

respondee information form

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

Consultation Response



Making the difference – improving parents' involvement in schools, a consultation on a draft bill

Deadline for responses 7th June 2005

Children in Scotland

Children in Scotland is the voice of over 350 voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children, young people and their families throughout Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children, young people and families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and other provisions are the highest possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.

The organisation aims to promote and enable the exchange of information on all matters relating to Scotland's children and their families, to promote the development of policies which will improve the quality of life for Scotland's children and their families, to facilitate practice development in the services they use, and to press for adequate levels of these services and other provisions and to promote awareness of specific concerns and contributions of voluntary organisations working with children and their families, as well as those concerns which are shared with other sectors.

This consultation response does not follow the questions laid out in the consultation paper although it does address the majority of these.

1 General comments

- 1.1** Children in Scotland welcomes the Scottish Executive's commitment to improve parental involvement in Scottish Schools. We also welcome the publication of a draft bill to allow comment at this early stage. Children in Scotland recognises the need for both legislative and non-legislative measures to address both parental representation and parental involvement.
- 1.2** Legislation is necessary to strengthen parents' rights to representation in the way schools are run and to ensure that schools and authorities adopt a strategic approach to parental involvement. Children in Scotland would suggest that the proposals would be significantly strengthened by changing the emphasis towards a rights based approach with explicit

rights for parents to be involved in their child's education and in the running of their child's school as well as being represented in broader education issues (for example local strategies and policies). This should also be extended to include rights for pupils and a requirement, where appropriate, to involve the wider community. To improve standards in Scotland's schools different stakeholder groups must engage together in planning and decision-making.

- 1.3** It is not clear what role parent forums will play in schools and what decisions they will be allowed to make. Children in Scotland would welcome greater discussion of what decision making powers will lie with parent forums and how pupils and others can be equally involved in such decisions. For example School Boards have the power to control the use of school premises outside of school hours but this is one example of where pupils and other community groups must also be involved (particularly given the increasing use of school buildings to house a wide range of services).
- 1.4** The overriding aim of parental involvement and representation is to improve standards in schools and assist in children's learning. Therefore measures must be child-centred and key to this is the involvement, not just of parents in the narrow sense, but of others involved in children's lives such as grandparents and carers.
- 1.5** Children in Scotland supports the Scottish Executive's proposals for a system that allows flexibility for individual schools or authorities in the way in which parents are represented. However we would argue that this must be underpinned by common principles to ensure consistency in the level and quality of representation open to parents. Children in Scotland would therefore recommend a set of principles laid out on the face of the Bill and a code of practice for parent forums.

2 Sustaining involvement from pre-school onwards

- 2.1** It is widely acknowledged that parents often feel more able to be involved at earlier educational stages (pre-school and primary) and indeed Scottish Executive research¹ commissioned to help inform these proposals found this to be the case. Children in Scotland hopes that the Scottish Executive will not overlook the opportunity to learn lessons from the early years sector and the need to support the development of "vertical links" (such as through the learning communities being established by a growing number of local authorities²) to ensure that parental involvement is sustained beyond pre-school and primary. Legislating for parental involvement should be seen as a vital opportunity to provide a continuum

¹ *Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education*, Scottish Executive & George Street Research 2005

² "Joined-up intervention in Drumchapel" *Children in Scotland Magazine*, Sept 2004 P12-13

of involvement beginning in pre-school and continuing throughout primary and secondary. This would make a significant contribution to delivering the high level commitment in the Scottish Executive's Partnership Agreement of improving the transitions between nursery and primary and primary and secondary.

3 Duty on education authorities to promote parental involvement

3.1 Children in Scotland welcomes the introduction of a duty to promote parental involvement but would suggest that the concept of involvement, and what it means in practice, requires significant development. We would urge the Scottish Executive to develop a view of parental involvement that recognises the wide range of roles that parents can play. For example involvement can range from parents helping with daily activities, assisting on school trips, organising extra-curricular activities to being involved in planning, developing and maintaining services. Indeed there is a long history in Scotland of parents initiating, developing and managing child care and out of school care services³.

