

Response from the Parentzone - Parental Involvement questionnaire

Name: Morag Bramwell

Responding as: An individual

Individual: Yes

Confidentially: Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address Behalf of groups:

Sharing responses / future engagement: Yes

Question 1: Yes.

Question 2: Yes.

Question 3: In the Highlands, the head of the Education service, xxxxxxxxxx, is also the head of Culture and Leisure services. There is no separate development plan for the education department, and so what we have is, in my view, unsatisfactory, because its stated objectives are too unspecific (therefore easier to achieve) and aren't always specifically related to education. The new SPLs should be presented in a separate document to avoid similar problems.

Question 4: I agree that School Boards need to be replaced. Most parents don't get involved, and I think this is partly because of the "high-powered" image of School Boards, and not having a voice on the board unless it is through an elected representative (who may not accurately represent their views, or may not represent them at all!). Parents wrongly think that PTAs are just about fundraising, and often most of the discussions at PTAs do centre around this. Parents do need some way of exploring serious issues with their school in an inclusive and non-threatening forum where they will feel comfortable about saying what they think. Question 5: People need some kind of framework to get them started. If they're given completely free rein they won't know where to start. I would propose that a 'skeleton' forum be offered as a starter. It's a good idea to allow locals to make decisions, the only problem being that over time locals may change their ideas about what they want. It might be sensible to build into the 'skeleton' some time-limit to allow for future changes to take place. This would allow for an 'evolving' group which could change with the times.

Membership of the forums should I think be non-elected. Elections will involve power-struggles and this wouldn't be helpful. We want to encourage people who would never put themselves forward for election to get involved in their school. Question 6: It makes sense to devolve this to a local authority. However the kind of help the forums get would vary then according to how committed the authority was. 'Support' would presumably mean pay for meetings. I would very much welcome the idea of the forums meeting up for an annual regional meeting - support for this would be tremendously beneficial.

Question 7: Yes, if this is the best way to organise small disparate forums. Question 8: Yes, so long as they don't scare parents off and so long as they make it clear that they want to hear from parents, whether this involves criticism or not.

Question 9: See my comments in box 5 above.

Question 10: Parents have to be in the majority, otherwise it isn't a parents forum. If the school wants a PTA, then it can have one. Individuals such as LEA personnel or teachers would obviously be invited, however I think it is important that parents have the opportunity to discuss their school for part of the meeting at least without the presence of staff employed there. Question 11: Those who care most of the time for the 'looked-after' children would be the ones who would be invited to be part of the parents' forum. Question 12: Yes Question 13: For the reasons stated in 10 above, I would wish for head teachers to NOT have the right to attend, but to be there by invitations, perhaps for the first part of the meeting. Question 14:

One function which hasn't been mentioned is how parent forums can feed back directly to local education authorities. I propose that they give some form of annual report to LEAs, and that some form of annual meeting take place involving LEAs, teachers and parent forums. This would provide a much-needed two-way communication which basically doesn't exist at present. Parents need to have a voice not just within their school, but regionally and nationally. SPTC does provide a voice, but not enough parents participate to make it representative (I have recently become Secretary of SPTC) Question 15: I agree that it should be as open-ended as possible. Question 16: It would be helpful for the forums to have some kind of umbrella organisation. Although the LEAs are to have a statutory obligation to support and help set up forums, this does not necessarily mean they have to be 'responsible' for them. SPTC is an independent body which is able to provide insurance for PTAs - why not have a similar independent umbrella organisation which is separate from the LEA, but which may receive some support from the LEA? Question 17: It's a shame that LEAs are having to be 'made' to set up parents forums. If the forums are being set up by the Executive just for the purposes of improving exam results, then I suspect they may not do so well. If, as I believe they should be, they are being set up to improve links between home, school and LEA, to involve parents in their childrens' schools, to involve parents in strategic decision-making, and to enable LEAs to understand the needs of parents, then these would be appropriate obligations for LEAs. Question 18: Given that forums might become a statutory obligation, finance should be made available, but not at the expense of other aspects of education. Separate funds should be made available as they were for school boards. Question 19: Yes, but I thought LEAs were already obliged to provide advice and information. Having said that, the amount of advice available in Highland is basic, and as a parent I have felt particularly unsupported by this LEA. Question 20: I believe that head teachers should not get a 'job for life', as they seem to do now. Their performance should be reviewed regularly in the same way as happens in industry and other public bodies, and they should be accountable. If they fail to perform satisfactorily, there should be set procedures for dealing with them which enable authorities to remove them if necessary. Question 21: Question 22: Yes. At present to make a complaint about an aspect of the education authority Highland Council has no dedicated complaints procedure for the education authority. There is only one complaints procedure which has to go to the Chief Executive of Highland Council. A complaints procedure is absolutely necessary in this region and is long overdue. It should cover all aspects of the education service.

PLEASE NOTE: THE ABOVE MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED FROM THE INTERNET.

On entering the GSi, this email was scanned for viruses by the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) virus scanning service supplied exclusively by Energis in partnership with MessageLabs.

Please see <http://www.gsi.gov.uk/main/notices/information/gsi-003-2002.pdf> for further details.

In case of problems, please call your organisational IT helpdesk

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*