

## **ABBEY GRANGE ACADEMY PARENT COUNCIL: SECOND ANNUAL REPORT (2016/17)**

### **Office Bearers 2016/17**

**Chair:** Mike Kemp

**Vice chair:** Janet Bove

**Minutes Secretary:** Marion Kemp

### **Other members 2016/17**

Paul Cooper (Vice Principal, Abbey Grange Academy)

Catherine Kershaw-Guy

Emma Hawker

Stephanie Cassidy

Susan Field

Timothy Jacobs

James Fenton

Richard Hamlin

Martin Lamb

Jayne Hollick

### **Overview of the Year**

The Parent Council is rightly proud of Abbey Grange Church of England Academy's achievements generally – both in terms of academic results this year and more widely in the breadth of education it's provided. It's equally proud of the Academy's leadership team, teaching and support staff. So again, on behalf of all parents and carers, we'd like to express our appreciation for all their hard work this year in providing an excellent education for students.

One of the major successes - with huge thanks to Mr. Cooper in particular, and the parent members of the Council – is the way that we've been able to further strengthen our partnership with the Academy. This has been achieved through:

- the openness and honesty of Council Members in providing challenge, raising issues and supporting and advising - coupled with

- Mr. Cooper's continual willingness to be open to proposals for improvements; and
- actively and openly sharing information with the Council about issues the Academy is facing – both good and bad – which has also played a major part in strengthening the partnership.

*In our second year, we've focused further on parental engagement and communication, one of the Academy's key priorities in its three year plan, and issues the Parent Council felt it could really add value to. These have included:*

- further developing existing policies and introducing new ones: reviewing and providing input to the new grading system Abbey Grange Academy is implementing;
- continual improvement of the Academy's website;
- support the school in its implementation of the three year plan: Parent Council focused on homework – including the introduction of the Milk planner - and a range of other policies;
- having considered developing a 'Useful guide to Abbey Grange' it was decided it would be more effective for all the material the Parent Council had developed for the guide to be used to strengthen existing guidance; and
- a number of other developments to help take the Academy further along its journey from "good" to "outstanding" – including the impacts of being part of a multi-academy trust (MAT).

*Other key priorities for parental engagement and communication have been achieved through our involvement and work in the following areas:*

1) Making ourselves accessible, including:

- a) making ourselves known, including through attending Parents' evenings;
- b) providing an up-to-date Parent Council webpage, which includes information and background on the Parent Council, along with copies of meeting minutes;
- c) photo of PC members on the school website
- d) established and updated a Parent Council noticeboard
- e) members now have PC T shirts to make them more easily identifiable at school events, which were provided free by the manufacturer;
- f) reappraisal of options for how parents contact whether Parent Council should have its own email address;
- g) arranged coffee morning to new year 7 parents in September, supporting parent engagement and the transition process from primary school, linking with PTA in doing so; and;
- h) encouraging parents to contact us and raise issues – either in person or via email.

2) Seeking to make Parent Council representative of the Academy as a whole. This included:

- a) recruiting parents from children in all key stages in Academy, which we did;
- b) writing to all parents to explain what the Council is about, asking them to complete a survey to explain what they'd like us to do and inviting parents to become members; and

- c) seeking to be representative of all diversity.
- 3) Reviewing existing communication strategies - providing advice, support and input to the strengthening of the Academy's communication protocols – especially the further development and improvement of the Academy's website e.g. to ensure that the school calendar is updated early enough to allow parent and students to plan ahead.
  - 4) Ensuring the Parent Council is kept regularly updated with strategic, policy and staff developments including changes to teaching staff, new starters, leavers, etc. This provides us with a valuable insight into key operations of the Academy, as well as the opportunity to seek clarification and influence strategy and policy direction. We're also able to minuted the non-confidential aspects of these updates for the benefit of all parents more widely.
  - 5) Providing the opportunity for Council members to ask questions that they feel other parents might like to ask and seek answers. These covered a wide range of topics, including clarification on the Academy's assessment procedures. Several of these questions have led to items being raised with the leadership team – and having Paul Cooper as the Academy's representative has been key to driving many of these issues forward.

