

# St Christopher School

## Parents' Circle

### **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 9 May 2009.**

#### **Agenda**

1. Welcome
2. Approval of the Minutes of the last AGM
3. Chair's report
4. Treasurer's report
5. Election of committee members
6. AOB
7. Head's talk

#### **1. Welcome**

The meeting was opened by the Chair of the Parents' Circle, Rouane Mendel, who welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming.

#### **2. Approval of minutes of the last AGM**

The minutes of the AGM held on 10 May 2008 were approved. There were no matters arising.

#### **3. Chair's report**

Rouane spoke to the meeting on the work of the Parents' Circle during the last year and its plans for the future.

*Rouane's address forms addendum a*

#### **4. Treasurer's report**

Peter McMeekin spoke to the meeting on the accounts for the year ending 31 July 2008, copies of which he distributed. In response to a question from the floor, Peter explained that the high surplus in the bank account was because monies were being retained for an outdoor theatre project, raised as a tribute to Colin and Betsy Reid when Colin retired.

## **5. Election of Committee members**

The Secretary, Alison Baigent, reported that three members of the present Committee had resigned and that Peter McMeekin was also standing down as Treasurer following his appointment as Parent Governor. Rouane had also come to the end of her two-year term but was willing to seek re-election. Rouane was then nominated and seconded from the floor and duly re-elected. No other parents had come forward to join the Committee. The Secretary encouraged anyone who was interested in the work of the Parents' Circle to come along to the meetings, which were open to all.

The meeting then considered the election of officers. Rouane and Alison were willing to continue as Chair and Secretary respectively. There were no other candidates. They were each nominated and seconded from the floor and duly elected. James Smythe, a committee member since 2008, had volunteered to take on the role of Treasurer in place of Peter McMeekin. James was also nominated, seconded and elected.

## **6. AOB**

There was no other business.

## **7. Head's talk**

Richard spoke to the meeting. *His talk is addendum b.*

Rouane again thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed.

*Addendum A*

Welcome and what a lovely surprise to see so many faces!

I would like to start with some thanks – first to all the members of the Parents' Circle Committee for their commitment, hard work and on some occasions doggedness! We needed it and appreciate all of it. Next to Richard for his support and accessibility, for all he does for our children and for being such a splendid Headteacher – thank you.

Thanks go to all those who helped to organise our biggest fund-raiser – so far! - of the year, Bonfire Night. I think all present would agree that it was a terrific occasion. Especial thanks to Lucy Orsman and the team she organised of parents from the Junior School –

and to all of the PC – thank you. Thanks to Alison, PCC Secretary, for her immensely hard work: keeping notes, writing up minutes, re-writing the PC legal constitution and a truly vast amount of work behind the scenes. Thank you too to our newest member, Emma-Kate, who's recently been appointed Deputy Head and is a tremendous asset to the School and also to Jenny for all the work she's put in to the Nearly New Shop. And thanks in anticipation to Karen, who's just beginning to show her extraordinary organisational skills in preparing for the Ball. You should all already have received both in the post and via e-mail her poster. I just think she's going to pull off an extraordinary feat. This is truly going to be the biggest fund-raiser of the year and if Karen had her way not one of you would leave this hall without having bought a ticket for yourselves, all your friends, your aunts uncles and grandmas! Thank you!

Finally, thanks to all of you for showing your support and for being here.

Preparing for this speech I looked back over past speeches – Kath's in 2007, Ralph's last year and further back to the time when Colin was Head. It was interesting to get a bit of historical perspective. I realised that some things have in fact changed. The parent body was this year for the first time asked by Richard to contribute to the School's Strategic Development Plan and we asked everyone for suggestions and ideas. Looking at what ultimately emerged, to be enshrined in the plan for the next 5 years, it's interesting to note that three of the areas in the first section (which effectively define the current position of the PC) indicate functions that are completely new:

- PCC meetings are now held in school on the first Sunday evening after the start of each half-term and are open to all parents. Ralph opened these meetings up; I suggested we have them at the same time of the term. Dates of meetings can now go in the school calendar, which hopefully will make it more likely parents can attend, because they can plan ahead.
- Each year-group has a representative on the PCC who is responsible for organising opportunities for parents in the respective year-group to meet.
- The Parents' Circle has a section on the School's website containing some information pertinent to parents and a system for contacting directly the Chair and Secretary of the Parents' Circle Committee and the Junior and Monte Parents' Circle (JMPC)

I know Richard is going to talk more about the Development Plan, but from this first section it seems clear that all of these changes are aimed at improving communication, connection, interface and quality of representation between the Parents' Circle Committee and the parent body as a whole. None of this would have been possible without the improvements in technology which now allow letters from me to be sent to individual e-mail accounts and for our area on the School's website to be regularly updated. The

creation of direct e-mail addresses for the Parents' Circle and their inclusion on the website means that any parent can ask a question directly to the PC at any time. These are all important and forward-looking changes.

