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Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Joanna Gilliatt
Sent: 29 May 2005 15:25
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Cc: SSBA; Hector Robertson; Bruce Robertson
Subject: Personal Response to Parental Involvement Consultation

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To whom it may concern

I attach a Word document including my personal response to the Parental Involvement Consultation. This is submitted in addition to a response made on behalf of the Kingussie High School Board and School Association.

I agree to my response, name and email address all being made public

I am content for the Scottish Executive to contact me in relation to this consultation response.

Best wishes

Joanna Gilliatt

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MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS

A response

This paper was originally produced to promote discussion of the Parental Involvement consultation. The views expressed are entirely my own. A separate response has been submitted on behalf of the combined School Board and School Association of Kingussie High School.

Joanna Gilliatt, Chair of Kingussie High School Board

Introductory remarks

The Foreword to the consultation document opens with the words "All the evidence is that children do better when parents are actively involved in supporting and helping their child's learning". It goes on to say that the consultation document "sets out our vision of how we can encourage and support parents more".

Before addressing the specific questions asked within the Consultation document, I feel it is worth looking at some of the evidence relating to different types of parental involvement and how they contribute to children's success at school.

The importance of Parental Involvement

In research on "Parents' Views on Improving Parental Involvement in Children's Education" undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Executive this year (see <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/pvipicm-00.asp>) a distinction is made between what many parents do at home in support of their children's learning on the one hand and, on the other, being "actively involved" within the physical environment of the school (such as being involved in the PTA, School Board, assisting with trips, playground duties, in the classroom, sports coaching, etc)

The average parent was found to:

- ensure their children complete their homework, and help with it when they can;
- attend parent's evenings;
- support their children when performing or playing sport
- keep track of their children's academic progress

But the tone of the report suggests that it is "active participation outside the home" which is particularly to be encouraged, rather than this type of involvement.

However, a literature review undertaken in 2003 (The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment, by Prof Charles Deforges, see: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR433.doc>) strongly suggests that this view of involvement is mistaken. The review includes the following statements:

- The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation.
- The impact of parental involvement arises from parental values and educational aspirations and these are exhibited continuously through parental enthusiasm and positive parenting style. These in turn are perceived by the student and, at best, internalised by them. This has its impact on the student's self perception as a learner and on their motivation, self esteem and educational aspirations. By this route parental involvement frames how students perceive education and school work and bolsters their motivation to succeed.
- Parental involvement in classrooms, trips, school governance and the like seem to confer little advantage (public or private) in terms of pupil achievement and/or adjustment.

If this evidence is to be believed (and without downplaying the importance of fundraising, etc) encouraging more parents to be involved as a member of a School Board, School Association or

Parent Forum will be unlikely to have any positive impact on their children's educational achievement. Rather, improvements in achievement would be best addressed by helping more parents to value education, have educational aspirations for their children, provide intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, etc.

The purposes of School Associations and School Boards are not to help the members' children "do better". Rather it is respectively to organise events and raise funds for the school, and to support the school in lobbying for better facilities, offer views on policies, help in the selection of senior staff, etc.

The Scottish Executive's Draft Bill

The main aim of the draft bill is to **replace School Boards with more flexible and inclusive bodies to represent parents' views** - the idea is to encourage the involvement of a wider range and number of parents, and therefore be more genuinely representative.

The Bill does little or nothing to promote the type of parental involvement which has been found to have a positive effect on children's achievement.

Responses to consultation questions

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

JRG – Yes, but at issue is what type of parental involvement they should have a duty to promote. Promoting the involvement of parents in a representative body (whether it be School Board or Parent Forum) is fine, and I would suggest they should have a duty to disseminate ideas and "best practice" to help ensure School Boards are as effective and representative as possible).

In addition, however, Education Authorities should have a duty to promote parental involvement within the home (in terms of valuing education, etc) since the evidence suggests that it is this type of involvement which affects children's educational attainment/achievement.

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

JRG – Yes, but the types of involvement these strategies should address should be made clear.

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?

JRG – Whatever is the appropriate mechanism.

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?

JRG – No, while it is definitely appropriate for there to be more flexibility, there does not seem any good reason why the existing School Board legislation should be repealed, the existing powers of School Boards removed, etc. Rather the School Board legislation could be amended.

