

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Parental Involvement Bill Consultation
Scottish Executive Education Department
Schools Division
Area 2-B North
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ.

Date 2 June 2005

Your Ref

Our Ref OSS/GD

Dear Sir/Madam

Making The Difference - Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools (A Consultation on a Draft Bill)

I enclose a copy of the Children and Families Department's response to the above consultation.

The response has been sent to meet your deadline of 7 June and forms part of a report, which will be tabled at the Executive meeting of the City of Edinburgh Council to be held on 21 June 2005. The report will be approved or amended at this meeting and I will advise you of the outcome.

Yours faithfully



Roy Jobson
Director of Children and Families

ROY JOBSON
DIRECTOR



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

respondee information form

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

Name: GRAHAM DOUGLAS, ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Postal Address: OPERATIONAL SERVICE SUPPORT
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL - CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
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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

**MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS
RESPONSE BY
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
DEPARTMENT**

Key Points and additional information

Summary of main points in consultation response

The proposal for authorities and individual schools to develop Strategies for Parental Involvement is broadly welcomed as a way of drawing together the various threads of parental involvement and representation. It is unclear, however, that a new duty is required because Sections 5(2) and 26 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 already place this duty on education authorities. Opportunities to support education in the wider sense, and not just confined to school education, will be integral to the service which the new City of Edinburgh Council Children and Families Department will seek to provide.

There is disappointment that these key aims of wider involvement of parents in children's learning are insufficiently developed within a proposal that focuses almost entirely on parental representation, specifically the replacement of School Boards with Parent Forums.

The proposal for more flexible arrangements for parental representation is a positive development although we do not agree that this requires the abolition of School Boards. Rigour, in terms of the constitution of parent forums, must be maintained if representative parents are to continue to be involved in key decision making in schools, for example in the recruitment and selection of senior staff, budget decisions and the School Improvement Plan.

Strong partnerships already exist in most of our schools in many forms with, for example, PTAs, School Boards and parent volunteers supporting and providing extra curricular opportunities. We agree that further progress needs to be made to encourage more involvement of parents in all the various ways in which parents engage in their children's learning and with schools.

The consultation responses that we have received strongly support the view that it is essential that Head Teachers attend School Forums as advisors and that representatives from the wider community should also continue to be encouraged to be involved.

The proposed roles and accountability of the Authority, Head Teachers and Parent Forums require far greater definition than is currently set out in the draft legislation. There is potential for conflict between the delegation of authority to flexible Parent Forums and the continued responsibility of authorities for delivering an educational service.

Existing practice in Edinburgh

The City of Edinburgh has a history of significant good practice in working in partnership with parents. 121 of our 132 schools have School Boards, most having formed strong partnerships with head teachers and staff in their schools that have been valued by all parties. Boards have been well supported by a School Board Unit that has been viewed as a priority for the Department. School Board members have made a significant contribution to Edinburgh schools in the 16 years since their introduction.

The introduction of Devolved School Management in 1994 in Lothian (and then continued in the City of Edinburgh) strengthened the role of School Boards. Not only is there the statutory duty for School Boards to approve per capita expenditure and participate in the School Improvement Planning process but they are also routinely consulted on the wider school budget and significant budget virements. Already a certain degree of flexibility has been agreed when required, for example when schools are amalgamating and one school has no school board. Similarly with the PPP school construction and refurbishment programmes, efforts have been made to include parents at all stages of the design process.

The close links that have developed between School Boards and schools have been an important element in ensuring quality in education in Edinburgh.

The Consultative Committee with Parents, formed as a sub committee of the Council in 1996, represented an innovative approach to sharing information and consulting with parents across the city. It has played a significant role in the development of policy in areas such as budget review, the asymmetric week, school security, healthy eating and school crossing patrols. It continues to provide a very constructive and valuable focus for parents and officers.

Family Learning programmes are well developed across the city and offer a range of adult education activities in schools designed to enable parents/carers in disadvantaged areas to support their children's early literacy and numeracy through the development of the parents' own learning, using a wealth model and capacity building approach to contribute significantly to encouraging parental involvement. Family Learning includes transition activities for parents of children moving from nursery to primary school and targeted work with black/minority ethnic parents and parents whose children have special educational needs. A key element in its success is that our Family Learning Workers are adult education workers with degree level qualifications. This approach enables our staff to focus on their own areas of pedagogic expertise, i.e. school staff with children, and Family Learning Workers with parents/carers.

