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Our Ref RO'C/AP Your Ref
Date 3 June 2005
If phoning please ask for Ronnie O'Connor

Mr Peter Peacock
Minister for Education & Young People
Scottish Executive
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ

Dear Mr Peacock

CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT BILL

I refer to the above Consultation document and attach the Glasgow City Council's response. The comments included in the response have been collated after discussion with, principally, School Board members, Church representatives, Education Services' staff and elected members.

The Council's draft response was the subject of detailed discussion at the Education Services Committee held on Thursday 2 June. I have been requested by the elected members of the Education Services Committee to bring to your attention separately the views of councillors within Glasgow City Council. In particular they wish me to highlight to you 4 specific areas on the proposed draft Parental Involvement Bill –

- It is the unanimous view of councillors that the draft Bill, as presented, in the consultation will not strengthen current parent interest or representation in schools. The proposed legislation will not lead to an immediate surge in parental involvement in schools, indeed the proposals may well erode parental involvement in schools
- Councillors reiterated their concerns about the increasing burden of primary legislation, secondary legislation and guidance emanating from the Scottish Executive – the effect of which is to disempower education authorities generally. There is a need to pare down new duties on local government particularly in respect of how they engage with their constituents for whom they deliver services, parental involvement in education as proposed in this Bill is another example of a meaningless statutory duty imposed on education authorities where it is already recognised by all councils that parental involvement is essential.

2.

- The current proposals in the draft Bill and the consultation undertaken pay scant regard to the real views of the vast majority of parents whose children are in education.
- Major concerns were expressed concerning the lack of detail contained in the consultation document particularly in relation to the democratic accountability of a parent forum.

I would be grateful if you could ensure that the comments from elected members of Glasgow City Council are considered as part of the consultation exercise.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. O'Connor' with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

RONNIE O'CONNOR
Director of Education Services

cc. Elected Members of Education Services Committee

Respondee information form

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

Name: **Education Services, Glasgow City Council**

Address: **Wheatley House, 25 Cochrane Street, Glasgow G1 1HL**

Title of consultation: **MAKING THE DIFFERENCE –
INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS**

1. Are you responding as:

an individual?

on behalf of a group or organisation?

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2a. INDIVIDUALS:

Do you agree to your response being made public (in SE library and/or on SE website)?

Yes

No

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 Scottish Executive to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

Yes ✓
No

**MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS
CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

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

No.
There appears little value in a statutory duty to simply promote parental involvement. It is unnecessary as local authorities & schools welcome parental involvement.

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

Yes. It is always important for Education Authorities to review best practice in this area but for the Executive to recognise that parental involvement will vary depending on individual parents views and needs.

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?

Yes.
However, there is some feeling that this is only likely to reach a narrow audience and other more imaginative ways of engaging with parents need to be developed.

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?

Given the diverse needs of individual parents, the concept of flexibility is very welcome. The current School Board system is based largely on 'one size fits all' – something that has been abandoned in most other areas of education. However, it would be important to ensure that the strengths of the current system are not lost, particularly the principle that all sectors of the community are represented.

Parent forums may provide an opportunity for strengthening parent representation in schools because they allow an independent voice for parents to emerge. However, they will need to ensure that they are effective, representative, transparent and in-touch with other parents to ensure that they are seen to be legitimate as a voice for parents. Clear guidance nationally on how parents forums would be constituted may help to ensure that they develop rather than erode the parents' voice in education policy.

The option of keeping the PTA as a separate body should remain. Many parents who contribute to the work of the PTA have little interest in becoming involved in the matters proposed for the Parent Forum.

We do not anticipate that this proposed legislation will lead to an immediate surge in parental involvement and interest in schools.

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?

It is acknowledged that the current system of elections is too bureaucratic and off-putting for some parents. However, there needs to be clear national guidance as to how the parent forum should be formed and examples of possible models provided. The democratic accountability of the parent forum is crucial and the system must be seen to be fair and easily defensible.

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?

No.

The authority already supports and promotes parental involvement. Therefore, a new duty is unnecessary.

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?

We expect that most schools will wish to have their own parent forum. However, we support the notion of an overarching parent forum for combined schools or clusters of schools if the schools / parents wish this. However, there is no desire to return to the old school council system where the needs/voice of individual schools become lost. However, this approach would reinforce the policy development of New Learning Communities within Glasgow City Council.

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.

Without this, there is a danger that parental involvement may actually decline.

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 national framework is desirable to allow parents across Scotland an entitlement to equal participation in partnership with schools. Parity across local authorities is desirable. Within the national framework there should be sufficient flexibility to allow for some local variations.

The constitution for each parent forum should include a code of conduct for the forum.

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?

While parents should always be in the majority, membership of the forum should be open to community representation.

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 Bill should make explicit statements about the rights of children who are looked after and accommodated. It needs to take into account that a percentage of them will be in residential accommodation e.g. children's units.

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?

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?*

It is reasonable to assume that the purpose of the parent forum is to promote contact between parents and the school. This could not be done without consultation between the Head Teacher and the parent forum and the Head Teacher's attendance should be assured. The Head Teacher should have the right to attend or send a representative without the need for invitation. The current system whereby the Head Teacher is 'adviser to the School Board' is too vague and can result in conflict.

Other parents, councillors and teachers should have the right to attend all forum meetings.

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?*

It is questionable whether an annual report to parents from the parent forum is adequate. Communication with the parent body has been an area of difficulty for School Boards and needs to be a major focus for parent forums.

Many School Boards have struggled to define their purpose and have a very vague idea of what they should become involved in. Being more specific in relation to these functions would be beneficial. The quality indicators in 'How Good is Our School' that pertain to parental involvement may provide a good starting point.

Otherwise, these are appropriate broad functions and are capable of further refinement by individual forums.

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?

In the same way that some School Boards have struggled to define their purpose, the open-ended provision in relation to consultation and representation may lead parent forums into similar difficulties. Being more specific in relation to these functions would be beneficial.

There should be a very strong emphasis on the need for the parent forum to communicate with the parents it represents. Skills-based training for parent forums in respect of this task may be required.

Complaints should not be part of a forum's remit and there should be no discussion relating to named individuals.

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?

Individual authorities will have different restrictions on what they will allow those for whom they carry liability to do. The 'agent' status also suggests that the parent forums are in some way controlled by the authority. Since the parent forum is there to represent parent interests rather than to act on behalf of the authority, a separate, national system of public liability cover is desirable. This would be similar to the SPTC insurance for PTA events.

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

The specific statutory duties of education authorities in relation to parent forums outlined in the draft Bill are reasonable. Good support from the local authorities in terms of financial support, flow of advice and information and responses to any questions and representations is already accepted as good practice within the authority.

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?

At present, many School Boards do not spend this budget and it is 'donated' to the school. Clear guidance on appropriate use of budgets is desirable. Apart from clerks fees and members expenses, there should be a strong emphasis on using the budget to communicate with the parent body.

The level of financial support should be reviewed at regular intervals and on a national basis.

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.

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?

More modern, flexible processes and procedures for appointing Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers are welcomed. With an increasing focus on the importance of leadership and the requirement for leadership qualifications, it is important that the appointment process is suited to the current needs of schools. The parent forum should be represented within this process, with the nature of involvement at the discretion of the local authority. There are particular issues of concern for the Roman Catholic Church in ensuring appropriate faith representation in future appointment procedures for senior staff.

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?

Yes. This is already accepted as good practice.

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