

Respondee information form

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

Name: East Renfrewshire Council

Address: 211 Main Street, Barrhead G78 1SY

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?

2a. INDIVIDUALS:

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

- 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, 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
- 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
- No

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

26 May 2005

Report by Director of Education

RESPONSE BY EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL TO "MAKING THE DIFFERENCE –
IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS"

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The Scottish Executive has announced a consultation in respect of a new Bill on parental involvement in schools. This report seeks members' approval for a response on behalf of East Renfrewshire Council.

BACKGROUND

2. Children show greater progress and therefore their chances of success improve significantly when parents are actively involved in supporting and helping their child's learning.

3. The Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) wishes to achieve stronger, more inclusive and effective parental involvement in all aspects of education and a new partnership between parents and schools.

REPORT

4. The proposals set out in the new Bill emerge from consultation with parents and a view that the Scottish Executive Education Department would like to see parents actively involved in their children's learning, whilst moving away from a "one size fits all" approach to representation.

5. SEED wishes education authorities and schools to do more than provide better information to parents. It is their intention that authorities and schools listen to parents, involve them in their children's learning and devolve school management and decision-making to the local school level.

6. The key proposals contained in the draft Bill are to:-

- i. replace School Boards with more flexible and inclusive bodies to represent parents' views. These will be called Parent Forums.
- ii. ensure schools respond to requests from parents for advice and information in respect of their children's education, building on existing reporting arrangements
- iii. ensure education authorities draw up strategies for parental involvement in education in schools
- iv. require education authorities to promote and support the new Parent Forums
- v. establish a complaints procedure with regard to the manner in which authorities discharge their responsibilities under the draft Bill
- vi. provide for education authorities to modernise their appointment procedures for Head Teachers and Depute Head Teachers yet retain the principle of parental involvement in such appointments

CONSULTATION

7. There has been consultation with School Board Chairs. Many members of staff have had discussions with the Scottish School Boards' Association and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council. All Head Teachers have been consulted.

CONCLUSION

8. A response on behalf of the Education Department is appended. The response proposes that School Boards should be retained but modified.

RECOMMENDATION

9. Members are asked to approve the attached response by East Renfrewshire Council to "Making the Difference – Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools".

John Wilson
Director of Education
26 May 2005

Convener Contact Details

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Local Government Access to Information Act 1985

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Response by East Renfrewshire Council

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILEDUCATION DEPARTMENTRESPONSE TO MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT
IN SCHOOLS: A CONSULTATION ON A DRAFT BILL**PREAMBLE**

In his introduction, the Minister makes the very strong statement, "All the evidence is that children do better when parents are actively involved in supporting and helping their child's learning", yet the title of the document, most of the references within it and all of the references in the draft bill are to parental involvement in schools. In narrowing involvement from learning to schooling, the document values school learning over learning in the family, in the home and the community. The document fails to affirm the positive role of parents and other family members in supporting their children's learning, a role that goes well beyond involvement in their child's schooling.

We believe an opportunity has been missed in the draft bill to place new duties on education authorities and on schools to positively regard and to promote the family learning aspect of parental involvement. This aspect also be considered when writing to the new HGIOS self assessment manual. We believe East Renfrewshire has excellent practice in promoting parental involvement in learning and would be pleased to be involved in consultation on the new HGIOS document.

Parents have varying interests in supporting their child's learning and may wish to organise themselves for specific functions. They may also wish to be involved in the short or long term, e.g. as properly constituted groups to manage out-of-school-hours activities, to help the school review its anti-bullying policy, to promote their own learning, to propose changes to parent/teacher consultation, etc. Some groups may be of interest to parents of different schools, e.g. a group of parents coming together from several different schools to organise out-of-school-hours learning opportunities for a community. The notion of a single parent forum that represents all possible interests and which is of interest to every parent in one school is therefore not viable.

It should rather be the duty of the local authority to promote the establishment of a wide variety of parent groups. Promoting this type of involvement calls for skills in community learning and development, and the education authority has a duty to ensure that these skills are available to schools. Integrated Community Schools provide a good context for such support. It should also be the duty of the education authority to ensure that any such constituted group is registered with the authority and abides by the financial regulations as outlined in Section 8 of the Bill.

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

A: The duty to promote parental involvement is generally welcomed. The national debate for education indicated that many parents were looking for education authorities to be more proactive in developing parental involvement. The power on education authorities to develop this area has been accepted gratefully by East Renfrewshire Council and many structures are in place to involve parents in our schools and within the Authority. This is confirmed by the recent HMIe report on the Education Department of East Renfrewshire Council.

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

A: It is correct that education authorities should have a strategy for parental involvement. In effect East Renfrewshire Council already has such a strategy. The strategy is reported frequently to the Education Committee. The current strategy for parental involvement which includes Parent Conferences, Parent Information Line, Parent Website and Parent Forums is attached. This shows the full commitment to the parental involvement strategy of the Education Department.

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?

A: In the local improvement plan which was in existence between 2003-2005 East Renfrewshire Council identified under the development of citizenship that there was a statement of education improvement objectives including parents. The plan which is in existence for 2005-2008 contains the objective to develop a partnership with parents to promote better, more flexible parental involvement in their children's learning. The incorporation of a parental involvement strategy should be within the local improvement objectives and its effectiveness should be reported in the Standards and Quality report of the education authority and of individual schools.

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 forums, as decided locally by the parents, in a way which suits them and their school best?

