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From: Lorraine Brown [Lorraine.Brown@midlothian.gsx.gov.uk]
Sent: 07 June 2005 12:55
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Subject: 853 Midlothian Council



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Education

Director
Donald S MacKay

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Midlothian

7 June 2005

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



Dear Sir

**Making the Difference - Improving Parents' Involvement in Schools
A Consultation on the Draft Bill**

With reference to the above consultation please find attached a response from Midlothian Council.

Please note that these are draft comments subject to final approval by the Cabinet of Midlothian Council. I shall contact you again as soon as possible to confirm their status.

Yours sincerely

Donald S. MacKay

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CABINET

ITEM NO

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – IMPROVING PARENTS’ INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS - A CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT BILLReport by Director, Education

1 BACKGROUND

The above consultation paper has been prepared by the Scottish Executive. It sets out why Ministers consider that improving parental involvement in education is important, how such involvement helps improve children’s attainment and achievements and contains a draft Bill which is intended to help achieve this.

The draft Bill’s main objectives are to:

- Support more and better parental involvement in their children’s learning.
- Create more flexible, locally agreed means of parental involvement in their children’s school.
- Build on existing rights to parental information, like report cards, for example.
- Allow input to shape new arrangements for parental involvement in school life.
- Strengthen the partnership between parents and schools.
- Ensure education authorities listen to and engage with parents more proactively.
- Extend the principle of devolving school decision-making to decisions on parental involvement itself.
- Ensure continued parental involvement in new modern appointment processes for Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers.

The consultation document sets out a series of questions intended to focus on the above key issues. Whilst the list of questions was not intended to restrict responses, the Scottish Executive was particularly keen to receive respondents views on the key questions. Responses to the consultation document are sought by the Scottish Executive by Tuesday 7 June 2005.

2 CONSULTATION

Three consultation meetings have been held with key groups of respondents. Firstly a meeting with parents representing School Boards and Parents Associations was held at Dalkeith Schools Community Campus on Wednesday 18 May 2005. Secondly a briefing seminar and consultation event was held with Elected Members and Church Representatives on the Cabinet on Tuesday 30 May 2005 and finally a consultation meeting with Headteachers was held on Friday 2 June 2005.

Further to this each School Board or parent group was asked to submit a separate and independent response to the Scottish Executive if they felt that was appropriate. To date a number of these responses have been copied to the Director, Education and have been used along with the outcome of the consultation meetings to shape the response to the consultation paper.

3 RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

The Council's response to the consultation document is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

4 CONCLUSION

In general it was felt that the proposals contained within the consultation document lacked any real framework for structure. As a result they do not give clear guidance to local authorities for either the continuation of School Boards or their replacement. Nor do they provide a common model which could be used across an authority in all its schools or for that matter across all 32 education authorities in Scotland.

Parents, Elected Members, Church Representatives and Headteachers were very clear that whilst they felt the existing School Board framework and legislation may be restrictive they felt that the proposals contained in the consultation paper would not improve matters. It was the general feeling that the existing legislation for School Boards should be reviewed and updated to provide opportunities for more parental involvement on a more open and flexible basis and with wider representation from the local community. It was felt that this structure should continue to support PTAs etc and the existing links between School Boards, Elected Members, co-opted members and education staff should be retained as this provides a significant link between the school, the community and the education authority. It was also agreed that there should be a revision of the appropriate procedures for Headteachers and Depute Headteachers but that there should be further consultation on this issue.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

The Education Division of Midlothian Council currently supports a significant number of School Boards and parent associations across the authority. Currently part of the time of an officer within the Education Division is used to support School Boards, their development, training and financial needs. Additionally a small budget is provided to each School Board for clerking and associated activities. Should School Boards be disbanded and parent forums established it is expected that a similar level of officer involvement and financial support would be required. Should no School Boards, parent associations or parent forums exist then the Education Division would need to seek new ways to involve parents in the life of their local schools and in their own children's education.

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7 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members:

- (i) note the response to the consultation on parental involvement in schools;
and
- (ii) agree to submit this report to the Scottish Executive as part of the consultation process.

DONALD S MACKAY
Director, Education

1 June 2005

Contact Person:

Lorraine Brown

Tel No. 0131 271 3718

Background Papers:

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**MAKING THE DIFFERENCE –
IMPROVING PARENTS’ INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL**

A CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT BILL

Q1 Do you agree with the placing of a new duty on education authorities to promote parental involvement?

Whilst welcoming the requirement that education authorities should promote parental involvement in schools, it is noted that under Section 5(2) of the Standards in Scotland’s Schools (Scotland) Act 2000 that there is an existing requirement for authorities to account in annual improvement objectives for the ways “in which they will involve parents”. This statement already seems to address the issue of the promotion of parental involvement.

Nonetheless we do agree that it would be helpful for each authority to prepare a strategy for parental involvement building on the existing good practice to be found across Scotland.

Q2 Do you agree that education authorities should be required to prepare new Strategies for Parental Involvement (SPIs)?

Whilst again referring to Section 5(2) of the Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act, it would be a good thing for all authorities to prepare new strategies. However, it would be of concern if all 32 authorities were to choose different approaches to the issue of parental involvement.

Q3 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?

