

Our Ref: PB/yjc

November 2014

To: Members of the Liaison Committee
of the School Parents' Association

Dear Parents,

BROMSGROVE SCHOOL PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

**MINUTES OF THE LIAISON COMMITTEE OF THE
SCHOOL PARENTS' ASSOCIATION**

THURSDAY 13th NOVEMBER 2014

I have pleasure in enclosing the Minutes for the Meeting of the Liaison Committee of the School Parents' Association, held on Thursday 13th November 2014.

Yours sincerely

P St J Bowen

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DEPUTY HEADMASTER

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BROMSGROVE SCHOOL PARENTS' ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF THE LIAISON COMMITTEE OF THE SCHOOL PARENTS' ASSOCIATION
THURSDAY 13th NOVEMBER 2014

1. Attendance

Anita Rose	Sc Chair
Jo Osborne	Sc Treasurer
Barbara Randall	Sc
Katja Dunn	TC
Ritsa Solomou	O
Dawn Hubscher	Ws
Jo Hill	L
Cerys Luckman	L
Sue Weston	Ly/Hz
Bridget Nisbet	Ly
Aileen Staniland	Hx
Delia Stokes	Ws
Mandy Bridgman	WG
Andrew Saker	O/HH

Apologies

Mrs Kay Wilson	Exchange Shop
Bob Stather	WG
Morag Ross	Ws
Jim Bridgman	WG
Karen James	E

School

Mr Philip Bowen	Deputy Headmaster
Mrs Catherine Maund	Assistant Pastoral Head

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 15th May 2014, including Action Plan

The Minutes were approved as read. (It was noted from the last Minutes that the two parents who had visited the dining hall had found some good things to report upon but also had some concerns about the food).

- a. **Chapel Suits** – the APH reported that subject to stock reviews it was likely that suits would be phased out (not bought by L4 September 2015). Present U4 and 5th would continue to wear them.
- b. **Bus Shelter** (See Agenda)
- c. **Day House Refurbishment** – The DHM reported that this was likely to commence in April. Contracts would be out to tender in January. H/TC/L/Ly would be refurbished. The work would be major alterations and with the School's purchase of the Police Station (from Monday November 17th) we would be able to 'decamp' houses whilst work was being undertaken. The exact order of Houses would be dependent on the contractors. Further details would be announced.
- d. **Catering/Nuts Policy** – The DHM reported back after the major concern of a parent; our food was now nut free.
- e. **Gym (5th Form use)** – The DHM reported that we were bound by H & S and the law. 5th Formers under 16 could not use the gym. We also had to have restrictions in place because of intensive use by 6th Formers and externals.
- f. **Car Parking** (See Agenda)
- g. **Sports Tour Kit** – The DHM reported back that tour blazers could be used on Saturdays. Most kit was funded by fund-raising events and was specifically for tours. Kit could be used for practices. It was only right that back at School normal kit should be the norm. A representative believed we had a two year lead in for a major tour to help parents plan and fund but that there was an Australia girls' tour in 2016. The DHM had looked into it – destination not yet confirmed.

3. Raised by School House

School Rugby Shirts

All boys that represent the school other than the A team are expected to wear their school cotton rugby shirts to play matches – most schools that we play have close fitting modern shirts in technical quick-drying fabric - in fact just like those that our A teams wear. There are several issues with this:

- a) *The boys look like scruffy ragamuffins when they step out on the pitch, something out of a previous century – and not a credit to Bromsgrove School.*
- b) *The shirts are faded and out of shape from constant washing.*
- c) *When it rains the shirts become very heavy and uncomfortable for the boys.*
- d) *The shirts are loose and consequently easy for the opponent to grab when tackling.*
- e) *The fact that only the A team get modern kit suitable for modern sports simply reinforces elitism – not something that Bromsgrove would normally endorse. Added to this is the fact that the A team kit is taken away at the end of the match and washed ready for the next game! Perhaps the A teams can have a special badge/stripe on theirs shirts to reflect their achievement.*

- f) *Talking to many parents of B/C team players this is a real 'bug bear' for them. They feel strongly that the shirts should be replaced with modern rugby shirts and would be more than happy to pay for these. There is an expectation that, if picked, the boys should always turn out for matches – please can we make them proud to wear the school shirt.*

This issue has been raised previously at the liaison meeting and one of the reasons given as to why they had not been changed was that the right colour could not be matched – this doesn't seem to be a problem for the A team shirts, can the boys in the B/C/D teams not have the same?

