

EDUCATION REFORM: IMPROVING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND STRENGTHENING PUPIL VOICE

1. Our current education reforms are seeking to create a genuinely school and teacher-led system, centred around the child. As a result, decisions that shape the education of young people will be made in classrooms, schools and establishments, by those working with young people, their parents and communities.

2. [*Empowering Schools: A Consultation on the Provisions of the Education \(Scotland\) Bill*](#), launched on 7 November, details the key policies which will be included in the forthcoming Education Bill. Whilst the Panel have previously discussed the introduction of the Headteachers' Charter and Regional Improvement Collaboratives, this meeting provides an opportunity to discuss two other prominent themes in the Bill:

- improving *parental and community engagement* in school life and learning; and
- strengthening *the voice of children and young people* by promoting pupil participation.

Parental Engagement

3. Evidence shows that parental engagement in learning has a positive effect on children's achievement, which is why it is one of our key drivers in the National Improvement Framework. We already have a strong basis for parents to be involved in the life and work of their child's school through the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

4. The reforms contained within the Bill build on the recommendations of the National Parent Forum of Scotland's review of the 2006 Act which included a call for evidence and a survey of parents, teachers and pupils. The recommendations, and proposals outlined here, seek to embed the significant good practice and culture which is already evident in many settings, whilst strengthening the focus on strong collaboration and consultation between headteachers and parents. We are also taking forward a number of non-legislative actions to support improved parental engagement including ensuring that all schools will have access to a home/school link worker and developing a National Action Plan on parental involvement, parental engagement and family learning

5. The Bill proposes to make a number of changes to strengthen, improve and extend the 2006 Act including expanding relevant aspects of the Act, to increase involvement of parents from early learning and childcare settings, providing a stronger focus on parental engagement in learning within the definition of parental involvement/engagement and strengthening the duties at local authority level in regard to parental involvement strategies. We have outlined below the key reforms of note to headteachers and schools.

5.1 *Strengthen responsibilities for headteachers to collaborate with the Parent Council on substantive matters of school policy and school improvement planning.* Parental stakeholders, and the 2006 Act Review, pointed to very proactive approaches from many headteachers who draw their Parent Councils into substantive issues relating to the school, attainment,

improvement plans and policies. They also pointed to a “gatekeeper” approach from some headteachers, whereby the Council performs a fund-raising role only. At present, the 2006 Act underpins what could be described as “one-way” communications from the headteacher to the Council through reporting or attendance at Council meetings. We propose to amend the relevant duties in the Act in order to require headteachers to engage in collaborative working relationships with the Council. We intend to specify that this collaboration should focus on substantive matters such as school improvement and school policies. This is not intended to prevent or dilute the very important role that Councils play in relation to fund-raising and supporting a positive school ethos, but it is intended to re-focus Councils on playing a substantive role in informing matters of attainment and achievement. This will provide balance to the Headteachers’ Charter, which will give headteachers’ greater flexibility and discretion, by requiring headteachers to demonstrate collaborative leadership with the parent body.

5.2 Strengthen relationships between headteachers and the wider Parent Forum. As not all parents will be able to, or may wish to, join the Parent Council, it is important that there is sufficient provision to ensure schools are engaging more widely with parents. This will be reflected in the Bill by ensuring headteachers take appropriate steps to work in partnership with the wider Parent Forum in tandem with their engagement with the Council. In doing so, we will retain flexibility for headteachers to work with parents in the ways which are reflective of their own local circumstance.

5.3 More meaningful reporting to the Parent Council and Parent Forum. At present, headteachers are required to report once per year to the Parent Council about various matters of school policy and performance. To ensure a more meaningful and regular flow of communications we would like to increase this to reporting once per term, with an additional requirement for a report to be made once per year to the Parent Forum. We will also seek to ensure effective and regular communication with the Forum about the life and work of the school.

5.4 Update and clarify legal definitions of parental involvement and engagement. We are conscious that definitions and understanding has evolved in the ten years that have elapsed since the 2006 Act. Parental stakeholders have pointed out that the headteacher’s responsibilities with respect to parental involvement and engagement cover a wider territory than that currently covered under the 2006 Act. We propose, therefore, to update the legal definitions and to bring clarity to the meaning of parental involvement (formal representation via the Parental Council) and parental engagement (in learning).

6. Panel members may wish to consider:

- *What are your thoughts on our proposals for strengthening duties on headteachers to collaborate with their Parent Council on substantial matters of school policy?*

- *What are the types of decisions which you feel would benefit from collaboration with the Parent Council?*
- *How can we appropriately and practically ensure schools are engaging with all parents, not just the Parent Council? What types of policies or plans could the wider Parent Forum contribute to?*
- *Are the increased reporting proposals reasonable and practicable?*

Pupil Participation

7. Pupil participation and learner engagement are already vital aspects of Curriculum for Excellence and, through our reform agenda, we want to embed these principles and good practice across Scottish education. We also want to build on the feedback we received from young people in our *Governance Review* consultation. There, young people told us that they wanted greater opportunities to influence the life and work of their school and to have a real opportunity to shape their experience.

8. We propose to introduce a requirement on headteachers to support children and young people's participation in the life and work of their school. We envisage that this duty would be accompanied by overarching principles which headteachers should have regard to when discharging this duty. Legislation can be a fairly "blunt instrument" to define principles, and so we are exploring other vehicles where we can set these principles out, including through the GTCS standards. The principles that we are currently exploring are:

8.1 *Collaboration and dialogue.* This reflects the importance of a partnership approach to gathering and sharing the views of pupils. Pupils should be provided with safe opportunities to express a view.

8.2 *Relevance.* This reflects the importance of pupils' participation covering issues that are meaningful to the pupils and relevant to their wellbeing, attainment and achievement.

8.3 *Inclusion.* This reflects the importance of gathering a wide range of pupil views and taking reasonable and practicable steps to provide a "voice" to all pupils regardless of socio-economic background, gender, disability, ethnicity and other key characteristics.

8.4 *Influence.* This reflects that the views expressed by pupils should be listened to and considered.

9. The intention is that the duty in relation to pupil participation will be a general duty. Rather than prescribe specific detailed mechanisms that will be required in every school (for instance, Pupil Councils) it will be for individual head teachers and schools to determine the best way to meet the over-arching duty. To support schools, Education Scotland have drafted new guidance on learner participation which will be published shortly. We would see this guidance and further support provided through the Regional Improvement Collaboratives as helping to guide implementation of, and reinforce, the overall legal duty.

10. Panel members may wish to consider

- *What are your thoughts on our proposals for enhancing pupil participation in schools?*
- *Is the proposed new duty reasonable and practicable?*
- *How can we appropriately and practically ensure schools are engaging with all pupils?*

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