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From: Jason McDonald [jason@cosla.gov.uk]
Sent: 07 June 2005 15:33
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Subject:



Parental
Involvement - COSLA [*****]

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- > Dear colleague,
- >
- > Please see the attached file - COSLA's response to the above
- > consultation.
- >
- > Kind regards
- >
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- >> <<Parental Involvement - COSLA Response.doc>>

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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:

Name: COSLA

Address: Rosebery House 9 Haymarket Terrace, EDINBURGH, EH12 5XZ

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?

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

COSLA's Response to
MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Introductory Comments

COSLA is the collective voice of Scottish local government, and represents the political view of its members in making this response, and we are pleased to offer support to the main objectives of the draft Bill, as set out in the consultation paper.

COSLA's main principles when feeding back on any such consultation exercise are to ensure that maximum and appropriate local flexibility is given to local authorities. Furthermore, we are determined to ensure that all additional responsibilities for local authorities arising from legislative changes are adequately resourced.

COSLA welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Scottish Executive's consultation document 'Making the Difference - Improving Parents' involvement in Schools'. COSLA is supportive of any initiative aimed at increasing parental involvement, acknowledging that such involvement will contribute to positive and lasting benefits for both the school and the child. We are particularly keen to see the proposed Bill facilitate more inclusiveness by drawing in hard-to-reach parents.

COSLA recognises the excellent work that has been undertaken by School Boards. We are, therefore, not entirely convinced by the main proposal of the draft bill - the outright replacement of School Boards with parent forums. However, the opportunity for individual Councils and individual schools to tailor the precise nature of parental involvement to their own local needs within an agreed Council-wide framework is endorsed wholeheartedly, but can only be achieved through clear accountability between the forums and the school/local authority.

Feedback from our members indicates that many parents do not associate or engage with boards due to their formality and election process, but that the level of parental involvement has generally been good in parent associations and PTAs, which do not carry the official stamp of boards. COSLA acknowledges that the present legislation would benefit from a degree of revision, e.g. the election procedures, which are considered unnecessarily bureaucratic and formal. The reduced formality and increased flexibility of the draft proposals is therefore likely to encourage wider participation among parents and carers.

COSLA has particular views on key aspects of the proposed forums, particularly the Executive's intention to allow parents the freedom to decide locally on their composition and constitution. These are addressed more fully in our response to the direct questions in the consultation document.

CONSULTATION QUESTION TEMPLATE

Q.	COSLA Remarks
1.	<p>Yes, although we do have concerns about the increasing burden of primary legislation, secondary legislation and guidance emanating from the Scottish Executive – the cumulative effect of which is to disempower education authorities generally. With that in mind, it is suggested that the final version of the Bill should be as non-prescriptive as possible, although it would be helpful to define this role more clearly in regard to, " . . . the child' s widest learning experience."</p> <p>A statutory duty on the measurement of parental involvement may be difficult. Councils can measure the promotion and opportunities for parental involvement, but it will be harder to evaluate the effect. Perhaps the existing requirement under section 5(2) of the Standards in Scotland's Schools (Scotland) Act 2000, that authorities account in Annual</p>

