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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

**MAKING THE DIFFERENCE - IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT
IN SCHOOLS - CONSULTATION REPOSE**

1. **Do you agree with the placing of a new duty on education authorities to promote parent involvement?**

Yes, education authorities should be accountable in this way for the ways and the extent to which they show their commitment to promote parental involvement in children's learning.

2. **Do you agree that education authorities should be required to prepare new strategies for parental involvement?**

Yes, authorities need to be able to demonstrate exactly how they intend to transform an aspiration to involve parents on an inclusive basis in the education of their child, in its widest sense, into a plan for action.

This strategy must concern itself with parental involvement in all aspects of children's learning from the earliest point in children's lives. It should be underpinned by a clear commitment to inclusion for all parents.

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 authorities to set out their intentions? Or should this be done in some other way?**

It is good to embed these strategies into the major planks of strategy at both the authority and the school level. It will ensure that they are not seen as outside the mainstream of strategic planning.

However, if the intention is to involve parents in their children's learning in the widest sense, then ways will have to be found for these strategies to touch a range of organisations and settings where children learn, from the earliest point of their lives. To target schools on their own misses many other opportunities to bring parents together with their children's learning, particularly in the early years. This is especially the case for vulnerable children where parents are not engaged with their children's learning even before they start school. Any strategy needs to take account of how it will ensure these parents too will become involved in a positive way.

4. **Do you agree that the current system of parental representation, ie School Boards should be replaced by a more flexible system of parents' forums, or decided locally by the parents, in a way which suits them and their school best?**

The current system, in schools where it works, allows for effective involvement of some parents. However, for many schools and for many

parents the system has failed because it is too rigid and too prescriptive in the role it gives parents in the life of the school. The role of School Boards tends to err towards a bureaucratic and management focussed set of responsibilities rather than any designed to involve parents directly in children's learning in ways that parents find accessible.

A system that is flexible enough to allow local parents to make decisions at a school level how they wish their forum to function, seems very attractive. Any concern would centre around that flexibility leading to lack of focus and direction which may in turn lead to failure or to special interest groups of parents taking over the forum for their own purposes. There should be guidelines published on how these forums should be conducted.

5. **The Bill does not prescribe the means of appointment to the new forums but provides for parents to decide this locally. Do you agree?**

Not entirely. There should be some guidance issued to ensure the forum is properly representative and not taken over by narrow or specific interest groups.

6. **Do you agree that education authorities should have a new duty to promote the establishment of a parents forum to each school and to support their operation?**

It seems sensible to allow for the possibility of multiple school forums in the Bill. It should also be possible to build in the possibility of forums in other non school settings and authorities should have responsibility to support these too.

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?**

Yes, although safeguards would need to be built in to ensure fair representation from all parties. It certainly makes sense for parent forums from several schools to act in consort eg related to community planning procedures.

8. **Do you agree with the proposal for the involvement of education authorities to get the initial parent forum off the ground?**

Yes, if the parents wish it.

9. **The draft Bill leaves the 'forums initiative 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?**

We agree that the constitution can be locally determined but it should be written in the context of clear guidelines issued by the authority which ensure

an inclusive ethos to the forum and should be submitted for approval to the authority or some other national body which can take an overview across Scotland, before the forum can begin its work.

- 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 the majority?**

It should be written into the constitution that parents should form the majority membership, however, the forum should be free to co-opt to its membership others who may be an asset to the forum.

- 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 carers of looked-after children should be entitled to membership of the forums and defined as 'parent' in its widest sense to ensure that the interest/points of view of these children are reflected in the general make up and business of the forum.

- 12. **Do you agree that the Bill should not result in parent forum members being subject to automatic disclosure checks etc?**

Yes.

- 13. **On balance, do you agree that 'rights of attendance' for certain non-members of a parents forum should not be a part of the new arrangements? In other words, do you agree that non-members of the parents forum should attend only by invitation or do you believe the head teacher should have the right to attend, with the councillor or other individual by invitation?**

It would seem sensible for the head teacher to have a close relationship with the parents forum for his/her school and therefore a presumption that he/she will attend meetings. However, the status of the head teacher at forum meetings should be advisory. He/she should not have full membership with voting rights to ensure that the forum is not unduly swayed by the opinion and power of the head teacher. Similarly, should the forum require to hold a meeting without the head teacher being present to allow parents maximum freedom or discussion this should be possible.

The councillor or any other individual should not have an automatic right of attendance.

- 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 functions listed are appropriate. None should be made obligatory since that is contrary to the idea of the forums actively being determined locally by local parents.

However, it should be the central purpose of a forum to promote, encourage and facilitate the widest possible parental involvement in children's learning and this should be the main object outlined in the constitution and underpin all its work.

15. **The Bill has been drafted to allow the parents 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 provision should remain open-ended.

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?**

It is clear there is merit in parents forums being able to act as 'agents' of the authority. However it would be a great pity for forums to have to limit their activity as a result. It should be for forums to denote if they wish to have this status or not. The Executive should therefore examine the feasibility of forums applying for this status should they wish it.

17. **Are there the appropriate obligations to place on education authorities in relation to their working with parent forums?**

Yes.

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?**

Agree. Forums need a budget to allow them to hold meetings/events which are well promoted and designed for maximum participation. They also need support in secretarial functions such as arranging meetings, circulating papers and taking notes of meetings.

There should be a budget to facilitate local events organised to promote forums and allow local parents the opportunity to become involved. These need not necessarily happen in schools but could take place in places where parents meet for other reasons eg community centres/leisure centres.

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?**

Agree. Parents should always feel able to ask for information specific to their child.

20. **Do you agree that education authorities should be enabled to replace the current system of appointing head teachers and deputy head teachers with more modern, flexible processes and procedures?**

Agree.

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?**

Agree.

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?**

Agree.

Early Years and Childcare Team
Children and Families Department
City of Edinburgh Council

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