**Breadalbane Academy Parent
Council Operating Manual**

This operating manual describes the rules and procedures which govern how Breadalbane Academy Parent Council (BAPC) operates.

Throughout this document we refer to “parents”. Please understand this to mean “parents and carers”.

This document does not cover rules of conduct. For the BAPC code of conduct, see the document BAPC Values\_FINAL.docx.

**1. The function and role of the parent council**

The parent council is a statutory body, the role of which is set out in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006:

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/section/8

https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-scottish-schools-parental-involvement-act-2006

In brief, the act says that the role of the parent council is:

* To represent the views and concerns of parents to the school on matters such as:
	+ the standards of education in the school,
	+ the quality of education which the school provides,
	+ the exercise by the council of its functions, and
	+ such other matters as appear to the council to be of interest to parents
* To promote positive engagement between school, parents and pupils.
* To keep parents up to date on the activities of the parent council.

**2. How does the parent council carry out this role**

To do the job outlined above, Breadalbane Academy Parent Council:

* Holds monthly meetings, to which all parents and school staff are invited.
* Publicises those meetings, so parents have the chance to submit agenda items, ask questions and to attend.
* Maintains communications channels — including but not limited to the website, public email addresses and social-media channels — which parents can use to get in touch with us.
	+ And we regularly monitor these communications channels.
* Uses school communications channels, such as school emails, newsletters and, when appropriate, group call to:
	+ Publicise parent-council activities
	+ Invite parental input and involvement
* Holds occasional special meetings to address specific issues or challenges.

**3. Office holders**

At the AGM each year, the parent council will appoint — after a vote among parent-council members with voting rights (see the BAPC constitution) — the following office holders:

**A chairperson**

The role of the chairperson is to:

* To compile an agenda for each meeting, soliciting input from parents to make sure the agenda accurately reflects their concerns and questions.
* To impartially chair meetings, ensuring meetings are civil and that everyone has a chance to be heard and no viewpoint is either privileged or disadvantaged.
* To ensure that everyone attending can understand the discussion, for instance by asking speakers to explain jargon, summarise historical points others may not know about etc.
* To ensure that meetings run to schedule, in an orderly fashion, and that all the agenda points can be discussed in the allotted time.
* To follow up between meetings with those who have agreed to take on action points and ensure they have what they need to succeed and that the actions are carried out.
* To liaise with the school, PKC and any other bodies with which the parent council must work to meet its aims.

If the parent council is to command respect and trust, it’s very important that the chairperson is seen to be a neutral figure. To this end:

* The chair should not shape the agenda or discussions to suit their own ideas or aims.
* The chair will not usually have a vote, unless a casting vote is required to break a tie.
* The chair will avoid expressing an opinion on matters under discussion.

If the chair has strong feelings about a matter on the agenda of a meeting, he or she can ask someone else to chair that meeting. This shouldn’t happen more than twice in any school year. If it does, it’s probably the wrong time for that person to be chair. He or she should propose themselves as head of a subgroup dedicated to the issue in question and save being chair for later on in their child’s school career.

**A secretary**

The secretary shall support the chair in ensuring the smooth running of the parent council. At its most basic, this involves:

* Taking the minutes and producing them in the agreed format.
* Distributing them to the school and BACP members for checking.
* Posting them to the website, from which anyone can access them.

Other duties, by agreement between the chair, the committee and the secretary could include booking facilities for meetings, dealing with PKC grant applications and so on. This is for the committee and the secretary to agree upon when someone takes on the role.

**The treasurer**

The treasurer shall:

* Exercise general financial oversight, ensuring that parent-council funds are only spent after a minuted vote and for the purposes intended by the committee.
* Assist the chair in planning and budgeting, to ensure that parent council has the funds to meet its goals and obligations, as minuted in the meetings.
* To keep accurate records and accounts, with the necessary documents and receipts.
* To submit these, checked and signed by a bookkeeper, to each AGM for approval. And to submit them to the PKC, when required for the annual grant application.

**Other roles**

BAPC can appoint other office holders, for instance sub-group leads, and define their roles, at its discretion. Any new office should only be created after a discussion in a full quorate meeting of the parent council. The person who wishes to fill that office will submit their candidacy to parent-council members, who will vote on the matter.

**4. Managing BAPC communications channels**

Office holders and people to whom they or the committee delegate the task may use BAPC communications channels to promote and further the legitimate business of the parent council, in accordance with the minuted aims and decisions of the parent council.

Anyone using BAPC communications channels agrees to do so in a manner which is respectful and courteous towards everyone with whom they interact and which promotes and protects the reputation of BAPC as a responsible and useful organisation within the community.

