

## **The Parents' Circle Committee**

### **Minutes of meeting held on 9 November 2008**

Present: Richard Palmer (President of PC) Rouane Mendel (Chair) Alison Baigent (Secretary) Peter McMeekin (Treasurer) Julie Cole (Joint Chair of Junior School PC) Jenny Roe, James Smythe, Peter Wesley, Ralph Wilce, Mike Collins (Senior School staff rep) Carly Smith (Junior School staff rep).

Apologies: Lucy Orsman (Joint Chair of Junior School PC) Allison Phelps, Sue Rix (Head of Junior School).

#### Agenda:

1. Welcome from Chair and approval of minutes of last meeting
2. Introductory remarks from Richard
3. Treasurer's report
4. Matters arising from the last meeting
  - a) appointment of Parent Governor
  - b) Year Group Reps and their roles
  - c) Parents' Directory
  - d) Nearly New shop
  - e) Parents' Circle website
  - f) Connecting with parents – Xmas events and a Summer Ball?
5. Bonfire night
6. Report from the London meeting
7. World Café event: moving forward the debate on PC constitution and funding
8. AOB

1. The Chair welcomed everyone present and thanked the Committee for their help organising the Bonfire Night event. The minutes of the last meeting were approved.
2. Richard reported that the latest School newsletter had just been sent out and that it indicated how busy the School was with a full programme of concerts and other events. He reminded the Committee that future mailings would ordinarily be by e

mail, with substantial environmental benefits. Though parents were entitled to opt out of electronic mailings, so far no parent had done so.

Richard also reported that his appraisal would be taking place over three days, the week beginning 10 November.

3. The Treasurer produced to the meeting draft accounts for the year ending 31 July 2008 and reported that he had submitted approximate accounts to the Charity Commission website. He also reported that the Bonfire Night event was a great success as all tickets were sold and £405 had been taken on the mulled wine and gifts stalls, with costs of those stalls amounting to £171. Following a brief discussion of the accounts, members were asked that, if they had any comments on the draft, these should be forwarded directly to the Treasurer.

It was agreed that the signatories to the PC bank account should now include both the current Chair and Secretary and Peter agreed to arrange this.

**4.**

(a) The Chair reported that three applications had been received for the post of Parent Governor. James sought clarification of the role of the PC committee in the election process. Richard stated that ordinarily the PC committee selected two from amongst the candidates to go forward for interview. On this occasion as there were only three in total, two of whom were members of the PC committee, all three applicants would be seen by Richard and two of the Governors.

(b) James and Ralph confirmed that they were happy to be the Year Group Reps for II and IV Groups respectively. Peter Wesley's offer to help with IV Group was gratefully accepted. The Chair explained that she would be circulating the job description for Year Group Reps prepared by Lucy for use in the Junior School, and that an important part of the role would be to organise, if possible, a social event for the year group parents once a term.

(c) Richard reported that the Parents' Directory would be sent out in hard copy in about three weeks to those parents who had submitted their own details. It had not been possible to send out the Directory any earlier as approximately one third of returns from parents had been incomplete, which had needed to be followed up. In future years, it should be possible to send out the Directory within a few weeks of the start of the Autumn Term as new parents would be asked in the initial summer mailing to send in their details for the Directory.

(d) Jenny reported that a suitable room was available at School for the Nearly New shop and that she hoped to meet with the Bursar shortly to move this

forward. Richard said that School was keen to help and would send out a mailing to parents shortly which would include requests for unwanted rails or hangars and also for volunteers to help with the shop. Jenny was thanked for her work on this project.

(e) It was agreed that the Parents' Circle section of the School website would be improved by the addition, for example, of a news section and information about forthcoming events, including events in the Junior School. The dates of PC committee meetings should also be on the website and parents should be encouraged to attend these meetings, which would ordinarily be open to all. Peter McMeekin agreed to take this forward in discussion with Ed Peters. Richard stated that the School considered the inclusion of discussion groups and blogs would not be appropriate because of editorial concerns.

(f) Richard reported that he had received many positive responses to the Bonfire Night event and that it should be repeated in future years. He reminded the meeting that Xmas events were already planned at which parents were very welcome, including the Junior School coffee morning on 15 November and the Junior and Senior School Xmas gatherings.

It was agreed that as the Summer Ball held last June had been a great success the event should take place again this year. Richard suggested that there were practical advantages in holding the ball on the day after the Leavers' Ball, which would be on the 3 July, and agreed to look further into the practicalities of this.

**5.** As already reported, it was agreed that the Bonfire Night event was a success and should be repeated, if possible with more stalls. It was agreed that tickets should only be sold in advance as the event had been a sell out.

