



CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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Secretary to Committee on Education: Susan M Leslie



Our Ref: AM/
7 June 2005

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

Dear Sirs

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

The Church of Scotland is pleased to respond to this document. Our Response is enclosed. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

AGNES MULLEN

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Standing Committee on Education

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Official Response

SUBJECT **MAKING THE DIFFERENCE - IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL**

REQUESTED BY **SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE**

AUTHOR **GEORGE ROSS, FOR THE COMMITTEE**

REFERENCE **OR 047/2005**

DATE **7 June 2005**

The Church of Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on this document. The Church has been in favour of encouraging parents to take an active role in all aspects of their children's education and welcomes the Scottish Executive action to encourage education authorities to support parental involvement in education and strengthen parent's rights to information.

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

A **Yes**

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

A **Yes.**

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?

A **Yes. SPIs should be made available to parents/carers. These should be easily accessible to interested members of the wider community eg through public libraries.**

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 suits them and their school best?

A Yes. However the features of School Boards that have worked well in some schools should be allowed to continue. The current arrangements should be made more flexible to encourage a wider involvement of parents.

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?

A Yes. The present system attracts those willing to be involved. We are not convinced that a different means of appointment will bring about a greater parental involvement.

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?

A The Committee on Education believes that there should be a duty on education authorities to promote greater involvement by parents/carers in their children's schools. We believe that the model of parental involvement should be determined by parents/carers of children attending each school. There should be a duty on education authorities to support the chosen arrangement.

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?

A No. The primary responsibility of the parent 'body' should be focused on one school and its pupils. This would not preclude parent bodies from a cluster group liaising and co-operating on issues of mutual interest.

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?

A Yes

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?

A Yes. It is important that the constitution should be able to take account of local/school variations. However some central guidance or templates should be provided to assist parental groups lacking confidence or experience in this area.

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?

A No. Co-optees from the local community with a strong interest in the school can be a valuable asset. Parents should always be in the majority.

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?

A Looked after children, where they are able, should be assisted to select someone who would represent their interests on the parent board or forum.

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?

A Yes

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?

A **The headteacher should have a right to attend. Others should be able to attend by invitation.**

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?

A **Obligatory functions should be few. Parent bodies should be free to exercise those functions that are relevant to their school and pupils. Some parents might find some of the functions particularly those in 7(g) and (h) quite daunting.**

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?

A **Parent body should be able to determine the views of parents on any issues that impact on the education or wellbeing of the pupils. As indicated in 14 above some parents might find this quite a demanding exercise. Safeguards would be required to prevent any unrepresentative minority group using such an exercise for its own ends. It would also be important that such a function did not impede the educational progress of the pupils.**

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?

A **If parent bodies are to be designated agents of the education authority then the authority would require to have some control over the constitution. Areas in which the parent body was acting as an agent would require to be clearly defined as would the types of action or agreements in which the parent body could enter. This is an area in which parent bodies might require considerable guidance and support. The issue of insurance would certainly require to be looked at.**

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

A **Duties listed in section 9 are appropriate.**

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?

A **Yes. For such bodies to function properly they would require financial and other support from the education authority. The school should not be required to provide any support as this could detract from support for its pupils.**

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?

A Yes

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?

A **Yes. A more modern system of appointing is required. This must have continued parental involvement. This then lays an obligation on education authorities to provide parents and others involved in such appointments with appropriate training.**

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.

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?

A Yes

Other comments:

The Church of Scotland's Standing Committee on Education is part of the Church's Church and Society Council. This Council carries forward the longstanding work of the Church of Scotland's involvement in and care for the education system in Scotland. The Church has been consistently in favour of effective parental participation in support of the education of their children, believing that the better parents are informed and involved the better will be the educational and social outcomes. We have, for example, been pressing just recently for the full implementation of the McCabe recommendations.

We, therefore, support the draft Bill's eight main objectives. Parental involvement in a school can only be good for children since parental interest and support can make a substantial difference to children's performance and progress. However, the parents of children who need the most help are those with no interest in parental involvement at present. We are not convinced that there is sufficient detail provided to indicate how this issue will be addressed. There is a vagueness throughout as to how the system is to move on from "school boards' It is essential that the best features of the school board system are retained.