Never post or send anything which is defamatory, inflammatory, uncivil or otherwise in conflict with the BAPC values, as listed in BAPC Values\_FINAL.docx.

For security reasons, the login details for these channels are not listed here. If you need access to one or more communications channel, please speak to the chairperson.

When you use any of these communications channels, please take care to check your work for spelling, punctuation and grammar before you hit ‘send’ or press ‘post’.

At the time of writing, BAPC has the following communications channels:

**Email**

* + hello@breadalbaneparents.com — a general email address
	+ chair@breadalbaneparents.com — the chair’s email address
	+ treasurer@breadalbaneparents.com — the treasurer’s email address
	+ asngroup@breadalbaneparents.com — the ASN group’s email address

There are also defunct addresses, for instance for Estates Review of 2019-21. If other office holders or subgroups want their own email address, they should make a request to the parent council.

We created these email addresses to:

* Promote organisational memory and allow a smooth handover between one officeholder and the next. Each successor has the correspondence of their predecessors.
* To allow officeholders to keep parent-council business separate from their personal life and personal email address.

The rules for using the email address are as follows:

* The four main office holders (chair, vice- or co-chair, treasurer and secretary all have access to the main email address: chair@breadalbaneparents.com.
* The sub-groups will control their own email addresses according to whatever rules they agree. But they will give office holders access on request.
* Any person or group using a parent council email address agrees to:
	+ use that email address to further the agreed aims of the parent council, in accordance with the minuted decisions of the parent council or subgroup.
	+ To maintain intact any detailed correspondence taken on behalf of the parent council unless privacy rules dictate that these must be destroyed.
		- In this case, the person in charge of the email account should notify the chair that he or she intends to destroy the correspondence and why, without divulging the confidential information in that correspondence.

**PLEASE NOTE:** the purpose of all office holders having access to email addresses on request is to ensure transparency and accountability while also ensuring the emails aren’t missed. It does not mean that everyone will actively use every email address they have access to.

Usually, there will only be one nominated person who manages the email address (see section 5 below for more on this). If a specific incoming email is better handled by someone else in the group, that person will forward it to them.

The rules for using the website are as follows:

* Use the website to further the minuted aims and decisions of the parent council.
* Ensure that anything you post is accurate and correct.
* Be civil and ensure that what you post reflects well on BAPC.

**The website**

The BAPC website is http://www.breadalbaneparents.com. The parent council uses it to:

* Provide details such as the time, date and venue of the year’s meetings.
* Explain what the parent council does and how it can help parents and pupils.
* Keep parents informed of school and BAPC business.
* Promote BAPC and school events and initiatives.
* List ways in which parents can contact us.

**Social media channels**

At the time of writing this, BAPC maintains:

* An open Facebook group.
* A main BAPC WhatsApp channel
* WhatsApp channels for individual classes in the primary school.

We use social media channels to:

* Publicise BAPC school events and initiatives
* Publicise third-party events, initiatives and services which may be of value to parents and pupils (for instance, PKC schemes, open days etc.)
* Build a rapport and relationship with parents and the school community (publicising good news, congratulating pupils and teachers on their achievements — and so on)
* Encourage and solicit parent feedback, ideas, opinions inputs and complaints.

The rules for using the website are as follows:

* Use social channels to further the minuted aims and decisions of the parent council.
* Ensure that anything you post is accurate and correct.
* Be civil and ensure that what you post reflects well on BAPC.
* BAPC social-media channels are for the promotion of BAPC aims and projects. Please do not express opinions individuals, organisations or events outside of BAPC’s remit.

**5. Communicating with the school**

BAPC aims to build a good working relationship with school staff. This can involve regular communication, particularly about common projects and goals.

But parent council office holders and members must also bear in mind that time spent communicating with us, is time school staff can’t spend working with or for pupils.

We should aim to be as efficient as possible in all our communications. To this end:

* All communications for the main parent council should go through the chairperson, unless otherwise agreed with the school (for instance, for a particular project).
* Each sub-group should nominate someone who will communicate with the school on its behalf, if it is relevant and necessary for that group to communicate directly with the school.
* For each person in BAPC empowered to communicate with the school, the school will nominate a point person on the staff.

All communications will then be channelled through the chair or through the relevant other BAPC office holder or sub-group member, as agreed with the school.

**6. Joint working groups**

Sometimes the school and BAPC create joint working groups, for instance the communications project of 2016-2019, the anti-bullying working group of 2022 — and so on.

