

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 19 APRIL 2018

CONNECT (SCOTTISH PARENT TEACHER COUNCIL) – MAISONDIEU PRIMARY SCHOOL

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Connect (formerly Scottish Parent Teacher Council, SPTC) is an organisation that “strives to make parental involvement in Scottish education as good as it can be”.
- 1.2 Maisondieu Primary School in Brechin has engaged with Connect for the past three years on their Partnership Schools Programme. During this time the school has gone from strength to strength with regard to their engagement and collaboration with parents and the wider community, whose presence in the school is clearly evident on a daily basis. Such is the success of the school, the head teacher and one of her members of staff were invited to present at a Partnership Schools meeting in Edinburgh and the school was visited by John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in January 2018.
- 1.3 The success is due, in no small part, to the vision and leadership of head teacher Ruthanna Chalmers and her staff, notably Lynette Mimiec (now head teacher at Lochside Primary School in Montrose) and Shona Seaman.

2. MAISONDIEU PRIMARY SCHOOL – PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS

- 2.1 Parents, carers and members of the wider community now figure predominantly in the life and work of the school, in both practical and strategic ways.

Parents as Learners - There are regular Family Learning workshops in French and Numeracy, Speakeasy sessions at which parents can learn about and discuss aspects of sexual health and Early Years Curriculum Evenings, at which parents not only learn about what their children will be learning, but also how their children will be taught. The school has used its PEF money sessions to support children and families learning together at home, and holds training sessions so that parents are better equipped to cope with matters relating to internet safety, leading to better outcomes for young people

Parents as Policy Makers - The school's Behaviour, Homework and Sexual Health Policies have been co-developed with parents, as well as the school's wellbeing Strategy.

Parents as Evaluators - Parental feedback is sought on every aspect of the school and this is driving change, particularly on aspects of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Parents are asked to respond to questions in relation to the school's self-evaluation and to evaluate the School Improvement Plan as well as determine actions to progress.

Parents as Agents of Change - Through the Partnership Schools programme parents are now leading change within the school in terms of 1+2 Languages, Numeracy, Careers and Reading, and helping to shape the curriculum. The whole school community worked together to establish the 'Maisondieu Deal' an outline of parent, staff and pupil expectations about learners' experiences and the school's learning provision. The Deal forms the basis of the school's curriculum rationale. Having a joint approach to school improvement means that the whole school community work together to plan, implement and evaluate improvements to achieve best possible learning and life skill outcomes for our learners.

Parents as Co-Educators - The school provides parents/carers with homework support packs containing materials, resources and handy hints for literacy and numeracy. Maths homework jotters contain explanations in parent-friendly language and examples to work through. There are 3-way interviews at Parent evenings where the child leads aspects of the learning conversation; the parent and child can then go home to discuss the child's next steps in greater

detail. Parents of Early Years children are given messages about the importance of literacy and numeracy and how this can be best supported at home. Parents of upper stages have been coming in to the classroom to experience learning first hand; some have delivered aspects of the curriculum.

- 2.2 The work that is carried out by small groups of parents reaches out to all in newsletters, bulletins, questionnaires, Twitter and there is a highly effective Parent Voice Facebook page that reaches out across the school community. Informal 'Biscuits and Blether' drop in sessions for parents and families are extremely popular and are an excellent chance for families and school staff to address topical issues. The school has established very positive links with families from other countries and cultures. Starting with very informal meetings the school has built solid relationships; this has resulted in a celebration of cultures within the school community. Parents have delivered lessons which every pupil in the school has participated in; parents have shared their language, songs, books and stories and have helped to translate school letters and bulletins.
- 2.3 Every pupil in P3 – P7 is involved in a leadership group. The purpose of these groups is to make connections with parents and community, and to make a difference. The Reading Group has collaborated with the local secondary school and has arranged for boxes of books to be left in community spaces and shops for everyone to share. The Travel Group has worked with the local police to promote safe parking around the school. The Parliament Group has been working on an outdoor space that will allow parents to hold workshops.
- 2.4 Pupils are comfortable and familiar with parents in and around the school both during and outwith the school day. They understand the benefits of parents' knowledge and expertise in their school journey. During Maths Week pupils thought about creative approaches to homework tasks; parents tweeted about how they use Maths in their jobs. There are whole-school events where parents come along to speak about their jobs. Parents speak openly about how comfortable they feel about engaging with the school, in a variety of ways. They feel included, respected and valued, and have opportunities to contribute in a very real and direct way to their children's education. They can see how their inputs directly feed into change and improvements in the school. Parents and teachers communicate easily and openly, and there are opportunities for pupils to engage directly with the parent forum. As relations with parents have strengthened, the school has been able to tap into community networks, further embedding Maisondieu in the life of the town. As an example, year groups have been invited to join in with community-based projects like the revitalisation of the Inch and Skinners Burn.
- 2.5 Addressing Mental Wellbeing, its impact and how to embed an 'Ask once, get help' strategy in the school could not have been possible without developing a culture of trust between the school and parents. The school is viewed by the parents as a safe environment in which to discuss and explore tricky subjects, supported by peers, school staff, professionals and subject specialists.

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