

Respondee information form

Please complete the details below and attach it with your response. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately:

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Title of consultation: **MAKING THE DIFFERENCE –
INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS**

1. Are you responding as:

an individual?
on behalf of a group or organisation? **Yes**

2a. INDIVIDUALS:

Do you agree to your response being made public (in SE library and/or on SE website)?

Yes **Yes**
 No

2b. **Where confidentiality is not requested**, we will make your response available to the public on the following basis (**please tick one** of the following boxes)

Yes, make my response, name and address all available **Yes**
 Yes, make my response available, but not my name or address
 Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

2c. ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

Your name and address as respondees **will be** made available to the public (in the SE library and/or on SE website). Are you content for your response to be made available also?

Yes **Yes**
 No

3. SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

We will share your response internally with other SE policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for the Scottish Executive to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

Yes **Yes**
 No

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS

CONSULTATION QUESTION TEMPLATE [FOR PARENTZONE]

Question 1: Do you agree with the placing of a new duty on education authorities to promote parental involvement?

We are very much in agreement that parental involvement in education should be encouraged. This would appear to involve two main areas:

- 1) Parents’ involvement in their own child’s education (which many are already involved in and which all parents should be involved in), and
- 2) Parents’ involvement in the operation of their child’s school (which it is likely a minority of parents will have the desire to be involved in).

Our understanding is that most education authorities already are promoting parental involvement in both these areas and in particular through supporting school boards. Therefore, we are unclear what any “new duty” would involve and how it would make any practical difference to the current situation.

Question 2: Do you agree that education authorities should be required to prepare new Strategies for Parental Involvement (SPIs)?

We are happy that Education Authorities should prepare new Strategies for Parental Involvement. Any new ways of involving more parents are to be welcomed. However, we consider that the main current problem is a lack of parental willingness or ability to be involved and this is unlikely to be significantly changed by legislation or strategies.

Question 3: Do you agree that incorporating these Strategies in existing Annual Statements of Education Improvement Objectives and School Development Plans (as set out in the 2000 Act) is the right way for education authorities to set out their intentions? Or should this be done in some other way?

Given our comments above we have no particular concerns with this course of action.

Question 4: Do you agree that the current system of parental representation i.e. School Boards should be replaced by a more flexible system of parent forum, as decided locally by the parents, in a way which best suits them and their school best?

While accepting that the present system of school boards is not perfect and could be improved at the margins, we consider that broadly speaking it works. There is a danger that by scrapping the present system we lose those parents already involved along with their goodwill and end up in a worse position with fewer parents involved than at present.

Given that relatively few parents are interested in being on a school board, we think it is likely that even fewer would be interested in debating what kind of board or forum their school should have. The present system of clear responsibilities for school boards has the advantage of being fairly easily understood by all involved. However, the idea that an education authority with 100 schools could have 100 different types of forums and 100 different constitutions seems to invite confusion amongst parents, teachers, and the education authority itself.

As far as "tweaking" or improving school boards is concerned, we do agree that there is room for improvement. One obvious area is the election system which seems overly formal and probably does discourage some parents from being involved.

Question 5: The Bill does not prescribe the means of appointment to the new forums (elections to Boards are mandatory) but provides for parents to decide this locally. Do you agree?

If the aim is to have as wide a representation of parents as possible on the school board or forum, some form of elections are probably necessary. It is also probably helpful to require parents standing for any such election to produce a written statement about themselves and their aims. While a (secret) ballot of all parents is relatively costly and time consuming, it is likely to lead to more parents voting than if the election is carried out at a general meeting with very few in attendance.

Question 6: Do you agree that education authorities should have a new duty to promote the establishment of a parent forum in each school and to support their operation?

Parents already have the right to require a school board in their school and the education authority should be (and we understand often is) encouraging this. We consider that it would be a weakening of parents' rights to only require education authorities to "promote the establishment of a parent forum", especially as any such forum is likely to have a much vaguer remit than school boards currently have.

Question 7: Should the Bill provide for 'composite' parent forums where this is the preferred option of parents in each school in a combined school or cluster of schools?

Our understanding is that most parents identify more with an individual school than with a combined school or cluster of schools. In fact there is some evidence to show that parents are more willing to be involved with a (smaller) primary school board than with a (larger) secondary one. Therefore, our assumption is that most parents would prefer a board/forum for their individual school. However, if there was parental desire for one board/forum in a larger grouping, we would not have any problem in allowing that.

Question 8: Do you agree with the proposal for the involvement of education authorities to get the initial parent forum off the ground? If not, what alternative would you suggest?

As already stated, our preference is to maintain the present school board system. Apart from anything else, it is likely any new system of forums would require considerable investment of time and resources by education authorities to inform and assist parents. It is difficult to see how they could be set up without this, except perhaps in a few cases where the parent body included considerable legal and similar expertise.

Question 9: The draft Bill leaves the forum's 'constitution' to be determined locally, either by the parents or initially under the education authority scheme. Do you agree with this approach? If not, what alternative would you suggest and why?

