

443

Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Rae Galbraith [r.galbraith@educ.gla.ac.uk]
Sent: 02 June 2005 14:14
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Cc: Chris Smith
Subject: 443 - SNAP's Response to the draft bill



Response to the
draft Bill on ...

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

Attached please find SNAP's response to the draft Bill: Making the
difference - improving parents' involvement in schools.

Regards

Chris Smith
Scottish Network for Able Pupils
University of Glasgow St Andrew's Building
11 Eldon Street
Glasgow G3 6NH

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

Draft Bill:
Making the difference –
improving parents' involvement in schools

Response on behalf of the Scottish Network for Able Pupils (SNAP)

Contact details:
Chris Smith
Project Leader
University of Glasgow Faculty of Education
Department of Educational Studies
11 Eldon Street
Glasgow G3 6NH
c.smith@educ.gla.ac.uk

Response to the draft Bill:

Making the difference – improving parents' involvement in schools

General comments

Emphasis

The Scottish Network for Able Pupils (SNAP) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Bill. There is no question that parental involvement in and partnerships with schools is of benefit to children's education. There are however, many aspects to this partnership.

1. How parents work at home with their children to support and encourage learning.
2. How parents, schools and pupils work together to promote learning both in school and at home.
3. How parents can have a more formal involvement on representative bodies that advise and offer support to the school and education system more widely.

The Bill, at present, concentrates on the more formal aspects of involvement through representation. If collaboration is to be encouraged the other aspects require attention.

National Support for the legislation

In section 3.2. The Parent Forum (p11) It is stated that 'While the school board system worked well for some schools and parents, responses to the national debate and subsequent discussions and consultations suggest that review and reform are needed. This paper and the draft Bill set out proposals for a new system of representation which we believe will work better for many more parents'. If previous legislation worked well for some schools and for some parents how is the Scottish Executive going to support this legislation to ensure that it works well for all schools and all parents? Support within the system must occur at all levels. Will there be national training made available for members of parental forums? Will there be a parent forums website established to permit contact across the country? Will there be national support for occasional meetings of parent forum members across the country?

The 'voice' of children and young people

There is no mention in the draft Bill of the need for parent forums to take the views of children and young people into account. All other sectors of the education system are rightly being encouraged to do this and it seems strange that parental bodies might be exempt from this requirement given that, in the main, they are representing the views of, not only other parents, but those of children and young people.

It is also not clear as to the rights of young people over the age of 16 who are still at school will be accounted for. Might these young people have the right to be part of any parent forums set up for secondary schools?

The place of children and young people in this legislation require to be thought through in order to make it consistent with other legislation and with the current drive for pupil involvement.

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

Yes. Local authorities are ideally placed to encourage and promote parental involvement. It is already good practice in many local authorities. Making it a duty to promote and support parental involvement could be beneficial in those areas of the country where the partnership is less well developed.

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

Yes. However, this strategy should cover all aspects of parental involvement and not just the establishment of representative bodies. It is vital that this strategy be developed in partnership with parents themselves but this may not be easy to do in practice. In the initial stages it may have to rely on existing parental involvement and thus exclude many parents who might have a view or wish to take part. It would be important that SPIs be revised and revisited on a regular basis.

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?

Yes. However, there also needs to be accessible formats and versions for parents. It is highly unlikely that parents will access these documents and thus distribution to and accessibility by parents is an issue that needs to be addressed.

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?

Yes but there is not enough guidance in the current bill. While leaving room for local flexibility and tailoring is welcomed the openness of the Bill could hinder constructive progress. It may be best to offer a series of frameworks in the first instance from which groups could choose to operate with the provision for adaptation and individualisation to suit local circumstances.

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?

As with question 4, advice is required in order to ensure that parent forums are representative of the full parent complement of any school. Some options with the pros and cons of each would be helpful.

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?

Yes, education authorities should have a duty to promote the establishment of such forums. However, it would be helpful if what might be considered reasonable efforts on the part of local authorities be outlined. In some cases – for a variety of reasons – it may be very difficult, if not impossible, to establish a parents forum. The limit of the authority’s responsibility in terms of their efforts may need to be delimited. How often, for example, should it attempt to set up a forum in a school or schools where previous efforts have failed? In addition it is not clear to what extent an authority is expected to support and maintain a forum that is struggling to maintain its existence. If a forum fails to consult and contact the parent body that it represents what is the role of the authority to be? The roles and responsibilities of each partner need to be made clear.

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?

Yes. Should nurseries not be included in this legislation? Thus a nursery attached to a primary school may wish to form a composite forum. This would seem to be a helpful option. It would also encourage parents to get involved from an early stage of their child’s education.

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?

Yes although most of the work will probably fall to the school since this is the body with which parents will be most familiar.