The role of the Parents Circle has changed in other ways.

When I read Kath's speech from 2007, I was struck by the really important role that the PCC, as I well remember, played in helping the School get through the difficulties of that period, not just representing parents but keeping the lines between parents, School and children open; and helping in the appointment of Richard. When I look at fellow St Chris parents two years later I feel glad at how much more positive and contented they seem on the whole. But there's a downside to this, as there always is, which seems to be that parents feel less inclined to get involved in supporting the School. No crisis: no need. But we need to be careful this doesn't lead to lethargy. One, the values of the School need constant parental involvement to keep them alive. Two, if, God forbid, we ever do face some sort of crisis again in the near future, how much easier it will be for us to cope if parents as a group, including the newer ones, are used to helping each other. It's not our business on the PCC to criticise parental apathy because the reasons for it are understandable. We have to ask ourselves what can be done to involve parents more.

What can be done?

1) As I've said, we have made moves forward in terms of communication and this is being used to some extent, especially by newer parents. **How can new parents, how can YOU help, join in, participate and help to contribute to the life of this School? There are three or more gaps to fill on the PCC and we are all very much hoping that someone will be prepared to step forward. We are particularly keen to find someone on the PCC who can contribute to updating the PC section of the School website!**

2) The PCC works at supporting the School in its role of community-builder. We organise events, year-group reps organise events, we've had some success in organising events for new parents, Bonfire Night, the Ball. Social events are deeply important to our community and ideally we would like to have far more of them. I've proposed, and Richard has agreed in principle, that one social event per year group should take place annually in school. But we need more people to join the PCC and help us to organise these events! If people want to get together and have important social events that help to build community, people need to step forward to volunteer to help.

3) The PCC also looks to give parents a voice and opportunities to get involved, make their views known, contribute to the School's vision. Together with Richard and the Senior Management Team, we have supported the organisation of educational events such as talks on internet safety and the drug information evening to be held soon. A world café event with a keynote speaker who will introduce proceedings on the subject of how children become independent from parents and independent as learners is planned for the

Autumn Term. These occasions, as those who have attended in the past will know, provide a forum for parents to join together and discuss educational issues. We hope that here too you will support these events by your attendance.

4) Fund-raising. Fund-raising in this school is a tremendously important aspect of our charity work and also for the benefit of the school itself: fund-raising in the past built our lovely swimming pool. To organise such initiatives effectively, we do again need volunteers. And of course the fund-raising AND social highlight of the year is the forthcoming ball on 4 July. We hope you will all be able to attend, perhaps to help a little bit – and to bring a few friends!

This past year has been a wonderful year for St Chris with events too numerous to enumerate – though I'm sure Richard will identify some. The School, its Music, Drama and Art departments, charitable work, trips, academic progress all go from strength to strength and I for one am proud to have had my three children go through this School.

In our role as parents, we all have an individual responsibility to encourage parents new and old to take part and help out.

I believe that the PCC has many roles but ultimately I think it is about defending and promoting the values of the School. Values are especially important at St Chris and again the example of what we say and how we behave is all-important. Perhaps no two members of St Chris staff, students or parents entirely agree on what these values are. I would say that this diversity is one of our most precious values! But I would also highlight nurturing the individual qualities of the child, respect for the individual whatever his or her role in the School, a democratic and participatory approach, and passionate commitment to the outside world whether in Kosovo, Rajasthan or the local community just outside the School gates. Ultimately we have to judge ourselves on whether we did what we could to promote these values. I want to thank you all again for helping us do so.

*Addendum B*

**PARENTS' CIRCLE AGM  
HEAD'S ANNUAL ADDRESS  
SATURDAY 9 MAY 2009**

Good afternoon and thank you very much for coming to support the Annual General Meeting of the Parents' Circle. I am very grateful indeed to all members of the committee for their work and in particular for turning up to Sunday evening meetings. I appreciate that parents, like their children, lead busy lives and so we are particularly grateful to you for finding time to give to the School in this way.

When I took on this job nobody actually told me what the Head's Annual Address was meant to accomplish – simply that it is an address to parents. I suspect that it dates back to a time when many parents only had contact with the School through parent consultations and through the Parents' Circle, which was originally founded to support the work of the School by bringing parents together. For many then, the Head's Annual Address was the only opportunity to see the Head – this may, of course, be something that becomes more fashionable as the Government considers appointing Heads of 'federations' (sounds a bit Trecky for me!). So, in theory, I might become the Head (or probably Chief Executive) of a Group of Schools. I would be responsible for the strategic vision within the schools, act as a figurehead in times of celebration or difficulty and I would be able to show myself off once a year to parents curious to know what a Head, or in this case, a Chief Executive of a Federation School, actually looks and sounds like.