The aim is stated to be to encourage more parents to be involved, and for the system of representation to work better for more parents. It is not clear how the proposed legislation will achieve this, nor is the purpose of this representation made clear, nor what the involvement is intended to achieve.

In at least some schools the issue of Elections rarely, if ever arises, since there is relative lack of interest in being on the School Board. I am unclear that there is any evidence that it is the issue of Elections which deters people from becoming involved. I suspect it is primarily the time commitment required, etc.

In view of this, it is unclear that asking parents to decide what approach to the Parent Forum they prefer will be effective. If parents do not have the time or inclination to take part in an existing structure, they may well have no more inclination to be involved in setting up a new structure.

For a truly representative Parent Forum to be set up successfully will require considerable input of time and effort, and preferably proactive and ongoing Community Development work. It is unlikely that individual parents (e.g. the current members of the School Board), would be in a position to do this. This suggests that the existence and success of Parent Forums it will be very dependent on significant input by Education Authorities.

The clearly defined format of the current School Boards helps to ensure their existence. Without this, it is more likely that either a Parent Forum will never be formed, or that in the absence of interested parents (with the time, energy and commitment to put in a lot of work) that it will falter or cease to exist.

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?

JRG – I am unable to comment about pros and cons of elections in areas where elections are frequently called into play. Presumably, it can be argued that in these areas election is the best means of ensuring that the membership is representative. In areas where elections are rarely necessary, it would be interesting to know if it is really the possibility of an election which deters people from putting themselves forward for the School Board.

If the Parent Forum is to operate as a Committee, being responsible for making decisions and/or taking actions, then it may be necessary to limit the numbers in some way. If the Forum were to be a membership organisation, the Committee could be nominated and elected as happens in other membership organisations, e.g. at an AGM. The success of this would depend on getting sufficient people along to the AGM to ensure it was representative.

Being given the option to decide things locally may simply mean that nothing happens at all – that is, that no Parent Forum is set up.

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?

JRG – Yes. If the change to Parent Forums goes ahead this will be crucial.

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?

JRG – Composite Parent Forums are unlikely to be appropriate unless the schools are clustered in the sense of sharing a Head Teacher.

However, improved liaison and communication between School Boards (or Parent Forums) from different schools in an area (e.g. the High School and its feeder Primaries) would be appropriate and helpful.

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?

JRG – Yes.

The Bill leaves open the possibility that an Education Authority might not initiate the process of establishing the Parent Forum, and it would require one quarter of parents (25 parents in a school of 100 pupils) to require the Education Authority to initiate the process. It is highly unlikely that there would be sufficiently strong feeling from enough parents to set this in motion. If the change to Parent Forums goes ahead Education Authorities should be obliged to initiate the process of setting Parent Forums up whether or not any parents request it, or if only one parent does so.

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?

JRG – There appear to be a lot of problems with this approach. Yes, increased flexibility would be desirable – for instance, in order to allow for more parents to be on the School Board, for representation from each school year, or each community served by the school, or from different ethnic groups etc.

However, it would be totally inappropriate for a Parent Forum to consist of only one parent. An absolute minimum of two should be required, whatever the size of the school and the minimum should increase with the size of the school.

If the Parent Forum is to be responsible for any decision making it will be necessary for minutes of meetings to be taken. Likewise, if it is to be accountable to parents, minutes will be necessary.

Giving parents "absolute freedom to decide on the arrangements for the new parent forum" and to determine the forum's constitution, gives the opportunity for the Parent Forum to be totally unaccountable. Lack of structure may simply mean the Parent Forum becomes the vehicle for a few zealots or that it ceases to exist at all.

It is unclear what the purpose of the Parent Forum is intended to be? Is it intended to be a decision-making body? Is it intended to be a body for the School to consult about policy documents, etc? Is it intended to provide a forum for the informal exchange of ideas? Just saying that it can be whatever parents want it to be is not very helpful, given that most parents do not have any strong views on this.

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?

JRG – Parents (using the broad definition) should be in the majority, but if Parent Forums are to promote involvement in school and/or education there must also be representation from the school – including Teachers and Head Teachers. Involvement of local Councillors is also invaluable.