3.2 Any consideration of parental involvement by the Scottish Executive should also involve an examination of the structure and nature of services themselves. For example research carried out by Children in Scotland's rural program (*Growing up in Rural Scotland*) recently studied how delivering services in an innovative way can help to increase the involvement of certain hard-to-reach groups of parents. At the Hval Gaard nature kindergarten in Norway children spend almost all their time outdoors and this has helped to attract a high level of involvement by fathers (as well as a relatively high number of male childcare staff, who report having good relationships with fathers).

4 Strategies for Parental Involvement

4.1 The proposed Strategies for Parental Involvement (SPIs) will be central to authorities fulfilling their duty to promote parental involvement. The consultation document gives minimal indication of what the SPIs would contain. We would suggest that legislation includes details of what SPIs would be expected to contain (as is the case with Accessibility Strategies for example). This would help to ensure that authorities' duty to promote parental involvement can be taken forward effectively and that there is a level of consistency across the country.

4.2 SPIs should include mechanisms for good practice to be shared between schools and authorities. Research carried out by Children in Scotland⁴ found that local authorities use a range of different methods to involve

³ *A sense of time, a sense of place: meeting the needs of the whole child in small communities*, Children in Scotland 2005

⁴ *A sense of time, a sense of place: meeting the needs of the whole child in small communities*, Children in Scotland 2005

parents in early education and child care services. It also showed that authorities had adopted a range of methods of overcoming the difficulties of involving parents.

- 4.3** A common criticism of the current system is that a limited number and range of parents are involved and that School Boards are not representative of, or accountable to, the wider body of parents. The proposals, including those for parent forums, do not address this sufficiently. Children in Scotland would recommend that the Scottish Executive introduce a statutory requirement that each local authority's SPI includes identification of the barriers to parental involvement in its area and plans for reducing these. This should include attention to issues of equality, for example addressing whether levels of involvement are as high for fathers as for mothers and identifying particular access difficulties for certain groups of parents. This should be consistent with the existing duty on public bodies to promote race equality and proposed duties to promote disability and gender equality.
- 4.4** It is Children in Scotland's experience that parents face a number of barriers to being involved in their children's learning and schools and indeed the Scottish Executive's study *Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education* (2005) supports this. However there is evidence from other countries of innovative methods for improving opportunities for parents to be involved and tackling the barriers that exist. For example the Scottish Office report *Parental Participation in Schools* (1998) highlights (among other initiatives) the use of mediators in France which has been successful in strengthening relationships between schools and parents.

It is not clear how the Scottish Executive intends to support and promote the use of innovative approaches to improving and increasing parental involvement. Such non-legislative approaches will be essential in underpinning legislative measures if a real impact on involvement is to be achieved.

5 Involvement and representation of pupils and wider community

- 5.1** Pupils are key stakeholders in education and should be central to raising quality and standards in schools. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) gives children and young people the right to be involved in decisions and this is supported by the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 which says that education authorities must have "due regard" to the views of children and young people. The introduction of a requirement, equal to that in respect of parents, to involve pupils would make a significant contribution towards supporting Scotland's obligations under the UNCRC and the duties placed on authorities by the 2000 Act.

- 5.2** While the draft Bill includes the requirement for parent forums to report to parents of pupils at the school there is no provision for pupils to receive information about the activities of the parent forum. As the main users of their school pupils should be kept informed the activities of their parent forum.
- 5.3** Schools are a key part of Scottish communities and in the context of every school becoming an integrated community school by 2007 they will continue to be so. It is essential therefore that in addition to parents and pupils, other community groups are also involved in school planning and development. Integrated Community Schools offer an opportunity to improve and increase the involvement of all stakeholders in schools and indeed the New Community Schools Prospectus (Scottish Office, 1998) identified raising parental and family participation in children's education as one of five key goals.
- 5.4** One example of how parental involvement can support the involvement of the wider community is the Vale Silves School Partnership in Portugal. This began as a parent association which then sought to involve the wider community with significant benefits for the school and its pupils as well as the area as a whole⁵. The Scottish Executive could also look to countries such as Denmark where parents have the right to set up their own schools and receive state funding⁶. The level of state funding (around 80%) ensures a high quality service underpinned by pay and conditions comparable to those of state run schools. This model has a particularly significant role in meeting needs in rural areas and disadvantaged communities.