To ensure that these are effective, we suggest the following guidelines:

* Each working group will be created to achieve a specific goal, which the school and BAPC will put in writing when the group is formed.
	+ The group will also agree a timeline for its activities and a deadline by which it aims to achieve its final goal.
	+ After this goal is achieved, the group will dissolve, turn into a normal BACP subgroup (if its members aren’t drawn from one) or agree to continue, to pursue a new goal.
* The membership of each working group should, unless school and BAPC agree otherwise, contain roughly equal numbers of school staff and parent council members.
	+ As a rough guide we should aim for groups of between six to eight people, with parity from each side, plus or minus one.
* Each working group will keep minutes of every meeting. These can be detailed or simply record actions and decisions. It’s up to the group to decide.
* Once a working group has been constituted, it is closed to new members, unless by agreement between school and BAPC.
	+ If more parents want to get involved, BAPC members may consider creating a subgroup which can meet without staff to which the BAPC members of the working group can report.

**PLEASE NOTE:** a joint working group between the school and the parent council is not the same as a parent council sub-group. The parent council can create a sub-group to deal with any issue that is a matter of concern to parents. That group can meet whenever it wants and control its own membership. A joint-working group could draw its members from and report back to a sub-group. But it is not the same as a sub-group.

**7. Handling parents’ questions and requests**

It’s important that the parent council responds to parent requests and questions in a timely manner. Everyone who agrees to manage a communications channel should monitor it regularly and deal with parent communications in a timely manner.

How we deal with a communication depends on its nature. Not every parent query becomes an agenda item.

The first thing to ask when a communication arrives, is whether it properly falls under the parent council’s remit (see section 1 and the links to the relevant legislation and guidance). If it does not, try to direct the parent to the person or institution that can help them.

If the query is relevant to parent council, possible actions include:

* Putting the issue on the agenda of the next meeting, or if it’s not time sensitive, on the agenda of a later meeting in the session.
* Forwarding the query to the school and asking the school to provide a response or an answer in a timely manner. Follow-up actions may include:
	+ Putting the issue on the agenda or raising it under matters arising, if it impacts more than just one family or child.
	+ Simply forwarding the school’s answer to the parent who raised the query, if the issue doesn’t impact other pupils or parents.
* Raising the issue with PKC or another body if the matter in question falls within that body’s remit and not the school’s (for instance, improvements to road safety around the campus).
	+ Before raising an issue in this way with an outside body, the parent council office holder should always let the school know, as a matter of courtesy, and check whether the school wants to be involved in the conversation. Sometimes the school won’t want to be and it may be better if it is not (because the parent council, for instance, will have a freer hand than the school could, but we should still ask).
* Escalating to the PKC or a higher authority: in almost every conceivable normal circumstance, we should do this through the school. The normal escalation process is:
	+ Receive a query or input from a parent.
	+ Raise the matter with the school and ask for the issue to be resolved.
	+ If the school cannot achieve this alone, because it needs resources or authorisation from PKC (or another body) ask the school to seek these immediately and to keep the parent council informed of progress and expected turnaround times.
		- The parent council will then keep the parent involved, either independently (if the parent has asked to be anonymous) or with the school.
	+ Repeat until the issue is resolved.
* Only in the most exceptional and serious circumstances would BAPC escalate an issue to PKC or another official body without going through the school. If we need to do this:
	+ All the office holders should be involved in the decision to do so, which should be minuted, with the minutes agreed and signed off by all office holders.

**ANONYMITY:** before raising any issue a parent brings to us with the school, the parent council should check to see if that parent wishes to remain anonymous. If they do, we should respect that in all our communications with the school and any other individual or institution.

**8. Conflicts of interest**

To protect the integrity of the BAPC’s decision-making process, to enable our stakeholders to have confidence in our integrity, all volunteers and office holders must avoid any conflict of interest or an impression that one exists. If you feel you have a conflict of interest, you must inform the chair immediately. If the chair feels he or she has a conflict of interest, he or she must inform the other office holders immediately.

For more on this topic, and an explanation of what might constitute a conflict of interest, see section 6 of the BAPC constitution.

**9. Dealing with complaints**

If a parent has a complaint about the parent council or a member of the parent council, they should be encouraged to email the chair. If the complaint is about the chair, the parent should contact another office holder.

The parent council will then act in a timely manner and in good faith to determine whether the complaint has any substance and if so, what remedial action BAPC must take to rectify its error.

If, after this process is exhausted, it’s impossible to reach a resolution which satisfies all parents, BAPC will escalate the matter to the headteacher for independent arbitration.