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?

JRG – Those responsible for Looked After Children (whether as Foster Carers or Social Workers) should have the same rights of access to the Parent Forum as others

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?

JRG - Yes

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?

JRG – It should be allowable for Parent members to meet informally to discuss issues on their own, should they wish. However, the expectation/requirement should be that the Head Teacher should normally attend Parent Forum meetings, whether by duty or by right. Likewise, councillors.

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?

JRG – 1) there is a real danger of losing what already exists by creating one amorphous Parent Forum rather than having the separate School Board and School Association (which at our school does a lot of hard work fund raising, organising events etc).

2) The stated functions include “making representations” to the Head Teacher or Education Authority about arrangements for promoting parental involvement, but say nothing explicit about “making representations” about aspects of the education being provided at the school, the facilities of the school etc.

3) The stated functions do not include those of the School Boards relating to “the administration and management of the school”. The parental contribution to the administration and management of the school appears to have been removed – limiting the opportunity for parents to make a real contribution to the school.

4) Contrary to the impression given in the consultation document, School Boards can already consult, discuss, etc on all areas of interest to parents. The Bill therefore limits rather than extends parental input.

5) While laudable, the idea that either a School Board or Parent Forum can “be clearly representative of, represent the views of, and be accountable to, all the parents in the school” is in practice very hard to achieve. Members of the School Board tend to be very busy people and I would suggest that it is simply not possible for most of them to actively seek the view of all parents on a regular basis. To do this properly would require a lot of work and considerable commitment of time, as well as relevant skills and experience. There is no reason to believe that Parent Forum members would have any more time, commitment or skills than do School Board members.

This is an area in which more assistance could be provided by the Scottish Executive or Education Authorities, whether through dissemination of ideas and suggestions (production of good practice guidelines, etc) or by more proactive assistance.

In addition, it would be preferable to encourage the Schools and Education Authority to provide opportunities for the wider parent body to meet and be consulted. For instance to:

- See/hear presentations – for instance about the school's policy on bullying, sex education, discipline, approach to teaching reading, approach to homework, learning support provision, curriculum options, etc etc
- Express their views on the issue, share ideas etc

This would give the opportunity for parents to **represent themselves**, rather than be represented, as well as encouraging all parents to think about educational issues, understand the concerns of the school, develop an understanding of how their children learn, etc. etc.

The difficulty is likely to be in getting parents along to such events – which might suggest that a good approach would be to combine them with existing parents evenings, which many parents do already attend; holding events locally within each of the communities served by the school, etc.

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?

JRG – See response to Q14 above.

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?

JRG – Yes, if the change to Parent Forums is made.

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

JRG – Yes, but see response to Q19 below

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?

JRG - Yes

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?

JRG – Yes. It astonishes me that there is any question about this. Of course Education Authorities have a duty to provide advice and information to parents on matters relating to the education of their children. How could they not have such a duty?

However, the Bill does not go far enough in this regard. Education Authorities should also have an obligation to be proactive in providing advice and information to parents about the education being provided to their children, the value and importance of education, the role of parents in promoting their children's education, etc etc. (All, needless to say, without being in any way patronising).

Moreover, the Education Authorities should also have an obligation to respond to requests from the School Board or Parent Forum (rather than just individual parents), perhaps providing speakers to talk about educational policy, alternative approaches to teaching children to read, research on bullying, etc etc..

Even better, the Education Authority should have an obligation to be proactive in making such speakers and opportunities available, in employing Community Development techniques to encourage parents to take part, etc.

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?

JRG – Yes, but see response to Q.21 below.

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.

JRG – There should be clear obligations as regards the nature of parental involvement in the new senior appointments process. Parents (whether as members of the existing School Boards or proposed Parent Forum) should have the right to active involvement in decision making (a vote) rather than simply to be consulted.

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?

JRG - Yes

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If you wish to reply electronically, please email your response by Tuesday 7 June to parentalinvolvementbill@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Or please return it to the following address:

Parental Involvement Bill

Schools Division

Area 2B

Victoria Quay

Edinburgh

EH6 6QQ

296 ✓

Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Joanna Gilliatt
Sent: 01 June 2005 08:35
To: Piaskowski K (Karen)
Subject: RE: Personal Response to Parental Involvement Consultation

This email has been received from an external party and
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Hi Karen

My address is:

I suppose I'd rather my address wasn't published, if that's OK. I'm happy for my email address to be included.