If strategies are to be put in place then it would seem sensible for these to form part of the statement of Education Improvement Objectives and for schools to contain them within their development plans. By virtue of this approach it would be possible for education authorities to monitor levels of parental involvement.

Q4 Do you agree that the current system of parental representation, ie School Boards should be replaced by a more flexible system of parent forums, as decided locally by the parents, in a way which suits them and their school best?

Whilst it was felt by everyone involved in the consultation process that there should be a more flexible system in relation to parental involvement, it was broadly agreed that it was not necessary to wipe out the current system of parental representation through School Boards in order to achieve a more flexible approach. It was generally felt that a revision and updating of the School Board system would be more appropriate. In this respect that it was felt that areas of inflexibility within the existing School Board legislation should be focussed on.

These are principally the make-up of the Boards themselves, the method of election, the terms of office and the formality/style of meetings.

Q5 *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?*

It was generally felt that a structure for the appointment to parent forums or to School Boards should be put in place. However, there was broad agreement that School Boards or their replacement should be more open to involve the wider parent and local community body, should be more flexible in their arrangements, such as allowing members of the public to participate in putting forward their views or raising questions, that there should be wider representation, more community involvement and that arrangements should support the existing provision of Parent Teacher Associations etc.

Q6 *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?*

It is essential that an education authority promotes the full involvement of parents in the life of their schools. As part of this process the authority will provide full and appropriate support for School Boards or for any other parent forums that are put in place. However, it was recognised that there are difficulties in supporting any new arrangements which might not appear to be representative. A wide range of different parent forum arrangements within a local authority would be difficult to support in the same way that School Boards currently are supported.

Q7 *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?*

Whilst there may be a range of areas of common interest between schools, experience suggests that much of a School Board or forums business will concern the activities of a single school. Short-term interests such as those covered by interim Board arrangements for closing or merging school would nonetheless be able to continue under any new arrangements.

Q8 *Do you agree with the proposal for the involvement of education authorities to get their initial parent forum off the ground? If not, what alternative would you suggest?*

The creation of parent forums without the assistance of the education authority may be fraught with difficulty. The education authority would provide a single point of reference for parents, any form of parent group whether it be School Board or parent forum etc will require centrally based assistance in the areas of organisation, constitution, training, personnel issues and appointment procedures.

- Q9** *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?*

It is vital that there is a generally agreed constitution in place for each parent body. In this respect it would be helpful for a nationally agreed model constitution to be provided. Individual constitutions put in place by parent forums should be monitored by the local authority.

- Q10** *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?*

Firstly, it was felt that all parents of a school should be entitled to be members of a parents forum if such a facility were to be put in place. Secondly it was agreed by all Boards or their successors should not be confined to only parents. It was agreed that there needs to be wider representation on such bodies and that they should be more inclusive. Whilst it would be in order for parents to be in the majority of membership it was strongly felt that membership should also include, where appropriate, pupils, staff, councillors, co-optees from the local community. Additionally the Headteacher must be present as an advisor and the Director of Education or his/her representative should be permitted to attend as appropriate.

- Q11** *Do you have a view as to how the needs of looked-after children should be addressed and catered for in the Bill?*

It was felt that any forum or Board should be given a duty to consider the needs of looked-after children by appointing, or where necessary, co-opting a member to represent the children's interests. However, it is vitally important that looked-after children are not in any way identified.

- Q12** *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?*

It was agreed that the Bill should not result in forum members being subject to automatic disclosure checks.

- Q13** *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?*

It was felt that it was essential that the Headteacher attend Board or parent forum meetings as an advisor. If the Headteacher were not to attend it would be difficult to understand how matters could be progressed or questions responded to. It was also felt that local councillors should have the right to attend along with the Director of Education or his/her representative, as appropriate.

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Q14 *Do you consider these functions appropriate to parent forums? Would you suggest removing or adding any, or making some obligatory and others optional?*

No response.

Q15 *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?*

There was a mixed response from the consultation with some groups agreeing that there should be a more open-ended approach whilst others felt it would be extremely difficult for this type of approach to operate satisfactorily. A consensus might be that the Board of forum should be proactive in seeking views within the terms of the constitution. However, there needs to be serious thought given to the confidentiality regarding children and staff at the school.

Q16 *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?*

There was no consensus on response to this question.

Q17 *Are these the appropriate obligations to place on education authorities in relation to their working with parent forums?*

Yes.

Q18 *Do you agree with the provisions requiring education authorities to provide financial support or support in kind to parent forums or would you suggest an alternative arrangement?*

It was widely agreed that education authorities should provide financial support for School Boards or parent forums as exists at present.

Q19 *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?*

Education authorities are currently providing such a service.

Q20 *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?*

Yes. There should be a degree of consistency across all authorities in Scotland with regard to the appointment of senior managers in schools. Further consultation in this respect should be put in place.

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Q21 *If you do not agree that the principle of parental involvement should be retained by the involvement of the parent forums in the new senior appointments processes, please give your reasons.*

It was agreed that parents should continue to be involved in the appointment process for Headteacher and Deputy Headteachers. Further consultation should be considered in this respect.

Q22 *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?*

Authorities already have complaints procedures in place. It would therefore seem unnecessary for legislation to be brought in in this respect.

Midlothian Council
1 June 2005