Now, I would hope that you would be as appalled by this thought as I am. I cannot imagine being the Head of a School where I do not know the names of all of the children. I would hope that, as parents, you have a sense of what is going on in the School – or at least as much of a sense as your children will let you.

Communication is vital to full and proper understanding and I hope that you feel that the School communicates effectively with you – and on a regular basis rather than just giving you one chance per year to hear about what's going on in School. When I became Head I started writing regular newsletters and more recently I have blogged and started twittering (what would my dear old Dad have made of this?). I did this for three main reasons:

1. To tell you all about what the whole School is doing – so that parents of children whatever age they are get a sense of the whole community in action
2. To recognise, reward and encourage the sharing of achievement. Not just academic elite but everyone, in every sphere.
3. To try and communicate what it is about St Chris that makes me so incredibly proud to be part of it.

If I were the Head of a Public School and this was Speech Day then I would now review the year and we would hand prizes to those who came top – in academic terms, sporting terms, poetry writing and a whole range of other things.

I did think about reviewing the year: about telling you how proud I am that in Anthony Harris' 100<sup>th</sup> term at St Chris, his IV Group Maths set of 19 pupils are already holding 15 A\*'s and 4 A's and that they will all take their GCSE early. About telling you of my pride at 'Oh! What a Lovely War', about telling you that even given our relatively small size we are still able to put out strong and enthusiastic sports teams with representatives at County and National levels; my pride that when visiting the Monte recently I was told by a top Monte that he was sorry I was too late for lunch but would I like some apple?; my pride that when I walk around the Junior School I hear music and laughter. But can I single things out? Can I really give prizes for one over the other?

Whenever I think of this, I think of King Midas who coveted the idea that everything he should touch turn to gold. He got his wish and soon realised that he could no longer eat for his food turned to gold and then tragedy: he kissed his daughter and she too turned to gold. As well as the obvious moral being be careful what you wish for there is also a lesson about what we assign wealth to.

Over the past year there has been much discussion about the relative merits of a society that revolved around the acquisition of wealth and how this obsession with seeing goods, money and possessions as a true indication of wealth had led to the recent economic collapse. If there is no other silver lining to the current clouds, then I hope that it will give people pause to think about what they really value.

Last year I did a Morning Talk about my disappointment at not being included in the Times Top 100 Rich list. I told the School how rich I felt I was – not financially, but in all sorts of other ways and my richness has not been hit devastatingly by the economic crisis. I continue to work with dedicated and hard-working colleagues who genuinely care; I continue to live and work in a beautiful environment; I continue to have my health; I continue to be surrounded by a loving and deeply loved family and I continue to see your children each and every day; to share their development with them and you; to feel the goose bumps go up on the back of my neck at least once a day.

So, I'll not review the year as you will have read about everything in my newsletters and on the web.

But I will tell you this. In this academic year there have been about 880 hours of academic work. In addition to this there have been somewhere in the region of 2,800 extra curricular activities ranging from Latin for Fun to fun swim, climbing to canoeing, fixtures, training, rehearsals and plays, music, dance, drama, expeditions and adventures; revision, examinations – did you know that this term there's a total of 222 separate sit-down exams over the five weeks, each involving up to 63 candidates; the busiest day will have 18 exams, 11 of them simultaneously; largest number of venues for one session is 9 (ie. exams going on in nine different places around School at the same time); an average exam season requires around 540 staff/hours of invigilation (about the same as running every lesson for every class in the Senior School for a week).

In addition to all of the assessed Drama and Music practicals, there is also CDT and Art practical and preparation work, there are around 875 pieces of written coursework ranging in length from 250 to 2,000 words and all of this has been produced by pupils and marked, graded and moderated by School staff ...

So that, if you like is my review of the year – not individual achievement centred but opportunity based. Like me, the children here are rich in their experience of School.

So, with everything in the garden rosy I should now congratulate everyone whether or not they won a prize and say just how splendid everyone and everything is.

But that's not really good enough. The School must always guard against complacency. In a School where we do things differently it would be too easy to hide behind the differences, to say 'oh, that's not how we do things, that's not in our ethos'. The School is a constantly evolving community. It is reflective. Currently Council are considering changing their constitution and there is a School meeting on Monday to discuss this – not at my instigation or insistence, but put forward by the children to strengthen self-government.

