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**SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE'S CONSULTATION
ON
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

A Response from CARE

June 2005

Introduction to CARE

CARE was established in 1983 to combine caring at national and community level with campaigning on social issues. CARE is concerned to see British and European law and public policy on family issues reflect Christian principles. CARE's Public Policy Department acts as a think tank on a number of family issues, as well as on issues of medical ethics and sexuality.

CARE's interest in education arises from its work in schools and in social services. CARE responds to policy issues affecting schools and provides curriculum materials which are written from a Christian perspective.

CARE for Scotland has approximately 3,000 supporters drawn from all the main churches in Scotland. Its support base across the UK is of the order of 50,000. CARE for Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Executive's consultation on the involvement of parents in schools. We provide comments drawn from CARE's experience of working in education and our wider experience in public policy work.

This response has been prepared for CARE by Dr Alastair Noble, Education Officer for CARE in Scotland. He can be contacted at:

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Parental Involvement in Schools

CARE believes that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of children and that parental involvement in schools is one of their fundamental responsibilities.

In general, CARE welcomes the Executive's commitment to improving parental involvement in schools and in their children's learning. We recognise that this has not been fully achieved through the School Boards legislation.

However, we have substantial reservations about these proposals and in particular the intention to abolish School Boards in 2007. We believe the current proposals are vague and potentially dangerous as they could allow unrepresentative pressure groups to exercise undue influence.

This paper summarises CARE's reaction to the the main issues in the consultation paper.

The Bill's proposes to:

1 replace School Boards with more flexible and inclusive bodies to represent parents' views – new parent forums.

CARE welcomed the introduction of the legislation providing for School Boards and believes the powers given to them should be extended. We are opposed to their replacement by a much less clear framework for parental involvement. It is likely that the format of the new Parent Forums will be determined substantially by Local Councils and will lack the rigour and transparency of properly constituted and elected bodies. The present requirement that parents be in a majority on a School Board will be lost.

CARE believes that the new Forums will be open to manipulation by parents with narrow interests and that there will not be adequate safeguards to prevent this. While we recognise that there were some issues about the representative nature of School Boards, we believe that a much more rigorous framework for Parent Forums than what is proposed is necessary.

We are also concerned that the statutory requirements for the conduct of Board meetings will be removed.

2 ensure schools respond to requests from parents for advice and information about their children's education, building on existing reporting arrangements.

We do not see how the new arrangements will improve this in any way. Indeed, the obligation that officials of education departments have to respond to enquiries from School Boards will be removed.

We are also unhappy with the suggestion that head teachers will not attend parent Forums unless invited and do not see how this improves communication with parents. We believe it is vital that head teachers have the right to attend Parent

Forums in order to give advice and receive feedback. Otherwise it will involve more bureaucratic communication between the two parties and create unnecessary tensions.

3 ensure education authorities draw up strategies for parental involvement in education and schools.

We fail to see how this is an improvement over the present arrangements. Indeed, the current arrangements devolve substantial powers to the School Board and this involves a degree of accountability for Local Education Authorities. We do not think education authorities should be the architects of the arrangements for parental involvement in schools.

We believe that, if anything, the powers of school boards ought to be extended.

4 require education authorities to promote and support the new parent forums.

While we recognise the desirability of the support of local authorities, we believe the best way to achieve this is through a clear legislative framework such as presently exists for School Boards.

5 establish a complaints procedure about the way education authorities discharge their responsibilities under the draft Bill.

CARE welcomes this proposal, but does not see why this cannot be accommodated within the current arrangements.

6 provide for education authorities to modernise their appointments systems for head teachers and deputy head teachers while retaining the principle of parental involvement in such appointments.

We are concerned that the present statutory involvement of parents in the appointments of head teachers and depute head teachers will be removed and replaced by a more flexible arrangement to be determined by local authorities. We believe that the nature of parental involvement in senior staff appointments should not be left to the discretion of local authorities who may benefit significantly from a less clearly defined role for parents in appointments.

We believe that school boards which include parents and others are a much more representative body to be involved in senior staff appointments.

Summary

CARE believes that the School Boards legislation can be improved in the light of experience. However, we are opposed to the ill-thought-out proposals being put forward. We recommend the continuation and development of a clear statutory framework for the involvement of parents and others in the life and management of Scottish schools.

We believe that substantial further consultation is necessary on this whole matter.

AN 24.05.05

- Q.15 The present system that operates and is available to School Boards works well in Drumbrae School, and the Board sees no reason or justification for change.
- Q.16 No. This would make no discernable difference to what School Boards already are. School Boards, Proposed Parent Forums, or PTAs should not be involved in the issue of insurance.
- Q.17 Yes. Most of these are in place at the moment in regard to Drumbrae Primary School Board and to our educational authority. So why change this?
- Q.18 If, sadly, the Bill is passed and Parent Forums replace School Boards, then the education authority would have to fund the Forums. But we reject the notion of Parent Forums in the first place!
- Q.19 Yes. This already functions well and efficiently.
- Q. 20 Yes. This should be modernised.
- Q.21 N/A
- Q. 22 Yes.

respondee information form

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

Name: CARE

Postal Address: 29 CANAL ST

GLASGOW

G4 0AD

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



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