**6.** Peter Wesley distributed minutes of the meeting of London parents held on 23 October and reported that it had been attended by 23 London parents, including three members of the PC committee: Peter himself, James and Ralph. It was noted that apologies had been made to that meeting on behalf of Richard and Rouane, both of whom would have liked to attend. Peter reported that the meeting had been extremely successful and very positive and he then spoke to the main issues raised:

(a) It appeared during the meeting that some parents had not received an invitation, which raised concerns about the completeness of the School's database. Richard explained that School only learned of the event on the 13 October, at which time the system used for mass mailing was down for planned upgrade work. The School Office had worked hard to send out mailings despite this.

(b) Parents had raised the difficulty of attending multiple events/meetings in Letchworth in a single week. Richard explained that many things were already taken into account when scheduling events, most importantly pupil and staff availability and therefore the scope for any material changes to current practices is limited.

(c) Suggestions were made as to how communication amongst London parents, and between London parents and the School, could be improved eg a list and map of all London parents organised by postcode, a forum/bulletin board on the School website, or a regular on-line Q&A session with the Head. Richard explained that the former would partly be dealt with by the Parents' Directory. Peter Wesley volunteered to sort names by postcode from the year group lists and distribute them to London parents. It was agreed that an electronic class list file would be sent to Peter as soon as possible. Richard welcomed the planned improvements to the Parents' section of the website, but repeated that a chatroom was thought inappropriate. He also rejected the suggestion of a London section for the school website and suggested that MSN Forums might offer alternative opportunities to discuss issues of common concern. Richard reminded the meeting that any parent could e mail him or telephone him at any time to raise concerns.

(d) Queries were raised as to the school's policy regarding exclusions and expulsions. Richard responded that the temporary or permanent exclusion of a student would be viewed with the utmost seriousness but would not be discussed with the general parent body.

(e) Concerns were raised regarding the behaviour of pupils outside School. Richard reported that since becoming Head he had received only 1 complaint about pupil behaviour on a train and 11 complaints about pupil behaviour on the former minibus service operated by Fox Transport (ie not the current service operated by London based parents) which took children directly into the School. He had received 5 calls congratulating him on pupils' train behaviour and 3 about excellent behaviour at theatres. Richard pointed out that there is a chaperone on the coach to monitor students' behaviour.

(f) Some parents were concerned about the effectiveness and image of the School Council. Richard responded that the current Council was very active and had considered a wide range of issues such as road safety, recycling, food, availability of drinking water, pattern of the day and the architectural brief for new buildings. Carly pointed out that the Junior School Council was fully supported by the children, who were all keen to take part, and that she thought they would carry that attitude into the Senior School. Mike added that there had been significant improvements in the functioning of Council over the last two years and that Council now made a very positive contribution to the life of the School, thanks to guidance from senior staff. It was suggested that the school communicate examples of the achievements of the School Council's work to address any misconceptions.

(g) Concerns were raised about the green and pink slips system, in particular there was a feeling that pink slips might have been issued for unavoidable lateness due to late running of trains or buses. Richard said that was not the policy of the School and that the slip policy was monitored by himself and the pastoral team.

(h) .Concerns were expressed that London children were disadvantaged when it came to participating fully in after-school activities because of transport issues. Some parents felt that introducing a free or reduced charge late bus might help, especially as there might otherwise be spare capacity on the late bus. Richard explained that there was generally no spare capacity, as appropriate transport was arranged every day depending on demand, and that a late "coach" was not organised. He emphasised that there were no plans to remove or offer a lower charge for use of the late bus by occasional bus users, bearing in mind the importance of fairness as between the regular users of the coach and other parents. Opportunities for journey sharing to and from London will be improved by the London parent list. Richard, the Chair and James agreed to arrange a meeting to discuss these matters further.

- (i) Queries were raised regarding the lost property system. Richard explained that named lost property was returned to students via their Company Advisor. Unnamed items were held centrally and any student could look for a missing item there. At the end of term, unnamed lost property was displayed for a week in School and, if still unclaimed, was then sent to a charity shop.

**7.** World Café event. The Chair asked for suggestions at the next meeting for a key note speaker and ideas that might be of general interest to the parent body. The event will be open to all parents and will provide an opportunity for parents to meet and discuss issues of importance to them and their children.

**8.** The Secretary explained that amendments to the PC constitution, which was in need of review, had to be brought before a general meeting of the Parents' Circle as the Committee did not have the power to change the constitution. She offered to produce a paper on this for the next meeting.

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on Sunday, 11 January 2009, that being the first Sunday after the start of term, and that all Parents would be welcome to attend.