The School has changed significantly over the years. There has been a Uniform; Meat has been eaten here. Here are some of the School Rules from 1924:

- ◆ After tea, the dining room should be left clear for the maids
- ◆ Everyone is to attend boot inspection
- ◆ Cinemas are out of bounds and in term time there is to be one evening festivity only per week
- ◆ No one may go out after dark without permission
- ◆ No girl is to go out after dark without the escort of a boy of good size

With Governors, Staff, Pupils and Parents we have put together a Strategic Plan for the next five years. This is not in the form of what I call an examination plan that we get out in five years and see if we have achieved our goals. It is something to guide us, to enable all of us involved in the School to work towards the same objectives. The overall Strategic Plan will be published to pupils, parents, staff and anyone else who's interested by the end

of this term, but I thought that I would share the overall aims and how it is constructed with you today:

## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2009-2014**

### **Our Vision**

We treat young people as individuals and aim for them to develop competence and resourcefulness, social conscience and moral courage, the capacity for friendship and a true zest for life

### **Our Values**

To find and celebrate potential for growth in boys and girls of all ages

To develop Moral Courage

To instil and develop a sense of community

To develop an understanding of the wider community

To expect the best of all

To promote the enjoyment of School

To encourage and reward trust

To value all within the School

To celebrate a broad curriculum

### **Our Strategic Aims**

The School aims to be a continuously developing community of children and adults working together in an open and informal atmosphere where all are valued as individuals and encouraged to develop in curiosity, competence, judgment, kindness and courage, thus preparing for happy and fulfilled lives in the service of others.

1. GOVERNANCE
2. SELF GOVERNMENT
3. MARKETING AND ADMISSIONS
4. EDUCATION:- TEACHING AND LEARNING AND CURRICULUM
5. PASTORAL CARE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES
6. BOARDING
7. WIDER LIFE OF SCHOOL
8. THE SITE AND SERVICES
9. MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE
10. PARENTS

### **PARENTS**

#### **Strategic Aims**

- ◆ The Agenda of the Parents' Circle broadened to include more directed fund-raising and social events.
- ◆ More parents will wish to become involved in organising and participating in School and community events
- ◆ Junior School and Monte Parents' Circle will have a clear understanding of its role and will continue to support social and fund-raising events effectively
- ◆ Parents and School will be able to continue working together in the best interests of the children and wider School community

#### **Plan of Action**

##### **Accountable: Head, SMT, PCC, Parents**

- ◆ Continue to develop opportunities for the parents and other constituents to come together to share opportunities for discussion of items of mutual interest (eg. world café events, working with adolescents, internet use, substance abuse, education and so on).
- ◆ Strengthen the role of year group representatives in providing support for new families to the School, including consideration of an annual wine-and-cheese event for all year-groups held at school
- ◆ Continue to investigate opportunities for parents to contribute to and engage with the life of the School, including the further development of the website, support of events such as the Summer Ball, the development and running of the second-hand shop, and so forth
- ◆ Define guidelines for event organisation

- ◆ Re-define the financing and constitution of the Parents' Circle and its Committee by September 2009

So, our plan is to move forward, to evolve, to develop, to get better, to allow children to enjoy their childhood and prepare children for their lives.

This is not an easy task. We have seen how quickly things can change. In my talk to parents on Open Morning I talked about the difficulty of thinking about our children's futures:

In 1979 I was 14 and at School. Let's just remind ourselves what life was like then and think about how things have changed in the last 30 years:

- Average UK house price was £13,650
- Petrol was 20p/litre
- Annual inflation 17%
- Interest Rates 12.5%
- Margaret Thatcher elected first woman Prime Minister
- VisiCalc became first ever spreadsheet programme
- Sony introduced the Sony cassette Walkman costing £300
- First ever Commercial Cellular Network launched

But what of the future? Let's take a child entering the K Group this year. Let's call him/her Chris.



So, are things going to change for our children whilst they are in school?

So, what can we give our children to equip them for this life and to not scare the hell out of them?

The answer is a **DREAM**.

**D**etermination  
**R**espect  
**E**nthusiasm  
**A**spiration  
**M**otivation

As a School we know that we cannot do this alone – we need to do it in collaboration with you as parents and our children: This dream can come true if we continue to stand up for

what we believe in, treat our children as children and to constantly strive to do what is right for now, and future generations.

There will be difficult times ahead but smooth seas do not make great sailors.

People are worried about the H1N1 Influenza virus, but we have a Pandemic Plan – the crisis management part of which we will put into play if necessary.

Like everyone we are feeling the economic pinch – we are estimating that our costs will rise about 6% next year. Mainly through staffing and other essential costs such as food and utilities. But we do constantly review these costs to ensure that we are getting value for money. We budget to break even – not to make great surpluses and we have difficult choices to make about our costs – we have had to reduce them, but without the effect of this being felt by the children.

And on that note I bring you back to Chris, who theoretically would enter the K Group this year; with all the talk of strategic plans; budgets and costs; policies and plans we need to always bear in mind our reason for being here: Children.

Thank You.