6 Parent forums

- 6.1** Children in Scotland is concerned that the proposals suggest giving parent forums the responsibility of ascertaining the views of other parents but does not mention guidance, principles or minimum standards of how this will be done. Consultation can be meaningless if it is not carried out in a way that ensures (as far as possible) that the results are reasonably representative of the views of stakeholders.

Children in Scotland would recommend a Code of Practice for parent forums to establish consistency and minimum standards across Scotland and provide practical guidance to forums. A Code of Practice would ensure a balance between flexibility for parent forums to operate in a way that suits local needs, and legal guidelines to ensure that forums are underpinned by common standards.

- 6.2** Greater detail is required on how parent forums will be monitored to ensure that they are providing a genuine means of parental representation

⁵ *Parental Participation in Schools*, Armstrong, A. Scottish Office 1998

⁶ <http://www.reform.co.uk/website/reformaroundtheworld/denmark.aspx>

in schools. Particular attention must be given to equal opportunities being promoted with parent forums being accessible to all parents regardless of their ability, colour, ethnicity, gender, health, religion, sexual orientation or social class.

6.3 Children in Scotland is concerned that the proposals for funding parent forums are insufficient to enable them to operate effectively. If parent forums are to act as the primary means of ascertaining the views of parents of children at a school then they must have the time and resources to undertake this task properly. This is likely to include payment of expenses to members of the forum and administrative support for arranging consultations.

7 Child protection

7.1 Children in Scotland supports the Scottish Executive's proposal that the Bill should not result in parent forum members being subject to automatic disclosure checks but that, like other parents, they should be checked when undertaking activities defined in the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003.

For further information or clarification of any of the points raised in this response please contact Shelley Gray (Policy Officer) on 0131 222 2435 or sgray@childreninscotland.org.uk

Prepared June 2005

Making the difference - improving parents' involvement in schools, a consultation on a draft bill

Deadline for responses: Tuesday 7 June 2005

Introduction

In *Educating for excellence* (the Scottish Executive's response to the National Debate on Education) the Scottish Executive made a commitment to review and reform School Board legislation. The draft Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill is intended to take this forward and also to introduce a new duty on education authorities to support parental involvement within modernised appointments systems for headteachers and deputy headteachers. The draft bill is part of wider policy initiatives aiming to improve parental involvement (including the *Making the difference* series of information leaflets and the Parentzone website).

The draft bill has been informed by views collected during the National Debate on Education (2002), research recently commissioned by the Scottish Executive (*Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education, 2005*), and discussions with stakeholders including the Scottish School Boards Association and Scottish Parent Teacher Council.

Key issues

1. Is there clarity in the consultation document about the distinction between involvement and representation?
2. How representative will parent forums be?
3. What value will parent forums add?
4. Are the proposals sufficient to address the need to sustain parental involvement from pre-school onwards?
5. How do the proposals link to the involvement and representation of children and young people themselves?
6. How will the wider community be engaged in schools?
7. Does Scotland need a national parents' body or would this risk weakening the links between different stakeholders?

Overview of proposals

The draft bill aims to strengthen parental involvement in education by supporting parents' direct involvement in their child's education, introducing a more flexible system of parental representation in schools with the details decided by parents locally, and ensuring that education authorities listen to parents more and engage with them more proactively.

● **New statutory duty on education authorities to support parental involvement in education.**

This aims to build on the provision in the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 which requires education authorities to state the ways in which they will seek to involve parents in promoting the education of their children. The proposed new duty will require authorities to consult parents and other relevant parties before drawing up a Strategy for Parental Involvement (SPI) which would then be included in their Annual Statement of Improvements Objectives, on which authorities report annually to the Scottish Executive.

● **School Boards replaced by "parent forums".**

The draft bill proposes the repeal of the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 and the introduction of parent forums which are intended to be more flexible and able to engage with a wider range and number of parents. The way in which these operate will be decided by parents at a local level. It is intended that parent forums will:

- ◆ be clearly representative of, represent the views of, and be accountable to (via annual reports), all the parents in the school
- ◆ consult with other parents in the school on issues including quality and standards at the school
- ◆ report the views of parents to the headteacher, education authority or another party
- ◆ make representations to the headteacher and education authority about their arrangements for promoting parental involvement in their own children's education and more generally.