We believe that our model could be used more widely, both within our Parental Involvement Strategy and in the Scottish Executive's wider plans to enhance parental involvement with schools. Professor Elsa Auerbach of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, an internationally respected figure in the development of Family Learning, has said,

"Family Learning in Edinburgh is an exemplary model of building on family strengths in order to address the challenges they face. Based on a recognition of the key role of the socio-economic context in shaping possibilities for families and communities, it is grounded in the view that families can only challenge the forces which shape their lives when their strengths and cultural practices are valued. As such, it enacts an empowering approach to family learning."

The questions refer to the sections in the consultation document

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

Authorities already promote parental involvement in a wide variety of ways. The draft Bill encompasses parental involvement in the widest sense, however the proposals concentrate on parental representation, specifically the replacement of School Boards with Parent Forums.

It is unclear from the consultation paper how a new duty of promotion would lead to greater consistency and a general increase in parental involvement in all schools. Sections 5(2) and 26 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 already place this duty on education authorities. The proposal is for schools and parent bodies to have locally determined structures, and therefore we are unclear to what extent the authority can intervene to ensure that these meet minimum standards. As indicated earlier, there is potential conflict if the parents' forums are to assume a role as agents of the authority.

Despite significant efforts, by family learning and other professionals, in supporting parents to become more involved in their children's learning, there continues to be challenge in achieving this for some parents. The ambition to build on and improve this situation must be a priority for authorities, however it is unclear how 'placing a duty' will facilitate this.

The reality is that different schools currently use different methods to develop relationships with parents with varying degrees of success and perhaps with different aims in mind. Further, while the success of school boards in encouraging wider parental involvement may be inconsistent across the country and possibly within local authority areas, there is real concern that some excellent good practice, including the valuable contribution that many School Boards make may be undermined.

It is not clear from the guidelines what responsibility and accountability the Authority, the school and the parent body will have in ensuring that parental involvement is promoted and enhanced.

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

The proposal to require authorities to develop new Strategies for Parental Involvement is broadly welcomed as a way of formally drawing together the variety of ways that authorities propose to engage parents in representation, consultation and in their children's learning.

It is suggested, however, that only after existing strategies have been reviewed and new ones developed to address all the ways in which parents are or could be involved in their children's learning and in representative roles, that changes to structures such as School Boards should be addressed. The proposal to replace School Boards with parent forums is to some extent prejudging the outcome of this debate at authority and school level.

Is the proposal based on any body of evidence gathered by the Scottish Executive, and if so, are there plans to publish this?

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?

We agree that strategies should be contained in the education authority's service plans. Aim 4 of the City of Edinburgh Council Children and Families Service Improvement Plan is "to maximise partnerships with, and between, learners, staff, parents and communities" with a priority to "involve learners, parents, staff and others in our planning and monitoring of service delivery and performance."

The 2000 Act already requires parents to be consulted on School Improvement Plans. However, greater involvement of parents in the production and monitoring of authority-wide and school plans will be needed if they are to be in line with the wishes of parents in all our schools.

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?

Edinburgh broadly welcomes the proposal to allow for a more flexible system of parent representation. This mirrors our input to the 2002 Banks Report. There is however, real concern that the very valuable contribution made by School Boards in Edinburgh may be diluted. There is a strong view that introducing more flexibility to the current format rather than a wholesale change to structures is preferable. This would allow local models to develop organically rather than be enforced.

Modification to School Boards would potentially allow more parents to be directly involved beyond the

strict membership limits of the current system. More flexibility would also link well with the community planning agenda and with this department's move to the integrated provision of children's services at a local level. It is envisaged that the integration of service provision within the City of Edinburgh's new Children and Families Department will present greater opportunities to encourage wider membership of boards/forums.

Feedback from schools indicates that a greater degree of clarification on the role of the proposed parent forums is essential so that there is a clear understanding of the functions and responsibilities of the forums, head teachers and the education authority. It is essential that there is a clear legislative framework and formal constitutions for any board/forum. The determination of the format of parent forums locally would be in line with the principles and practice of Devolved School Management, however, in this context it is important that there is clarity that with devolution also comes local accountability. Parent forums' responsibility for their procedures and actions would have to be explicit and clear.