The DHM commented that it was acknowledged that shirts were 'dated'. The U14, U15, U16 'A' teams were now wearing new synthetic ones, they were being trialled for wear & tear, washing etc with a view to rolling them out for all teams. Several representatives noted that this had been raised for some time and they hoped to see all teams wearing new kit in September. There was a strong feeling that the School compared unfavourably with others in this regard and that all teams were important.

School Shop

The ladies running the shop do a sterling job but the sheer volume of kit / uniform and variety of footwear has impacted on accessibility. Once more than 3 parents plus children are in there it does become cramped and uncomfortable.

Were there any long term plans to give more space? Is it necessary to have the tuck shop there on the side given all the new dining facility build or could they use that space for better changing rooms and a proper place to try footwear on?

The DHM reported that some stock would – in due course – be moved to the 'Police Station' to create more space in the shop.

4. Raised by Elmshurst House

Benches

There is still an absence of benches over by the rugby pitches. It is a long time to stand if you are elderly or impaired in any way. Perhaps a bench over that area (or two) would be a good idea. Continuing on this theme. I noticed that there was also not much seating available for match tea, which would make it a long time to stand. It was rather difficult to balance tea and cake whilst standing.

The DHM commented that we could always put out a bench by request. It would be difficult to put out one for each rugby pitch (they were stored away in winter). He would however, discuss it further.

Match Teas

We visited Millfield recently for the rugby and whilst our match teas for parents are quite nice, Millfield's were a lot better, offering a bigger choice of cake and also sandwiches and soup. If we are to be considered as one of the elite schools, perhaps our teas could be given a boost.

The DHM commented at this point on all the catering issues raised.

Some patience was needed. We would soon have an outstanding Dining Hall and kitchens. Of equal importance, the School had decided to appoint an outside catering company. A consultant had lived at school 3 days a week and been very active all term. On Monday 17th November several companies would bid. The Executive, Headmaster, several staff and Senior Boarders would be present and also act as 'tasters'

Regarding the quality of food at present, concerns were noted. It was an interim period but we did not want pupils unhappy and parents concerned. We kept in close touch with pupils via various forums. Visitors to the School (prospective parents & pupils, visiting staff and guests) still commented very favourably on lunch. Queues were unavoidable but perfectly reasonable. The lack of a proper entrance for a large school and the crowded inside areas would soon be a thing of the past. The APH added that sometimes queues inside built up because of getting children in from the rain. It was not true, however, that because of queues pupils had to miss lunch and go elsewhere.

The DHM had met with the consultant and knew of the plans for September (building and food) and had no doubt it would (rather like the new sports facilities) be another major and very exciting landmark for the School and its children.

Tables

Whilst organising the fashion and beauty event for the rugby, we have noticed that there is a lack of large rectangular tables in the school, of about 6ft by 2.5ft. As the hospitality suite is being frequently used for this sort of event, might it be a good idea to buy some more. There are only 12 in the school. The rest have to be made up by hiring tables or pushing exam desks together. I am sure they would come in useful throughout the school.

The DHM would look into this.