A: East Renfrewshire Council does not agree that School Boards should be replaced by another body. This Council has a very good record of working in harmony with School Boards. School Boards are in place in all of our schools and have contributed significantly to the health and wellbeing of schools, have often been involved in senior staff appointments and have had a sensible and pragmatic approach to policy development within schools. However, School Boards should be changed to be more flexible to parents needs and more representative of the wider parent body. It is inconceivable that School Boards and Parent/Staff Associations should not be harmoniously entwined within a school. It is equally inconceivable that for large secondary schools of 1700 pupils that parent representation on School Boards should be limited to 4 or 5 places. A wider enfranchisement of School Boards of a more representative nature should suffice in developing parental involvement without radically altering the structure which has been accepted within this Council over the past nine years. Many schools report that School Boards have delivered more harmonious relationships with parents. Many also report that the formalisation of the structure within the School Board has dealt well with many problems of confidentiality within the system. The proposed replacement of a formal structure with the more informal structure of the parent representative forum might stand against these positive developments.

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?

A: East Renfrewshire Council does not agree that any forum should not have mandatory means of appointment. The proposed Bill will lead to irregularities and challenges unless there is some sort of system or structure that makes the appointment to the Forums absolutely clear and precise.

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?

A: East Renfrewshire Council does not agree that there should be a duty to promote the establishment of a parent forum. East Renfrewshire Council would rather that the School Boards be restructured into a wider School Board Forum for each school and the Council would willingly support the operation of a wider School Board in each of its schools.

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?

A: There is merit in providing for composite arrangements of wider School Boards. For example, it may be that within a secondary school and its associated primaries there comes together a wider School Board to represent all parent views within that locality.

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?

A: Education authorities have always been willing to put in place new legislation. The education authorities were instrumental in getting the original School Boards off the ground. There is no doubt that education departments would undertake a new duty. We would rather, however, undertake the duty of getting wider School Board Forums off the ground than pursue parent forums.

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?

A: It is inconceivable that different parent forums would have radically different constitutions. There has to be a degree of uniformity in this area. The current arrangements for School Boards provide this uniformity. The organisation is easy to understand. The consultation leaves the system very wide and open to interpretation and therefore open to misinterpretation and challenge. The Department sees its role in the revision of School Boards as providing pragmatic and practical support, advice and training for the new bodies. This is made very difficult if there are significant differences in the type of operation of different parent groups within the system.

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?

A: Parents should be in the majority of a revised School Board arrangement. However, the contribution of co-opted members to School Boards over the years should not be underestimated or devalued. Co-opted members have contributed significantly to the system, often representing churches or local organisations and their contribution should be cherished.

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?

A: Looked after children have a corporate parent. The corporate parent includes the authority but also includes the school. Therefore, by definition, the needs of looked-after children are catered for by the Head Teacher and by staff of the school who are present

currently on the School Board and will be present in any future extended School Board or parent forum.

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?

A: East Renfrewshire Council and the Director of Education have taken a very firm view that parents involved in schools are in a unique position. They contribute to the life of the school, but they are also in a position where children can develop a relationship of trust with them. The Director has taken the view that we anticipate the worst and plan accordingly. Given this it would be inconceivable that extended School Board or parent forum members would not be subject to automatic disclosure checks. It is also important that the system is developed so that there is much more scrutiny of individuals contributing to the public good. For example, the members of the extended School Board or the parent body could have their photographs displayed in school.

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?

A: There is no suggestion that Head Teachers, members of the school staff including non-teaching staff, co-opted members or local elected members would not contribute significantly to the wellbeing of a school. It is invidious to suggest that only parents should make up the new group. While accepting fully the enablement and entitlement of parents there are key officers and key elected members who support parent bodies to a great extent and whose knowledge, wisdom and commitment can enhance the parental process.

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?

A: The suggested functions for parent forums are broadly similar to the hours and duties of School Boards. Again, we would suggest that School Boards be extended but take over generally the functions outlined in sections 7 to 8 on the functions and financial powers of a parent forum.

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?

A: The draft Bill allows for parents to ask legitimate questions on behalf of the parent body. There is no evidence to suggest that these requests would not be treated seriously, professionally and addressed fully by Head Teachers in staff in schools or by education authorities in Scotland.

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?

A: East Renfrewshire Council considers that an extended School Board would be an 'agent' of the education authority.

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

A: The duties outlined for an education authority in section 9 are consistent with the duties of the education authority in respect of School Boards. Again, there is no evidence to support the view that education authorities would not willingly undertake these duties in supporting of parents groups.

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?

A: The provisions to provide financial support or support in kind is consistent with the current operations within the Education Department of East Renfrewshire Council.

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?

A: East Renfrewshire Council would make the point that we already through the strategy for parental involvement willingly undertake the proposed duty. We are constantly striving for new ways to provide advice and information to individual parents. It is absolutely consistent that parents should ask for individual advice and information on their own children and receive this information from the school. Again, there is no evidence to support the fact that this does not happen in any of the schools within East Renfrewshire Council.

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?

A: The involvement of School Board members in the appointment of senior promoted staff has worked very well. School Board members bring a valuable additional dimension to the selection process.

The introduction of a degree of flexibility into the procedures is to be welcomed. Many authorities have already begun to move away from the single interview procedure anticipated by the current legislation. The removal of central prescription will enable authorities to consolidate emerging good practice into clearly communicated and locally appropriate appointments procedures.

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.

A: East Renfrewshire Council agrees with the principle of parental involvement.

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?

A: East Renfrewshire Council's Education Department has recently received a Charter Mark award for its ability to deal with complaints. Many of our schools are at the forefront of good practice in dealing with complaints. Again, it is a well-published procedure within the Council for making and handling complaints. "Let us know" has been significantly successful in developing this. There is also a Customer Survey which supports the Council in dealing with complaints. The point would have to be made is, is this legislation necessary?

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Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Mathison, Margaret [margaret.Mathison@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk]
Sent: 26 May 2005 16:00
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Subject: Making the Difference - Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools .



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Please find attached response from the Education Department of East Renfrewshire Council.

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