as much as possible. We can take extra questions to the Parent Council. Susan Bennett, John Wilson, Pauline Cumming and Shona Wallace are all here.

Welcome to this Q and A by the Parent Council. The PC has worked closely with school over the last few months, we have had an open and constructive dialogue with the school about the challenging times due to Covid 19. It has been a chance to connect, to share the difficult balancing act of keeping the school community as safe as possible.

We will not have time for every question, so we will do some offline answers too.

The PC wrote an open letter which was issued to the school, you can read this after the call (on our website: broughtonhighpc.org) . It was a Thank you to all the staff and a recognition of the current difficulties for teachers. We would like to know if we can be of help today, and answer some of the questions but there will not be enough time to do them all. Thank you to the teachers and leaders for their time today.

John Wilson (Headteacher) - Rozi thanks for organising this opportunity to engage. The SLT are all in the room. Thank you to the PC and the parental community for the open letter, it is very much appreciated. It is a powerful statement supporting our school which like other schools around Scotland are welcoming young people back into our buildings - pupils are the life and soul of our school. We have a very well-informed PC who is empathetic to the challenges so thanks for putting the letter together.

Members of school staff were keen to see young people back in school but knew that returning to school is not about being 100% safe. Every day we have to take calculated managed risks to maximise learning and supporting the health and wellbeing of our pupils, both physically and mentally, whilst keeping them safe from the virus.

Every decision I make as headteacher and colleagues make is about getting the balance right in accordance with the guidelines and the science. That is the context to our answers. We wish we could go back to a better normal that we were in before. This is why so many things have had to change since the return to school.

I am sure you are all aware that we are hearing mixed messages from political figures who are balancing the harm and protective measures. We are told to avoid crowds indoors and yet our pupils are asked to go indoors and there are over 1200 in

the school. This brings a dilemma. Some parents have made the choice not to bring their children back into school.

Trust will be more precious until we rid ourselves of the virus. I will also open these questions to my colleagues.

Learning

- 1. Learning during lock-down worked well for some, and was a struggle for many, despite the schools amazing efforts to engage. Children must therefore be at different stages, and behind. How do you plan to manage this, with specific reference to those sitting exams this year?**

JW - With regard to preparation for exams and the baseline, we are fortunate at Broughton because we have teachers well experienced at differentiating for young people. This is a fundamental requirement, as lockdown was followed by the summer holidays leading to 5 months away from school. Young people are therefore all at different stages. It will require differentiation, evaluation and assessment to establish the next steps in their learning. We have great expertise at Broughton with regard to that.

How have they kept up with Teams during lockdown? When a teacher saw a young person was not engaging, Shona Wallace (DHT) coordinated a response to that family. There are different dynamics in class. Some curriculum leaders reported that all 9 Advanced Higher students engaged, whereas in some 4th year classes only 20 to 30% engaged. The teachers will be providing extension work for some pupils whilst judging how best to cover the work that wasn't done before summer.

We have the expertise to look on a case by case basis, so each pupil is brought up to speed. As for sitting exams, we don't yet know the nature of what those exams will be like.

With regards to support from the parental community, the harsh reality is that the young people who suffered in lockdown, are likely to suffer even more. On a day by day basis, every child will be asked to wipe their seat and table, a 50 minute lesson turns into a 40 minute lesson. Cumulatively this will affect their learning.

The SQA is undertaking a consultation/survey for the parental community and the hope is that they will adjust assessment and levels of expectation accordingly. There will be less learning time, and some will have missed 2 months of school before the summer.

- 2. Some of the teachers are wearing face masks in class. It makes them difficult to make out, impacting both learning and discipline. Given teachers understandably want to keep themselves safe, are there any creative ways of maintaining their safety, whilst enabling communication?**

JW We can't think of any ways around wearing masks. As a Head teacher I do my best to keep all the young people safe and my staff safe. It is not mandatory to wear a mask, but I encourage them, on a pragmatic level, to do so, because if they fall sick, there will be zero tuition. So we are minimising the risk whilst attempting to provide learning. I know it is difficult for some children to hear, to interpret what their teacher is saying. In a news report, I saw a face covering which is partly transparent but that may not yet be available.

RT - An alternative could be using teaching materials on Teams, you tube clips etc.

- 3. Many of the children benefit from extras at schools, such as nurture areas, hot school meals, use of the library after school and so on. We've often talked at the Parent Council about how key these things are. What is your appraisal on when we might be able to open up some of these provisions again?**

JW Rozi and the PC are right, one of the strengths of Broughton High School is we are so ready and able to accommodate the wide range of needs our pupils have. However there is a set of restrictions imposed by the virus, 'gatherings of no more than 50' gets in the way of these provisions. The library is available on a booking system, but not available for those that need peace and quiet. Regarding hot school meals, we have reintroduced warm pasta - but we are making food provision 'grab and go', so the young people can stay outdoors where it is safer for them to be. Nurture areas are being made available again too.