5. Raised by Hazeldene House

A Level Changes

We are aware that there are changes to the A level system... again! Am I right in thinking that the present 5th form/Yr 11 will be returning to the traditional 2 year A level course with no AS exams at the end of Year 12? If that is the case please could you advise on the following points:

- a) When are you planning to advise the parents about the A level changes? We have had notification of an IB course meeting and an information leaflet but nothing about A levels yet. The IB is not suitable for my daughter and we are keen to continue down the traditional A level route.*
- a) Have the teaching staff been given any guidance yet on the A level course changes as this will impact on the academic year? Is there any investment planned for INSET courses? The current 5th form will be the trial year for these changes so we are a little anxious.*
- b) What will happen to the usual 'take 4 AS courses and drop to 3 A2 courses at the end of Year 12'? The original 2 year A level course that we parents did, was 3 subjects only in most cases unless you did General Studies as a tag on. I am not sure that I would welcome 4 subjects for 2 years for my daughter. Will she take just 3 subjects from the start of year 12 and if so, will course content/depth change too?*
- c) I note that AS subjects may be 'stand alone qualifications and not contribute to A2'. So how do they get an A2 qualification then?*
- d) Are all subjects changing at the same time? If not, this will affect A level options and indeed university course requirements. It all looks quite a mess at the moment... The documentation I have looked at is quite confusing with lots of 'consultation' going on. All at the expense of the current 5th form.*

The School understood anxiety about the changes, notably for this year's 5th Form. They would face a transitional year with 'reformed' and 'unreformed' subjects. The DHM mentioned various potential scenarios but noted that we had little idea yet what Universities wanted (Cambridge had issued a statement) nor had we yet received the vital specifications. Regarding other Schools, we were part of the Monmouth Group of like-minded schools but schools were all so different. There was as yet no consensus at all.

Mr Ruben had reflected carefully on the present information and what might be right for Bromsgrove. In due course there would be a letter and he would speak at the 6th Form Open Morning in late January but the Headmaster would be looking closely at this in coming weeks and it was premature to say anything definitive on his behalf (and because of national uncertainty). Regarding much of the above, it was in the public domain (the future of AS/A2) but he would prefer a more expert view to reach them. The DHM would not minute all the discussion – there were no final decisions yet and those must come formally to parents and pupils from the right people.

The DHM stressed that – as always – we would be well abreast of events and introduce any new system as well as anyone. Staff would be fully trained through Inset. Guidance to the children (and parents) in coming months (and August especially and onwards if a subject was dropped at some stage) would be thorough and very supportive. Pupils would not of course know anything different when they reached the 6th Form but would be very aware of changes afoot.

It would be discussed with pupils at Head of Year shortly.

It was the role of the School (and parents) to allay any pupil anxiety and to reassure if necessary.

Car Park

Another complaint is the car park, lack of spaces (which are very small) still a problem even with the 6th form not parking there, and there is now not enough spaces at Housman for the 6th form, so where should they park when it is full this concerns me as most of them have only just passed there test and don't want to be rushing around in the morning trying to park in various places.

The DHM stated the obvious – that the School was not built for the motor car, we could never 'solve' the problem completely and at pressure points there would be issues and sometimes gridlock. He added:

- a) The 6th Form had been moved back to HH and spaces were exceptionally tight until the rest of the car park was released late month.
- b) The Police Station provided extra parking for staff and that would help.
- c) In response to various questions – we could not expand onto grass and in any case would not be allowed to; we could not stop 6th Formers driving to School and we liked them parked safely with us though long term we might not have enough space for all.
- d) The House Song had caused chaos – it had run over and clashed with another event; a prep school fixture was on; the whole School came out in one go. We would clear the calendar and staggering of day house departure would be looked at.

A parent noted the huge increase of traffic on Worcester Road especially in the evenings and wondered if a right turn should be stopped. Views differed on this. That would be raised with the Bursar. A mini-roundabout was suggested but the DHM did not think the Council would allow that.

Meals

Please could you bring up some concerns for me, a point about the school lunches being particularly bad, poor quality of food, not enough choice, small portions, especially the pasta, not being allowed anything else with the pasta, running out of jacket potatoes no fillings to put in them some days whilst I appreciate that the dining room is being refurbished the quality of food should not go down to the extent it is now for a school with the standards of Bromsgrove. A point to make is that a lot of girls are now not eating the lunches but going to the tuck shop or going without, some even want to bring packed lunches in! I don't know if you have had any other comments about this.