The development of good practice guidelines by the authority based on a clear legislative framework would be essential to assist parents to set up forums locally.

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?

Yes, we accept that appointments could be made locally but within a legislative framework and agreed constitution. We accept that the formality of the existing election process, particularly the candidate statement where nominations exceed vacancies, may tend to discourage some parents from becoming representatives. Minority groups tend to be disproportionately disadvantaged in this respect. The term of office is also unduly prescriptive although some limit on this might continue to be necessary to avoid a few parents from continuing in office for many years. Lines of authority and responsibility will require to be clear and explicit if the new forums are to have responsibility for budgets, service planning and staff appointments.

It is also agreed that the current strict quota of School Board representatives dependent on school size is an unnecessary and arbitrary limitation. There is some agreement that there could be value in membership being based on year groups, however this would be something that could be agreed locally. The democratic rights of all parents (the wider parent forum) must be safeguarded through having local constitutions approved by the local authority.

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, this would be consistent with the overall aim to increase parental involvement in schools. The establishment of forums in schools is one of the ways in which the representative aspects of this aim may be met.

Education Authorities would have a responsibility to support parent forums, if established according to constitutions agreed with the Authority. Clear definition of areas of responsibility would need to be included as noted in Q5 above. For example, it could be difficult for head teachers to sustain their management responsibilities if the school forum was able to have other than an advisory role in school budget management. Currently School Boards have a statutory responsibility to approve the head teacher's per capita expenditure proposals; within Edinburgh head teachers are also required to consult their board on any significant expenditure plans. More, rather than less, consultation is welcomed as long as this does not limit the decision making ability of the head teacher.

Current budgets for the support of School Boards are limited and while it would be the intention of this

Authority to continue support at the existing overall level, this budget would be significantly stretched should parent forums become much larger than is currently the case. It is hoped that the significance of the new legislation would ensure that SEED would identify new monies to take this initiative forward. Any additional burden falling on schools, for example organising elections locally, would require to be funded.

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?

This proposal would seem to represent, in part, a reversion to School Councils and it is anticipated that in general there would be few situations where composite forums would be locally proposed. There may be local circumstances, however, such as a joint campus site where a composite forum might be desirable. We would suggest that the bill should not preclude the formation of this type of forum.

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, the authority accepts that it would have a responsibility to encourage the formation of parent forums. This might take the form of publicising the proposals and producing good practice guidelines and 'model' constitutions.

Training would be an important part of this process for example in relation to:
Community engagement
Consultation practices
ethos

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?

In principle, yes. However, in order to facilitate the introduction of the new forums, model(s) should be made available with clear guidelines on what would be a 'competent constitution'. As the forum within a school became more established parents might choose to develop the constitution. If parents are to continue to be involved (and this authority is committed to this) in decisions such as the recruitment of senior staff and expenditure choices, then it is essential that the constitutions are legally competent in order to promote confidence on the part of candidates, staff and parents.

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?

The consensus within this authority is that all parents should have a democratic right to be a part of the parent forum but that an organising group or groups would be required to have a role to facilitate or pump prime the involvement of parents in the school. One model might be for an organising or executive group with sub groups having responsibility for providing input to the School Improvement Plan, ad hoc short life working groups, appointments, fund raising, etc. The view of the Authority is that we currently welcome and value input by co-opted members and would wish this to continue. Parents should, however, remain in the majority.

See also response to Q.13.

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?

The carer should automatically be a part of the parent forum if this was the whole parent body and would be eligible to be elected to an executive or sub group.

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?

The need for disclosure should be driven by the nature of the activity in which the parent is involved rather than the membership of a forum as such.

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 headteacher should have the right to attend, with the councillor or other individual by invitation?

The view of the Authority is that it is essential that the generally strong partnerships that have been built in most schools are continued and enhanced. For this reason the head teacher should have a right to attend as an advisor. In the spirit of involving the school with the local community it is felt that local councillors should have a right to attend.

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 existing right of school boards and the wider parent body to be consulted on the School Improvement Plan is considered to be very important; the proposals seem to make this involvement optional rather than mandatory. Likewise, the role of parents on appointment panels is crucial and should be included in the legislation.

