



Glasgow City Council

Wellbeing, Empowerment, Community and Citizen Engagement City Policy Committee

Report by Executive Director of Education

Contact: Donnie Macleod Head of Service

Briefing note on the Petition

Purpose of Report:

To provide information on the Petition "Pupils wellbeing during COVID".

Recommendation:

The Committee is requested to note the contents of the report.

1. Purpose of report

To provide information on the Petition – "Pupils wellbeing during COVID".

2. Background

2.0 St Paul's High School has been adhering to Scottish Government guidance and advice for secondary schools since August 2020 including strict measures around social distancing and managing the safe movement and flow of large numbers of young people in and around the building. In preparation for the school re-opening, the school revised playground/social areas for each year group from S1-S6.

2.1 National advice has repeatedly recommended that the package of measures that must be put in place to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus includes:

- In both primary and secondary settings, the preference should be to avoid large gatherings and crowded spaces and, as much as possible.
- To keep pupils within the same groups for the duration of the school day.
- Reviewing timetabling to reduce movement of groups of pupils around the school estate as much as possible.

- Two metre distancing should remain in place wherever possible between adults, and between adults and children who are not from the same household.
 - Distancing should be adapted and used alongside other strategies to reduce transmission.
 - Minimising sharing of equipment / utensils / toys / books, use of smaller groups and more outdoor activities.
- 2.2 The school is continuing to encourage young people to use the outdoor areas at intervals and lunchtimes as part of their Covid-19 mitigations. It is widely accepted that the spread of the virus is less likely to take place outdoors, and, as the outdoor areas in the school offer more space, it is possible for different friendship groups within the same year groups to physically distance.
- 2.3 All S1 young people are able to remain in the usual secure playground area where they are supervised by support and teaching staff at all times during break and lunchtime. There are substantial, covered seating areas and play areas for the young people and even a free-standing service “Hut” operated by catering staff to serve food which is only for S1 pupils to use to ensure they get priority for both lunch and break-time snacks.
- 2.4 The school dining area is not of a sufficient size to cope with the large numbers of young people in S2-S6 to allow access at the same time. Therefore, the school operates a staggered break and lunch time to allow all young people access to the food served and to eat it in the diner. This requires a rotational approach to make it fair and equitable for all S2-S6 pupils.
- 2.5 To mitigate against extreme weather the school also operates a wet weather contingency plan including supervised classroom areas available for pupils and a wide range of daily lunch-time clubs for young people to sign up for. Most boys elect to play football in all weathers when restrictions allow.
- 2.6 As well as careful management of the COVID 19 situation, the school is also managing an over capacity situation which necessitates the staggered break/lunch time approach. The school capacity is 940 and currently has a roll of 1035 pupils which is also projected to rise significantly over the next few years. The school awaits a sizable extension and building work is due to commence in 2021.
- 2.7 Since August 2020, the school has had very few concerns raised with them from young people, parents and carers about their arrangements. Overwhelmingly, families have been understanding, supportive and grateful for the efforts the school has put in place to ensure all young people are safe and happy. To date the school has only received two contacts from concerned parents about these lunch space related issues. This includes Ms Thain who raised the petition.
- 2.8 Both the headteacher and her Year Head deputy headteacher as well as the Pastoral Care teacher have responded to Ms Thain on numerous occasions

by phone, by email and face-to-face interactions, outside the school gates to try to address her on-going concerns.

- 2.9 The headteacher has also given some pupils, including the Ms Thain's daughters, an earlier lunch permission pass as they did not like to stand in the S1 lunch queue with all other 200 pupils. The staff then agreed that they could go off campus at lunch. It should be noted that this is not in line with Education Services' advice that S1 pupils should stay on campus for their safety and to promote access to healthy eating and they have also encouraged pupils including the girls to access any lunch club they choose. This was a Council policy which was agreed by the then Council's Executive Committee.
- 2.10 Overall, in response to this petition, the school's policy has been and continues to be one where they are keen to find any and every means possible to resolve issues brought to them by any concerned parent/young person and to ensure all staff take a similar approach. Regarding this particular complaint, the school is of the view that this concerned parent (alongside some others) are actually not in favour of the "Safer Schools" lunch policy promoted by Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government and supported by both the school's parent forum and the Parent Council. This advice to parents and young people which outlines the importance of keeping all S1 young people in at lunchtime for safety and wellbeing reasons. We recognise that not all parents or pupils may support this. However, for the headteacher and her staff, the priority remains the safety of all the young people in the school particularly the current S1 cohort. Overall, staff of St Paul's High School are very disappointed that there has been a public petition against the school.
- 2.11 The school has worked in good faith and has worked within the government recommendations and COVID restrictions as best it can to try to resolve the issues. During the current global pandemic all the staff continue to be grateful for parents/carers who work in partnership with the school to resolve any issues for the benefit of all children and young people.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 The school will continue to engage with the pupil council to resolve the issues highlighted in the petition and seek the young people's representatives' views as to how best this can be achieved within the limitations and restrictions at play. As part of this effort, staff will continue to explore the potential to augment indoor seating capacity of those S1 pupils who would like to take advantage of this facility particularly in inclement weather.
- 3.2 The school will continue to explore the challenges presented with both the parent forum and parent council, seeking their support and influence to ensure a satisfactory solution can be secured while taking account of the most up to date guidance from the government.

- 3.3 There is an extension planned for the school. The headteacher will liaise with the architects for the extension to explore the potential for increased flexibility within the planned accommodation.