We would suggest that this is one area where the present school board system has a definite advantage over the proposed new forums. Given that there is a relatively small minority of parents wanting to be involved in boards, forums, or PTAs, it is better that they do not have to spend time examining constitutions. They are therefore able to spend more time on directly educational matters. Any suggestion of producing a constitution from scratch or even of making modifications to a model constitution is likely to reduce the time parents have available to engage in more directly educational matters.

Question 10: Do you agree that membership of a parent forum should be confined to parents (the broad definition) of children attending the school or individuals co-opted by the parent forum? Should parents always be in the majority?

We would certainly agree that parents should be in the majority. However, we do consider that school boards have benefitted from some co-opted members representing the wider community, e.g. a local priest or minister. Co-opted members such as these can often speak up for the community at large and specifically for children whose parents are not on the board/forum.

Question 11: Do you have a view as to how the needs of looked-after children should be addressed and catered for in the Bill?

We agree that the needs of looked-after children should be addressed, however, we would not want these children stigmatised in any way. Therefore, it might be more appropriate to suggest this be a suggested subject on the board/forum's agenda (possibly on an annual basis) rather than having a specific representative for them.

Question 12: Do you agree that the Bill should not result in parent forum members being subject to automatic disclosure checks but that members, like any other parent, should only be checked when engaging in activities defined under the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003?

Yes, we would agree with this approach.

Question 13: On balance, do you agree that 'rights of attendance' for certain non-members of a parent forum should not be a part of the new arrangements? In other words do you agree that non-members of the parent forum should attend only by invitation or do you believe the headteacher should have the right to attend, with the councillor or other individual by invitation?

We find it difficult to understand how a board or forum could operate without the headteacher or other senior member of staff being present. If the intention is to have more parental involvement in education, then one of the key elements needs to be interaction between representative parents and senior staff members. This happens in the present school board arrangements. We consider any new system would be weaker if the headteacher or substitute was not required to attend. Obviously there could be occasions when the parents would wish to meet on their own but we feel this should be the exception rather than the rule.

One of the complaints of school boards at present is how seldom councillors or other elected representatives attend. It is through such individuals that the board can often seek to exert pressure on the authority to increase the resources, change policies, etc. Therefore, we consider that there should be increased encouragement on councillors to attend boards/forums rather than any form of discouragement.

Question 14: Do you consider these functions appropriate to parent forums? Would you suggest removing or adding any, or making some obligatory and others optional?

Although the text of the consultation suggests that school boards focus on particular issues, our understanding is that many school boards take on a very wide remit at present. Therefore, we fail to see how replacing boards with forums would make any significant difference in this respect. At most some minor revisions to boards' functions is probably required.

Question 15: The Bill has been drafted to allow the parent forum to find out and report the views of parents in the school on any matters which are of interest or concern to them. Do you agree with this open-ended provision or would you suggest defining the areas of interest more restrictively?

Again this seems to be largely what is happening under the present board system. We understand that boards do often attempt to find out parents views on a particular issue. However, even on a potentially emotive subject like school uniforms, a high number of parents are often reluctant to express their views.

Question 16: Do you agree that the Bill should designate parent forums as 'agents' of the education authority for the purpose of their dealings with third parties, and that the issue of insurance should be looked into further? Or do you take an alternative view?

We have no problem with this view.

Question 17: Are these the appropriate obligations to place on education authorities in relation to their working with parent forums?

Broadly yes. We understand that these obligations reflect the current relationship between many education authorities and school boards and only need minor amendments.

Question 18: Do you agree with the provisions requiring education authorities to provide financial support or support in kind to parent forums or would you suggest alternative arrangements?

Yes we would agree that such support to Boards/Forums should continue in a similar way to the present arrangements.

Question 19: Do you agree with the proposed duty on education authorities to provide advice and information to individual parents on request, on matters relating to the education of their children?

Yes, we would agree that this should happen. We understand it is already best practice for a number of authorities.

Question 20: Do you agree that education authorities should be enabled to replace the current system of appointing headteachers and deputy headteachers with more modern, flexible processes and procedures?

We have concerns about this. The present system of parents being part of the interview panel is widely appreciated and seems to work well. This can often give a balance between the authority's "professional" approach and the parents' "hands on" experience of the school and where it should be heading in the coming years. If parents were only to be consulted during the appointment process, we feel that would be a major reduction of parents' involvement in their children's education. We would obviously support some modernisation of the appointment process although we note there is no widely accepted alternative to interviews as the best way of making appointments. We do wonder if the present system of "open" references for potential headteachers could be improved as it is seldom helpful to have every reference in glowing terms with no weaknesses reported.

Question 21: If you do not agree that the principle of parental involvement should be retained by the involvement of parent forums in the new senior appointments processes, please give your reasons.

As stated above we are concerned that only "involvement" is anticipated and consider that a much more specific description of this is required.

Question 22: Do you agree with the proposal to require education authorities to establish complaints procedures in relation to the way they exercise their functions under the Bill?

Yes, we would agree that there should be clear complaint procedures.