Parent forums would also be able to:

- ◆ seek to raise quality and standards in the school
- ◆ support those managing the school in developing the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of each child to their fullest potential
- ◆ promote contact between the school, current and prospective parents, the local community and other individuals or groups
- ◆ enter into contracts with third parties (except in relation to land).

● **Duty on education authorities to give advice and information in response to a reasonable request from a parent on any matter relating to the education provided to their child.**

● **Modernisation of appointments systems for headteachers and deputy headteachers.**

This would not be prescribed centrally and instead each education authority would have to inform ministers and parent forums about its procedures including the arrangement for the involvement of parent forums in these procedures.

● **Complaints procedures to be established about way in which authorities undertake their responsibilities under the new legislation.**

This would also be decided at local authority level and authorities would have to publicise these arrangements.

Key issues

1. Is there clarity in the consultation document about the distinction between involvement and representation?

The consultation paper discusses parental involvement and parental representation almost interchangeably. Children in Scotland would consider parental involvement to refer to ways in which individual parents are involved in the life of the school (including the wide range of roles that parents can play). However representation suggests a collective parent voice which can legitimately speak for parents generally and this is essential in decision-making and the development of policies (at school, local and national level). Is the consultation paper clear on what is meant by involvement and by representation and are the proposals sufficient in terms of ensuring both involvement (and reflecting the wide range of roles this can encompass) and representation?

2. How representative will parent forums be?

The consultation paper states that “the intention is that they [parent forums] should also be clearly representative of, represent the views of, and be accountable to, all the parents in the school”. One of the difficulties identified with the current system of School Boards is that they are often not representative with some parents facing barriers to becoming involved¹. Will the proposals result in parent forums being representative of the wider parent body of a school?

3. What value will parent forums add?

While difficulties exist with School Boards it seems that replacing them with an entirely new structure must be seen as an opportunity to add value to the current system. Does the introduction of new legislation offer the opportunity to increase the extent to which the views of all stakeholders (including parents, teachers, headteachers, the wider community and education authorities) can be brought together to inform education policy at a school, local, and national level?

4. Are the proposals sufficient to address the need to sustain parental involvement from pre-school onwards?

It is widely acknowledged that parents often feel more able to be involved at earlier educational stages (pre-school and primary) and indeed research commissioned by the Scottish Executive to help inform these proposals (*Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education*, 2005) found this to be the case. The consultation paper does not acknowledge the need to support the development of vertical links (such as through learning communities being developed by a growing number of local authorities) to ensure that this involvement is continued beyond pre-school and primary school. How might the proposals support this type of work?



¹ *Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education*, Scottish Executive and George Street Research 2005

5. How do the proposals link to the involvement and representation of children and young people themselves?

Children in Scotland strongly supports efforts to better enable parents to be involved in schools but is concerned that the opportunity to examine how parental involvement and representation, and pupil involvement and representation relate is being missed. This echoes the point made above about the need to bring together the views of different stakeholders and also raises the question of how involved and represented children and young people currently are in schools and in the development of local and national policy.

6. How will the wider community be engaged in schools?

Clearly parents are key stakeholders in schools and their involvement and representation is essential. However schools are also a key part of the wider community – particularly in the context of every school becoming an integrated community school by 2007² – and Children in Scotland would suggest that the involvement of the wider community, and crucially children and young people themselves, be considered in the development of policy and legislation on parental involvement. Should involvement and representation of other stakeholders be included within this legislation?

7. Does Scotland need a national parents' body or would this risk weakening the links between different stakeholders?

It has been suggested that it may be necessary to establish a national independent body for parents to ensure that their views are represented in Scottish Education policy. Would such a body risk weakening the links between different stakeholders by separating parents' discussions from those of teachers, education authorities, children and young people, and communities. Is there a need for a national parents' body or should the Scottish Executive instead examine mechanisms for discussion to take place between all relevant stakeholders?

For further information

- The consultation document and draft bill can be viewed at www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/education/ipism-00.asp or on the Parentzone website www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk
- Hard copies and a parent guide to the consultation can be requested from the Scottish Executive on 0131 244 4485.
- *Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education*, 2005, www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/pvipicm-00.asp
- www.childpolicy.org.uk/scotland/index.cfm

For more information or clarification of any of the points raised in this briefing, please contact:

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² *A partnership for a better Scotland*, Scottish Executive Partnership Agreement