

# respondee information form

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

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Consultation title: **Making the difference – Improving parents' involvement in schools**

1. **Are you responding as:** (please tick one box)

(a) an individual?

(go to 2a/b)

(b) **on behalf of** a group or organisation?

(go to 2c)

2a. **INDIVIDUALS:**

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

Yes (go to 2b below)

No, not at all

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 SE to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

Yes

No

**HEADTEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF SCOTLAND****RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION****5 JUNE 2005****MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

It has become evident during the past two years that a strong focus of government attention on schools both north and south of the border is the desire to engage that section of the parent body which is believed to be disengaged at the present time. Here in Scotland, the present Minister for Education and Children and the Scottish Executive have made this aim a cornerstone of their hopes for Scottish education. HAS welcomes their stated intention to continue to develop this theme.

It is equally clear that Headteachers and senior managers in our secondary schools have worked hard over many years to engage these parents, and have come to see clearly the challenges implicit in this task. Yet there has developed in our schools an established tradition of building a strong community ethos with parents and students through the concept of partnership and involvement.

Since 1988 parental representation in our schools has tended to become formalised through School Boards and Parent Associations and it is recognised that this level of parental involvement has not always represented the totality of numbers or social mix of families in each school community.

**HAS recognises that, after 16 years of operation, it is time to review the original legislation, with a view to bringing about improvements. However HAS would seriously question whether the repeal of the existing School Board legislation and the attendant possibility of alienating parents who have worked hard for the school community can be matched by the aims of this Draft Bill.**

We welcome the proposals to revitalise parental involvement in schools with the removal of the over-legalistic and bureaucratic aspects of the current School Board format. However HAS finds the concept implied in this bill of involving parents, in a representative capacity, to assist the aspirations of their own particular children contrary to meeting the partnership ideal of improving educational opportunity for all in the school.

**A fundamental point must be that individual self-interest should not be the criterion for parental representation.**

We believe that parental representation and involvement are vital ingredients in improving the quality and effectiveness of learning but feel that parents will not be encouraged to become more involved in the life of schools, beyond taking an interest in their own children's education, by offering them a role in the vague terms set out in the Draft Bill.

**HAS believes that a clearer framework and guidelines on representation, powers and procedures are required.**

A starting point would be to allow Parent Forums to keep the limited powers which are at present attributed to School Boards in these areas.

HAS recognises and welcomes the need for parental involvement and representation in the decision-making processes of the school. However, for parents the Draft Bill represents a loosened structure with reduced opportunity for real involvement in these processes. This is instanced by the proposal not to require Headteacher or staff membership of the parent forum in any formal advisory capacity. In addition the lack of prescription regarding membership and numbers of forums for each school opens the way to disharmony and potential conflict without a clear mechanism for resolution of difficulties where they arise. What is clear is that the vacuum created by the repeal of the School Board legislation might lead simply to the emergence of much vaguer structures.

In addition to a clear statement of the powers of Parent Forums there requires to be clear guidance on the responsibilities of parents who participate in Parent Forums.

**HAS believes that this bill says much about parental rights but requires to state much more clearly a position on parental responsibilities.**

Parameters require to be set on suitable areas for Parental Forums to address and on areas not appropriate for discussion. We do not believe that issues relating to confidentiality, the specific circumstances of individuals, pressure groups and special interest groups should fall within the remit of Parent Forums.

For many schools we see the loss of School Boards as giving rise to the risk of the loss of the strongest current pattern of parental support. In particular HAS finds it difficult to reconcile this with the laudable aim of outreach to currently disengaged parents. We believe that the looser structure at present set out in the Draft Bill has the potential to result in even less parental involvement in schools. We recognise that School Boards may not be representative of the parent body of the school as a whole but do not accept that a more informal approach to parental involvement, on its own, will address this problem. In addition, as stated, we consider that the termination of the role of Headteacher as Adviser to a Parent Forum will further reduce this support. We also consider that many School Boards have given strong support to schools in an advocacy role with local authorities and elected representatives at local and national level.

An approach which might encourage greater parental participation would be 'short-life' parent groups to address specific issues or initiatives eg Health, which would time limit any commitment. It is difficult to conceive the proposed structures as giving this same measure of organised support.

**It is possible that some local authorities may perceive this bill as an improvement through presenting an opportunity to disenfranchise parental rights in respect of senior staff appointments to schools.**

HAS has concerns that the changes implicit in this bill might be used in certain circumstances to amend the employment rights of senior staff by making appointments to a local authorities as opposed to an individual school unfettered by the conditions of the School Boards legislation.

HAS believes that this bill also gives rise to the possibility of up to thirty-two different frameworks with implications for appointment procedures without a requirement to meet the conditions as set within current School Board legislation.

**HAS attaches the maximum importance to the pursuit of an improvement agenda for our schools and students as set out in the National Priorities. HAS believes that this requires a measure of parental support not likely to be met by the provisions of this bill.**

We see the aims of the bill as laudable but do not accept that they will be met by this proposed legislation without a great deal of additional detail, structure, clarification and amendment.

We believe that any new representative body should be entitled "School Forum" and should, in the spirit of true partnership working, continue to include the Headteacher as Principal Adviser, teacher representatives and co-opted members with parent members constituting a majority.

**HAS regrets the lack of meaningful consultation in the preparation of this draft bill and will be happy to co-operate with the Scottish Executive in a consultative capacity in any forthcoming review.**