As discussed above.

6. Raised by Lyttelton House

Exam Re-marks

Could we discuss the matter of parent communications in the context of public exam remarks / reviews. A number of parents in the current L6 have commented on the lack of clarity about the availability, process and risks of remarking. This is also the case when there is a school review of a particular subject - as has recently happened with the RS.

The DHM commented that we could clarify this more clearly for parents. He did refer clearly to it in the End of Term Bulletin in June but we would ensure parents of exam candidates also knew of the policy in August. He did stress that:

- a) Marks could go up as well as down
- b) It was expensive
- c) Sometimes staff spotted an anomaly with a pupil and would contact them.
- d) Rarely – as happened with GCSE RS – there was a problem with the whole set. The Academic Deputy Head had contacted the Board and a remark was done.
- e) It needed to be emphasised that for the Board it was the pupil's mark (not the parent's, pupils were over 16) and staff had to deal directly with them. Parents of course were involved – they paid for it but it was not always possible to go back to parents on every case.

Car park

- a. *Car park - this has been raised by a few parents - the lack of spaces available both in the school car-park and also in Housman for the sixth formers.*
- b. *The pupils all stand at the corner of the actual parents car park, at the junction of Oakley/Elmshurst houses. From here they can clearly see their parents cars as they 'attempt' to drive round and/briefly park to collect their children at the same time that external users arrive/depart for external swimming lessons, gym use etc. Early identification of their parent's car would help alleviate the miserable congestion in the car park and the resulting issues in the main road too!*

As discussed.

Bus Shelter

Meanwhile the lovely new rain shelter is poorly sited on the wrong side of the bus turning circle, discreetly hidden from public view and camouflaged nicely by some sort of pampas grass. Is this to encourage parents to drive round the forbidden bus turning circle or just to tuck the structure out of the way least it spoil the view of the school? Either way it serves as a waste of money and campaigning time....

Please, please could common sense prevail and the shelter be re-sited in the location where our wet and cold children actually have to wait and can actually see the cars? A brief visual survey at pick up time would have pinpointed the crucial spot and saved much time and money.

The shelter itself is a tasteful structure and nicely branded in corporate style as (as school was so keen to ensure).

The DHM would raise with the Bursar again. Parents loved the design but felt it should be near the car park where they were closer to seeing parents arrive and that the present siting encouraged some cars to pick up on the road that should not be used by cars.

7. Raised by Lupton House

Parent's Evenings

Over the years Parents' evenings for particular year groups have been held on two evenings which gives greater flexibility for parental and pupil attendance. Last year and this they have only been offered on one evening. Is it possible to have them offered on two evenings again (shared with another year group, as in the past, so this does not increase the time commitment for staff)?

Another plea connected to Parents' evenings: please could the teachers' tables be spread further down the hall so there is ample room to navigate around them. The lack of space this year meant there was little or no privacy for individuals talking to staff and it also slowed down the process of getting where you needed to go as the rows quickly became blocked. There was plenty of space to move the tables down.

- a) The DHM commented that we had been sorry to change the system; it had been much appreciated by parents though few schools offered two nights a year. It had been necessary to change. Regarding the Parents' Evenings doubling up, the L4 had always been stand alone; 5th & L6th were uncoupled due to the end of L6 modules and introduction of L6 internal exams a bit later in the term; 5th Form were 5 terms through a 6 term course so January worked well for them. For L6th 2 terms through a three term course there was a logic to pushing the Parents' Evening back. It actually helped staff – it meant more staff could be free (eg. some taught U6th but not U4th) and it made it easier to staff boarding houses. It was also easier to mentally focus on one age group.
- b) The layout of desks had been a mistake and would not happen again.