### **Providing support, input and advice on new policy development, including the Abbey Grange Academy development plan.**

The leadership team and the Parent Council agreed that, where there was a major policy change / introduction of a new policy, then the Parent Council should be consulted – as well as existing policies where input or review is needed. These included:

- making further recommendations and developing clearer guidelines for the International Middle Years Curriculum (IMYC) - e.g. using iMovies - and for the completion of reflective journals;
- the new grading system, which members advised on communicating this to parents;
- we've also discussed the impacts of expanding the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) on a number of occasions, including parents' concerns and the opportunities and challenges that presents from a parent, student and teacher's perspective;
- In September the Council was presented with the positive rewards systems, which we provided feedback on. This has led to new a number of new strategies, including recognition for students who consistently got the basics right – e.g. automatic vivo rewards and praise letters for not getting any teacher comments;
- highlighting teething problems with the new Milk Planners, which have largely been addressed;
- commissioning a parent survey through Survey Monkey to assess parents' understanding of the role of PC. In spite of extensive publicity, only 16 parents responded. We were therefore unable to assess parents' understanding as the response rate was too low to be statistically valid;
- it was agreed that a "Useful guide to Abbey Grange" would be developed as living document to assist parents of existing and new students in response to parents' queries that don't appear to be covered either in the year 7 hand book or on the Academy's

website. Once complete, the guide will be available electronically and updated with new information as it becomes available;

- providing input and advice on the options for the future pastoral support system beyond April 2017, covering student mental health support, speech and language therapy, community policing support, etc;
- proposing a buddy system for parents, with a particular focus on hard-to-reach student and parent groups. It was agreed that this would be a role for the new parent / family support worker; and
- on-going curriculum review and models for the future.

### **Academy Updates and Providing Challenge, Advice and Support**

Our main link with the Academy has been through Mr. Cooper – who continued to provide regular and comprehensive updates as well as feedback to the leadership team, following Council meetings. These are invaluable:

- providing members with a unique insight into the running and structure of the Academy,
- helping to identify potential issues requiring our input and support;
- offering the opportunity to input, advise, challenge and provide supportive feedback to the Academy; and
- enabling wider communication of the updates through publication of the Council minutes on the Academy's website.

Issues covered have included information on:

- teachers leaving or joining the Academy - enabling the Council to extend their support to the leadership team, in addition to thanking leavers / welcoming new starters and behalf of all parents, as appropriate;
- GCSE Grades for summer 2016 and the Academy's achievement and progress in subject areas in comparison with previous years;
- the Academy as Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), explaining changes, etc; and
- departmental profiles.

### **Other Business Items**

In common with many other groups, we have a "catch-all" AOB item to provide the opportunity for members to bring up matters which have come to light since the previous Council meeting or aren't covered in minutes (e.g. for confidentiality or other reasons).

Topics raised have, for example, covered:

- languages at Abbey Grange;
- clarification of the rules on wearing coats at school; and
- security and storage of mobile phones during PE lessons.

It also seems to be a useful avenue through which parents provide input and feedback (through Council members) - as they often seem reluctant to use email (to date, at least).

### **Parent Council's Indicative Future Plans for discussion and Areas of Focus**

It was agreed that we would consider the options for improving the profile of Parent Council members – e.g. delivering presentations at each meeting on evening for each year, perhaps alongside the PTA and Praying Parents' Group.

As well as maintaining its strong focus on *parental engagement and communication*, the Council plans to continue its support of the Academy and its leadership team in representing parents and carers in partnership with the Academy in:

- relaunching and (possibly redesigning) the Parent Council survey;
- further developing existing policies and introducing new ones: review / offer feedback;
- reviewing the Academy's One Year Development Plan;
- support the school in its implementation of the three year plan: Parent Council will focus on one aspect of this;
- providing input through a review of any curriculum changes emerging – which the Academy will inform the Council of;
- the embedding of Christian values throughout the Academy - for example Trust, Hope, Koinonia – which are also British values – and with sensitivity to other faith students;
- continual improvement of the Academy's website;
- ensuring parents and students are promptly and fully informed of matters and issues relevant to them in sufficient time to plan responses and any actions required;
- strengthening Parental engagement and communications – e.g. through learning from the strategies and good practice of other academies and schools;
- Parent Council to become more representative;
- a review of the support offered to Pupil premium / 'most able' students / students with learning difficulties / disabilities; and
- input and advice on all developments that take the Academy further along its journey of continual improvement.

We look forward to working with Jenny Thornton during the coming year - and continuing to build on the really strong partnership we've developed with the Academy through Mr Cooper, Mr Norden and the wider leadership team in taking the Academy from strength to strength – and, we trust, hope and pray – on towards "outstanding"!