Within Broughton we have three specialist schools, can you provide any information on how fully they are able to operate, or when this might be known? (Dancing, face to face music lessons etc.) Or should these parents engage separately with the relevant special school?

Tudor Morris (Head of Music School) The music school is now getting practice sessions. We will start piano lessons for everyone. The week after, we will introduce the other instruments except for voice, and for 'blowing instruments' (wind or brass). For these, pupils will need to practice at home/ online. As soon as the government says we can, we will bring back ensembles.

With regards to instruments for the music students, we have taken advice from Steinway and got specialist wipes for the pianos and students will wipe them at the beginning and end of each lesson. These don't damage the keys. Students can bring in their own instruments but can't share these. The dept will try not to share instruments, so pupils will keep an instrument with their name on it. The teachers will be 2 metres away for demonstrations. There will be less lessons, 1 lesson on each instrument, and practice and ensemble sessions will be reintroduced.

There was concern that singing led to an increase in the spread of the virus in America so singing and blow instruments will therefore be online (and practicing will take place at home).

JW With regards to the other specialist schools, the footballers have been risk assessed and can use the changing rooms as there are not many of them. Outdoor dance is approved, but not yet indoor dance. It is lively outdoors at Broughton now! The musicians have been affected the most.

- 4. It's clear that some practical subjects will be limited. For example learning music without access to an instrument, cooking, and indoor PE. Whilst this is understandable initially, indefinite continuation will impact on learning and achievement. Is there anything you can say about when you hope this might change?**

SLT are concerned by this as pupils are getting fed up with theory lessons but the Scottish government guidelines limit our ability to provide what we would normally provide. HFT has effectively gone into close down and is just theory at the moment.

The other affected subject areas are PE, HFT, Modern languages (no headsets), Music, ICT (iPads - need specialist wipes), Woodwork and metalwork as you can't share tools, and in Science where you can't share equipment.

These are the Risk assessment guidelines which amount to no practical work.

In other subjects, we are waiting for the correct cleaning equipment between students without upsetting everything else we are trying to do, for instance if a microphone was either not wiped down or damaged by the wrong cleaning equipment. Jane Wallace (school Business Manager) has been encouraging the local authority to give us the correct equipment. It is frustrating as it is difficult to source the cleaning resources needed.

5. Some children haven't had report cards as usual, so parents are unclear how their child is progressing. When can we expect to hear when reports cards will be issued during the course of this year?

JW SB and I are looking at the cycle of reporting.

Susan Bennett - I am the deputy responsible for learning, teaching and attainment. We are looking at the reporting process and parents' evenings. We will follow the same cycle as last year, for each year group 3 tracking reports throughout the year. The baseline information will be with parents by the October break.

6. We have all built up competence using Teams during lock down and it would be a shame to lose these skills, will Teams continue to be used on some basis, and could teachers put key learning resources here to help support catch up learning

SB - Teams will continue to be used for homework. We are very conscious of not going backwards in the use of Teams which was a steep learning curve in lockdown. It is a useful tool for homework, it will form part of our contingency plan in the event of a temporary lockdown. We have been discussing its use with curriculum leaders and class teachers.

Practicalities of the school day

7. Clearly the staggering of entry times is an attempt to improve on crowd management going in and out of school. Many children seem worried about this, and some parents are concerned that this crowding might aid the virus and negate the health benefit of being outdoors. What are you learning as you see this in action?

JW With regard to the 3 minute stagger times, even in the past couple of days our young people are getting more used to not bunching up when they try to get back into the building. Their initial rush of enthusiasm has waned and they are not gathering in such close proximity.

We ask young people to spend lunchtime outdoors. One day it was wet, but most have been happy to go outside. It is good they are spending more time outdoors. At the end of lunch,

they are staggered back into the building and they are better at distancing now when coming in. However we recognise that it is very difficult to physically distance from friends. Inside therefore would be more dangerous.

We are not providing 100% protection from Covid, but I think it is the safest way to do it for now. Some parents have asked for groups of students to remain in the building. However this would contravene the upper limit of 50.

When we looked at staggering re-entry into buildings, this would involve putting young people into 23 separate groups, and coming up with 23 different lunchtimes which is not feasible. Although it is difficult at the moment, our young people are cooperating fantastically well.