There needs to be nationally consistent legal advice made available on certain issues. This should not be left to individual local authorities and constitutes the national support that is necessary to support the legislation. In particular national, consistent advice is required in relation the issue of a named individual (p13).

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?

The constitution of any such body will be important in terms of how well it takes on its responsibilities. We would suggest a core constitution for all forums which could be adapted and extended to suit local circumstances.

While it is an attractive idea to leave it to parents to choose an ‘everyday’ name for their forum. For the benefit of parents not directly involved and other community members it should be clear in official documentation that this is what it is.

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?

It could be very helpful for parents of other stages to be represented. For example, a forum centred on a primary school may benefit enormously from representation from the nursery forum/s and the secondary school forum in a cluster. If this is to be a parental representative body then parents should always be in the majority however this does not lend itself to partnership and collaborative ways of working. Should there not be space of a pupil and school representative?

One aspect that is missing from the Bill entirely is how such forums will work with children and young people. Given that schools and local authorities are now required to take into account the views and opinions of young people it would seem odd that parental bodies did not also have this requirement. This should be applicable across sectors. There are ways, should nurseries be included in the final legislation, that even very young children's views can be taken on board and represented. The issue of young people over 16 years of age, and still attending school, has not been addressed.

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?

There must be ways found of giving a voice to all those concerned with children being looked-after including, where appropriate, the carers, the biological parents and the young people themselves. However, it may be most appropriate for the prime carers of any child to be represented on any 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.

Disagree. Given that we are advocating the involvement of children and young people in the forums more directly it would be appropriate for all members to have to be disclosure checked.

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 head teacher should have the right to attend, with the councillor other individual by invitation.

The head teacher should not have a 'right' to attend. However, given that forums are being established to represent parents' views, and in the spirit of openness, then it may be useful to give all parents of children in the school/s concerned the right to attend in a non-participative manner i.e. any meetings be open.

There are some contractual issues here for the head teacher and other members of the senior management team. There could easily be a burden placed on individual members of staff to attend such meetings on a regular basis. Head teachers have many duties that exist outwith the normal school day and care should be taken that a work life balance for such individuals are maintained.

It may also be that a head teacher is also a parent. Should there not be specific guidance issued in this respect?

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?

The wording of the Bill is unhelpful. There is at present a lot of 'reporting', 'seeking', 'contact' and 'making representations' rather than communication, consultation, collaboration and negotiation. This difference on terminology is important.

It would be important that the Bill does not 'set up' the school forums as 'watch dogs' of schools and teachers. This possible role is evident in function 7 'to ensure that any duty...is duly complied with' and in the Bill's accompanying notes which states on p16 that a function is 'to seek to raise the quality and standards in the school'. Schools and authorities have many quality and standards procedures already in place and another strand to this is not helpful. This also mitigates against possible collaborative working.

There is no function related to working with children and young people and we believe this is a major omission. Should the forum not also have to comply, for example, with any reasonable request made to it by a child or young person relating to its exercise of those functions? Should a function of the forums not also be to take on board the views and opinions of the children and young people in the school/s.

Function 9 – 'a parents' forum ceases to exist when the school for which it is established is discontinued' – Are there not more circumstances than this that should be listed for example when the parental support for such a body no longer exists?

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?

There is a lot of onus being placed on members of the school forum to contact all parents and gather views and encourage involvement. This may involve much more expertise, time and effort than some parents are able to give and thus may become exclusive.

It is interesting that the schools and authorities have duties yet the parent forums have only functions. Might this make partnership or collaborative working more difficult if all parties are not equal in terms of their duties and responsibilities?

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?

What auditing procedures will be required given that the forums may be handling not insubstantial amounts of money?

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

There should be a limit on the amount of demands that a parent forum can place on wither the school or the authority. It may be helpful therefore to give examples of what would be reasonable and unreasonable and the frequency of these requests.

The second bullet point 'ensure that the head teacher and staff are available to give advice and information...in the school' Might there be the words 'and the authority more widely' added here to ensure that this wider remit is made clear?

No timescales for the provision of information reasonably requested by parent forums are given. The Additional Support for Learning Act may offer some helpful timescales here.

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?

The funding to properly support a school forum in every school in an authority may not be an insubstantial amount. Is there to be national financial support made available for local authorities in this respect?

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?

This would be consistent with other legislation – for example the Additional Support for Learning Act. There may need to be guidelines, however, to address the issue of the 'quality' of advice and information provided.

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

We agree but this does not go far enough in our opinion. It is not clear why parents are not to be involved in the appointment of all staff. The class teacher, for example, is the person who will have most contact with the child in the school and in many ways parents might like to have input and have very valuable views on such appointments. Thus we would suggest that parents **along with children and young people** have direct input to the appointment of **all** school teaching staff.

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.

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?

The complaints procedures are, at present, very one-way. If this is to be a partnership then there must be opportunities for complaints to be made about the forums themselves: by parents themselves, by children and young people and by schools.