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From: Mailer-Daemon@scotland.gov.uk [mailto:Mailer-Daemon@scotland.gov.uk]

Sent: 06 June 2005 18:48

To: Parental Involvement Bill

Subject: 690

Response from the Parentzone - Parental Involvement questionnaire

Name: Alastair Duncan

Responding as: An individual

Individual: Yes

Confidentially: Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

Behalf of groups:

Sharing responses / future engagement: No

Question 1: Yes - as long as the onus of this is genuinely borne by education authorities and not simply passed on to schools as 'one more thing' which beleaguered head teachers and school teaching staff have to implement along with every other 'bright new idea'.

Question 2: Yes. However, I would hope that in the consultation process with parents, each education authority would take account of local differences within its own region and not seek to implement a new 'one-size-fits-all' model universally within that region.

Question 3: I think it should be done in some other way. As a School Board member I am aware of and have access to the contents of the Annual Statement of Education Improvement Objectives and the School Development Plan for the School, but this information whilst available on request, is not widely disseminated or known amongst parents. A Strategy for Parental Involvement should be made known in some other way - preferably directly to parents - and in a simple, clear, well-presented document which will not be discarded unread because it is too complicated, too wordy, or too full of 'in-house' policy jargon.

Question 4: Absolutely - I've been on School Boards since 1989 and I'm still unclear about what their function is or what good they do! Their powers are limited and many of the areas on which parents might have a view or wish to make a contribution are outwith their jurisdiction. I have already wasted far too many evenings sitting through School Board meetings where we have ploughed through turgid documents which have apparently little or no practical relevance to the needs or concerns of the local school community or had to listen to head teachers seek approval from the Board on matters which (s)he alone is qualified to judge. Get rid of them - fast!

Question 5: Yes, although some measures would need to be in place to ensure that this is a truly open and democratic process and not vulnerable to the abuse of cherry-picking compliant parents who will not 'rock the boat', or simply including only 'favourite' parents.

Question 6: Yes.

Question 7: Yes.

Question 8: Yes. The Draft Bill appears to allow for an appropriate degree of flexibility between a proactive and permissive approaches to instigating these new forums.

Question 9: Yes - although offering a 'multiple choice' constitution which sets out options from which local forums could choose, might prevent uncritical acquiescence from determining the shape of the constitution if a single model constitution were offered initially. There is the danger that by starting with such a constitution, forums might not have the

experience or the confidence to change this constitution and find themselves shaped by a document at the beginning of a process which is intended to provide for new forms of parental involvement within the school community.

Question 10: Yes. Parents should be in the majority, but provision should be made allowing the co-option of community members as well. In my experience of School Boards, this has always led to a good balance of interests within the parent body and the wider community.

Question 11: Looked-after children should have as equal a right to parental representation on parental forums as other children living with their own parents.

Question 12: Yes. The CRBS is snowed under as it is with Disclosure checks - there is no need to burden them with any more unnecessary ones!

Question 13: Yes - on balance - but it concerns me that head teachers can often play a dominant and somewhat intimidating role at School Board meetings. Whilst I can appreciate the wisdom of granting head teachers the right to attend in the interests of good relations with the parental forum and the provision of accurate information, I would hope that the advisory role of the head teacher would be stressed and that forums might be encouraged to develop their own identity without the 'nervous deference' which the head teacher's presence sometimes seems to create. Councillors and other non-members of the forum should only be invited as appropriate - the presence of our somewhat loquacious local councillor at every School Board meeting regularly lengthens the meeting by a good half hour or so!

Question 14: Yes, they seem broad enough and permissive enough to allow forums to determine their own functions.

In terms of obligations versus options, I would suggest that the following functions be made obligatory:

- Finding out the views of parents at the school about quality and standards at the school, how the parent forum is carrying out its functions and any other matters of interest or concern to parents.
- Reporting the views of parents at the school to the headteacher, education authority or another party.
- Making representations to the headteacher and education authority about their arrangements for promoting parental involvement in their own children's education and more generally.
- Reporting to parents on its own activities annually.
- Seeking to raise quality and standards in the school.
- Supporting those managing the school in developing the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of each child to their fullest potential.

By contrast, I would leave the following as optional functions:

- Promoting contact between the school, current and prospective parents, the local community and other individuals or groups.
- Amending its constitution.

I am happy to see that the principle of maintaining the involvement of parents in the selection and appointment of senior teaching staff is to be preserved. This is a function in which parental forums must have a role.

Question 15: No - the legislation should be open-ended to allow parental forums the right to determine their own priorities and areas of concern. For one thing these will vary across Scotland and within education authorities and, for another, the main areas of emphasis or concern may change in the course of time. Legislation should be flexible enough to accommodate the changing concerns which the parental forum may wish to take up at any given time.

Question 16: Yes. This should help to strengthen their role and guard against any perception that parental forums are little more than fund-raisers or talking-shops without any real statutory 'clout'.

Question 17: Yes - for these forums to have any real value and to be worthy of parents giving up their time to serve on them, there has to be a real measure of accountability built in to the relationship with the education authority. Anything less than this will lead to disillusionment and frustration, which would run current to the spirit and intention of what is proposed.

Question 18: Yes - financial support and other forms of support are essential to the proper functioning of this new proposal.

Question 19: Absolutely - although I would help that this would not be perceived as allowing parents to hold head teachers or teaching staff to ransom regarding the education of their children. 'Advice' and 'information' are fine, but I would hope that this could not be misinterpreted as giving parents a right to demand that teaching staff 'give an account of themselves' to disgruntled parents, or use this provision to take teachers to task in an inappropriate way about their teaching methods.

Question 20: Yes - but only after a consultation process outlining clearly what is proposed has been undergone.

Question 21:

Question 22: Yes.

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