On Monday, there was a downpour. We did not want to force young people outside to get soaked and become unwell, so pupils stayed indoors. The students were brilliant, they sat in friendship groups in reasonable numbers. We had the ventilation on maximum. This is a time of highly unusual choices but we are doing our best.

- 8. Lack of changing facilities and outdoor PE in the rain are a definite source of anxiety for some of our young people. Can you advise how you intend to manage PE on the wettest of days, and whether it is ok for children to use the toilets for a quick modest change of top to ensure they are comfortable in their other classes? Might the changing rooms be able to open on some basis or is this deemed too risky?**

JW - We are following health protection advice with regards to the changing rooms. They are too small and no staff are allowed in to ensure young people are being safe. The wet weather contingency is that young people will have a theory instead of a practical lesson instead (as they are not allowed indoor PE) This will become more and more difficult unless the advice changes as we will not be able to override it. Our young people can cope with the cold, but not rain and cold.

COVID Related Absence

- 9 Can you confirm when you expect us to keep children off school. Are you keen to avoid any pupil attending with any symptom (e.g. common cold) Is it correct to assume they should self isolate for 10 days if they show any COVID symptoms? If a child displays symptoms in school how will it be dealt with?**

JW - In accordance with Scottish Government guidelines, if your child has any symptoms at all, do not come into the school building.

If you are coughing at home, do not come into school. Seek a test for the child and let the school know the outcome.

If the test is negative, we welcome your child back to school, but until the test result is back, do not come into school.

Jane Wallace:

If a child is ill in school they will be taken into the Isolation room and looked after until they are collected, but do not allow a vulnerable adult to collect them. The isolation area will be cleaned and disinfected afterwards. If they are over 16, they will be asked to travel home on

their own and parents will be contacted (if they are well enough). Parents must then arrange a test and School needs to be informed.

10 We realise COVID-19 symptoms may lead to higher pupil absence. How do you think a pupil would best stay up to speed with their learning if and when this happens?

JW This prompted a good discussion, we are at an early stage on our preparation for that. It is now on our radar, so thanks for the prompt. We will look at Teams and check where we are with that. The material that is on Teams is still from lockdown, there may be some information there already that some pupils could engage with - we will work towards a new bank of learning materials for pupils whilst they are off sick.

Specific Questions for 2 key groups

11 We have a whole year group of S1's learning how to navigate the school in the midst of so much change, and the normal high quality transition programme was not possible. How can parents find out information about how things work at Broughton? How can they engage with the school on any specific special needs enquiries?

JW Our normal transition process is very thorough. Shona Wallace will answer this, but we were able to do a part of our normal programme on Wednesday to Friday of the 1st week.

Shona Wallace: I am the Pupil support deputy head. The S1s are settling in very quickly. We are not seeing many asking for help to get around. We did an amount of primary transition online. Information sharing has still taken place. For children with Additional Support needs, you can make direct enquiries to Sally McMillan. We are aware of those submitted already, and we will continue to support those children as they were in primary school. You can also look online at the Primary transition section for the school handbook, and a video.

Rozi: Parents can also ask questions using the PC's askparent email address – askparent@broughtonhighpc.org

Concluding remarks

12 Finally what is your sense of how it is all going so far, what shifts in government guidance do you think are under discussion, and what do you think we can do as parents to help during this time.

JW Thanks for the opportunity to mention a few things. Schools are under immense pressure so support from the parental community is invaluable. It is a struggle to keep up with the advice - 83 lengthy documents related to Covid and SQA procedures have been

sent to me as HT of secondary school - we have had to skim through them, whilst making sure we attend to the young people in our school. We need to devote most of our attention to pupils and colleagues.

The patience of the parental community is appreciated. As with any change within an organisation, there is a short-term surge in energy and enthusiasm, but in the not too distant future, we will see an implementation dip. We will need to be vigilant to keep everybody onboard and motivated. Please emphasise to your children all of these seemingly illogical rules are there so we can do our best for them and the community.

The SQA survey on learning time and adjustments to the exams - it would be beneficial if parents and carers could complete the survey:

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/94837.html?fbclid=IwAR2Ep-YJ8SYFKV0ntpcxPdS9KE9KbJI60cjULs9VNt-nKjiQY8Dbk83zPsl> (survey closed Monday 24th August)

At the start of the Covid outbreak there was a huge focus on support for the NHS and additional resources. However no additional support has yet been provided to schools - education is so vital, we need our national figures to put more into education. That is our plea to you as our supportive parental community.

Rozi: We will gather the questions and put out a feedback survey. The PC AGM will be around 14/15 Sept and this conversation will be continued.