8. Raised by Elmshurst House

Plaques/School Meals

Elmshurst House would like a name plaque above their door to identify themselves to visitors and guests, and to also give the building some identity as it is unclear as you walk past exactly what it is.

The DHM would ensure this happened.

Secondly, several of the boys in the house have expressed their concerns about the quality of the food again at meal times.

As discussed.

9. Raised by Walters House

Car Park

The issue of the car park at the end of the school day. Some days it is absolutely appalling, people parked all over the place not in designated bays making it almost impossible to navigate through the car park and if you can get through it can take ages to get back to the road as traffic turning right out of the school cannot get out easily. Also on several occasions the back up of traffic to the car park has resulted in the main road almost coming to a halt. A excellent example of this was the House song evening where the whole of Bromsgrove ended up being grid locked. I think the school have to look seriously at this issue as not only are the parents like me extremely fed up with it but also the residents of Bromsgrove, rightly so! (This is from an email direct from a parent but felt strongly by many. I know it was recognised in one of the newsletters recently and there has been a visible presence of car parking attendants this week, but the knock on effect to Worcester Road and town in general is significant. The biggest issue seems to be turning right out of the school gate).

As discussed

Website

The convoluted web site process to try and find sports reports seems to have taken a giant leap backwards, particularly Prep reports.

It is very frustrating that what was a fairly good reportage system in, or attached to weekly news letters seems to have migrated to the present culture of '20 steps to find it, if you are lucky' sports directory. Can someone not come up with a shortcut please? I've spent an hour trying to find Hockey Tour reports this weekend to no avail. (email)

The DHM could not speak for Prep issues but several representatives needed the link put again in his Newsletter. Those letters were being archived and it did take time to find it again.

Life-Saving

Could you follow up on my request for the pupils to learn basic life-saving skills. There was a thought that it may already be covered and that Mr Mullan would be asked. My daughter is doing Medicine at Birmingham Medical School and in one of her lectures on Basic Life Skills they mentioned the fact that they wanted to eventually get all schools teaching BLS as part of the curriculum, and repeated every year so that the students learnt these value skills that may mean one day they may save a life. Just being able to do CPR until an ambulance arrives for instance, knowing what to do if someone is choking and how to put someone in the recovery position are all simple skills that could save a life. St John's Ambulance have a campaign on this and are happy to come in to schools if required, maybe the Walters boys could trial a training session? (Parent who mentioned it to my House PA in September).

The DHM welcomed the suggestion but with a school of 900 and so busy academically and XC (and with all the other things we had to do eg. Personal and Social Education) it would not be feasible. Some did do this through D of E and there was a First Aid course available. We would at least consider if we could do more in this important area.

Meals

Please could we have an update on the school dining arrangements and issue that was raised last year on the quality/quantity of the meals. A parent also mentioned the length of the queues for hot meals which means their child is regularly 'opting out'.

As discussed.

10. Date of Next Meeting Thursday 5th March.

11. General Matters

The Treasurer presented her accounts.

Funds were approved for D of E, the Play, a Boarders' Trip to a Chinese, the electric car, the 1914-18 display in Humanities which will remain to 2018 and was warmly applauded by parents at the recent Open Day and the robots activity.

ACTION PLAN

1. DHM to ensure day parents know of eventual refurbishment plans.
2. DHM to ensure an early decision re girls' sports tour is conveyed.
3. DHM to discuss rugby shirts with senior colleagues.
4. On catering DHM would discuss present issues with the Bursar eg. Match Teas.
5. DHM to look into the issues of tables.
6. DHM to discuss with Headmaster/Academic Deputy the best way and when to notify parents in more detail re Exam Changes
7. DHM to continue discussing car park with Bursar.
8. DHM to ensure policy on re-marks was more widely known.
9. DHM to discuss Bus Shelter with the Bursar.
10. DHM to re-publish website link re sport.
11. DHM to ensure plaque for E was erected.
12. DHM to look further into life-saving.