The emphasis in the proposals on the parent forum being representative of, and consulting with, the whole parent body is welcomed although adequate support would be needed to enable a forum to do this. It is important to remember that parents are volunteers and that their input has to be manageable.

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?

The view is that this may be too open ended an ambition and that some mechanism would be required to assess and manage the consultation agenda, in particular for the protection of individuals.

It is suggested that it might be helpful for any consultation to be linked to the areas defined in the HMIE document "How Good is Our School" (2nd version)

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?

This relates to Q4 where it was noted that it is essential that the forums operate within a clear legislative framework and that forums have formal constitutions. It is suggested that the authority would only be able to designate parent forums as 'agents' of the authority if the authority was able to approve the local constitution. A potential 150 different constitutions would be difficult to legally approve and monitor for compliance with Council policy on dealing with third parties. This might apply with insurance also. Legal guidance would be required.

There is potentially conflict between the delegation of all authority to parent forums and a continued responsibility of education authorities for their actions.

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

Yes. The proposed duty to provide information is already good practice in Edinburgh and is also now enshrined in the Freedom of Information Act.

The Authority would also continue its support for parent forums, financially and through the provision of information and training, as we do currently with School Boards. The costs are likely, however, to be significantly greater (Ref Q6 and Q18 below).

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?

It is anticipated that the proposals for larger parent forums with wider remits, local responsibility for elections and particularly a remit to actively and regularly consult with the whole parent body, will require substantially increased funding to be made available at the individual parent forum level. Different burdens will be placed on the authority to promote the establishment, support more diverse parent forums and provide training for greater numbers of parents. The burdens on individual schools would also increase. The Scottish Executive has as yet given no indication of what level of funding will be made available to implement and support all the proposals in the draft legislation. A realistic assessment of costs must be made to ensure that the implementation does not reduce resources available for current service delivery to children and families.

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?

Yes. All our schools currently respond to requests from parents for information on matters relating to the education of their own children. There is much good practice in individual schools, for example open surgeries, opportunities for access to individual teachers and of course regular parents' evenings. As part of the ongoing agenda for improvement schools are expected to review and develop these arrangements.

Responses are also currently made to individual parents who request information about more general education issues that affect their children such as information on composite classes, dress code etc. The Authority also has a range of information leaflets available.

The Authority operates an Advice and Conciliation Service for staff and parents. It is considered imperative that effective advice and information is provided to individual parents on matters relating to their children's education. Early advice giving and receiving ensures more effective communications at school level in the best interests of the pupils. A dedicated person, on a dedicated helpline, provides early interventions with information, help, advocacy, and support, particularly when difficulties arise in schools. Advice can be given to senior staff and to parents about what is possible to expect and what is reasonable to provide to avoid misunderstandings which may lead to disputes.

In the Advice and Conciliation Service in Edinburgh, over 1000 enquiries were responded to in 2004/2005. 40% of calls were received from senior staff and 60% from parents, which contributed to early resolution of arguably, over 1000 potential complaints and disputes.

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

There is a support within this education authority for a review of existing recruitment and selection procedures for head teachers and deputy head teachers. Initial suggestions include, for example, more evidencing of competencies, verification of experience and the inclusion of some 'social' time within the selection process.

In making proposals for a panel for selection the key question is "what would be the added value of each member of the panel?" The involvement of parents as well as senior officers from the department is viewed as being essential for the recruitment and selection of highly skilled leaders for our schools. As noted above, there would need to be a continuation of the rigor necessary to ensure that all parties, including parents, involved in the recruitment and selection process were adequately trained.

The present School Board legislation requires all head teacher and depute head teacher posts to be advertised. In the present climate of falling rolls it would be beneficial to the Authority to be allowed to appoint supernumerary promoted staff to vacancies in other schools.

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.

N/a

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?

It is agreed that complaints procedures are necessary for parents to access the local authority, when they are dissatisfied. Complaints should be investigated by a dedicated member of staff, in a fair and impartial manner, which respects people's rights to confidentiality, ensures a speedy response and redress, as necessary.

The analysis of complaints information and the recommendations made as a consequence of the outcome from justified complaints, contributes to continuous improvement and should be seen as integral in the future development of Children and Families Services.

If you wish to reply electronically, please email your response by **Tuesday 7 June** to parentalinvolvementbill@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Or please return it to the following address:

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