Cheers

Joanna

From: Karen.Piaskowski@scotland.gsi.gov.uk [mailto:Karen.Piaskowski@scotland.gsi.gov.uk]
Sent: 31 May 2005 16:03
To:
Subject: RE: Personal Response to Parental Involvement Consultation
Importance: High

This email and any files transmitted with it are intended solely for the use of the individual or entity
to whom they are addressed.

Joanna

I would be grateful if you could provide your full postal address for your personal response. To enable us to publish your response I need this information. If you only wish your name and response published that it is ok but a full postal address is a requirement. For the School Boards response I have used the school's address.

Thanks

Karen Piaskowski
Parental Involvement Bill Team

-----Original Message-----
From: Joanna Gilliatt
Sent: 29 May 2005 15:25
To: Parental Involvement Bill

Cc: SSBA; Hector Robertson; Bruce Robertson
Subject: Personal Response to Parental Involvement Consultation

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To whom it may concern

I attach a Word document including my personal response to the Parental Involvement Consultation. This is submitted in addition to a response made on behalf of the Kingussie High School Board and School Association.

I agree to my response, name and email address all being made public

I am content for the Scottish Executive to contact me in relation to this consultation response.

Best wishes

Joanna Gilliatt

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Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Joanna Gilliatt
Sent: 29 May 2005 06:49
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Cc: SSBA; Bruce Robertson; Hector Robertson
Subject: 296

This email has been received from an external party and has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

At a meeting held at Kingussie High School on 16th May 2005, including members of the School Board, School Association and staff of the school (a total of some 16 individuals) it was unanimously agreed to respond only to Question 4 of the "Involving Parents" Consultation, and to respond to this question as follows:

We do not agree that the current system of parental representation i.e. School Boards should be replaced.

Rather than abolishing School Boards, we believe the existing legislation should be amended and updated, including providing for greater flexibility (e.g. to allow 6 or 8 parent members rather than the current limit of 4 in a school of our size), and giving Education Authorities greater responsibility for promoting parental involvement (e.g. by disseminating ideas to help ensure School Boards are as effective and representative as possible).

We wish to retain the existing rights and powers of the School Board, particularly in their relationship with Education Authorities. Under current legislation, School Boards have considerable clout and this can be used very effectively, to the benefit of the school.

We also wish to retain the stated functions (possibly with some updating) of School Boards relating to "the administration and management" of the school, and feel that the draft Bill limits, rather than extends, the opportunities for parents to make a real contribution to the school.

We wish to retain the right/duty of the Head Teacher to attend School Board meetings since we believe this is the best way of ensuring dialogue and the appropriate focus for meetings. We also wish to retain the right of Councillors to attend School Board meetings.

We wish to retain the right to full parental involvement in the appointment of senior staff, while accepting that the appointments process itself may require modernisation.

We do not consider the level of flexibility proposed for Parent Forums would necessarily result in either greater parental involvement or better representation. In rural areas, it would appear that the clearly defined structure of current School Boards helps to ensure their continued existence. In the absence of sufficient parents with the necessary time, energy and commitment, too much flexibility could result in parental involvement levels falling. The proposed flexibility would also allow Parent Forums to be (or become) both unrepresentative and unaccountable.

We see no evidence that the proposed legislation would increase parents involvement in their children's learning. The research indicates that it is parental values, educational aspirations, and direct involvement (providing intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, ensuring homework is completed, etc, etc) which affects levels of attainment and achievement. The draft Bill does nothing to promote this type of involvement.

We support the attempt to achieve stronger, more inclusive and effective parental involvement in education, and to enhance communication and partnership between schools and parents. Once the decision is made to retain School Boards we would be happy to take part in consultation on how to improve their effectiveness.

Response from:

Joanna Gilliatt, chair of Kingussie High School Board

On behalf of the combined School Board and School Association. We are happy for our response to be made public and also to be contacted by the Scottish Executive in relation to this response. Please note I have also sent this response using the Parentzone website – I hope this does not cause confusion.

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