	Improvement Objectives for the ways "in which they will involve parents....", already addresses the issue adequately.
2.	Yes, but with consultation of existing School Boards and parent bodies, and with local authority guidance, e.g. a handbook for Parent Forums.
3.	<p>Yes. School Improvement Plans would then contain action plans for parental involvement, which are based on the overall authority SPI.</p> <p>However, as already noted under the response to Question 1, the Bill should be as non-prescriptive as possible. At a time when Head Teachers are being empowered to take more decisions for themselves, the requirement as currently stated in Clause 2(5) for inclusion of reference to parental involvement in School Development Plans would appear to be excessively bureaucratic and will almost certainly lead eventually to what will become meaningless repetitions on an annual basis. Similar reservations apply to the excessively prescriptive requirement relating to annual Statements of Education Improvement Objectives. It follows, therefore, that the alternative to the current proposals should simply be to place a requirement on education authorities and on schools to promote parental involvement without any further prescription.</p> <p>Authorities will wish to also publish and promote strategies and initiatives in ways more easily accessible and intelligible to most parents.</p>
4.	<p>There is undoubtedly a clear need for reform of certain aspects of school boards. However, the Consultation recognises that the School Board system has worked well for some schools and parents. Over the last 15 years, boards have developed into invaluable consultative forums for parents, head teachers, education authorities and the Scottish Executive itself. Therefore, if boards are to be replaced by parent forums, it is important that the new forums maintain a similarly strong, consultative role.</p> <p>It would appear that the election process for School Boards, for example the preparation of candidate's statements, has been a significant factor in discouraging parents from participating. Some flexibility is required to combat this, but it would be a challenging, if not impossible task, for an authority to support a multiplicity of Parent Forums with diverse structures and terms of reference.</p> <p>We feel that some common structure should be established for Parents Forums within each local authority. It is possible that none of the proposed models would be suitable for a parent body but it is likely that this would only occur in the most exceptional of circumstances.</p>
5.	<p>Yes, it is clear that less formal means can be employed to engage parents in the new forums. It is not necessary for there to be formal procedures, in that any parent should be allowed to be a member.</p> <p>However, it will be easier for the authority to support procedures if these are agreed for all schools within that authority area.</p>
6.	Yes. This proposed new duty would simply replace the similar existing duty to promote the establishment of school boards and to support their operation.
7.	<p>It is much more likely that parents will want a Parents Forum for each school. Composite parent forums could result in the creation of tensions between parents whose focus is their child and their local school. However, there may be benefits so this option should be left for each parent body to decide in consultation with their local authority.</p> <p>If a composite Parents Forum were the preferred option, protocols would be required to ensure that the interests of all parents are taken into account.</p> <p>It should be noted that school boards already have the potential to meet on an area or cluster basis. There is no reason why parent forums could not do the same for one</p>

	purpose or another according to their shared goals.
8.	Yes, the authority is uniquely placed to support schools and parents in the first establishment of parent forums.
9.	<p>Yes. However, a significant part of the parent forum's procedures would be determined by standing orders. These standing orders would almost certainly be based on, if not identical to, an exemplar model provided by the local authority.</p> <p>The devolution of all aspects of the constitution to a forum is a different matter. Unless there was clear guidance as to certain minimum requirements of a constitution there would undoubtedly be potential for serious internal problems over time, particularly concerning individual interpretation of the constitution.</p>
10.	<p>One of the most valuable aspects of the school boards has been the breadth of their composition so other individuals should be able to be co-opted. Parents should remain in the majority. Some guidance from local authorities in regard to co-opted members would be helpful.</p> <p>In order for parents to fully influence change, it is important that a good link is maintained between the forum and the local authority/school. For this reason, councillors and head teachers, in particular, should be considered valuable attendees, whether as members or observers. This detail should be decided locally.</p>
11.	The interests of looked after and accommodated children should be represented on parent forums. The role of the council as corporate parent should be developed locally.
12.	<p>Disclosure checks should only be required by those engaged in activities defined under the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003. Mandatory checks might simply put up additional barriers to parental involvement. The nature and purpose of each individual forum will determine whether or not Disclosure checks are required, i.e. membership of the forum may not in itself technically carry any 'childcare' responsibilities.</p> <p>However, clear guidance would need to be provided to Parents Forums about when Disclosure checks become necessary. Guidance is also required to identify who is responsible for arranging and funding Disclosure checks.</p>
13.	<p>There should be clarity about the accountability of the parent forum and there must be clearly agreed protocols to ensure open and active communication with the head teacher and local authority?</p> <p>A parent forum should be discussing issues of interest to the local school community or to parents generally. School Boards are open to the public and the minutes of board meetings are a matter of public record. This level of public accountability should be maintained for the proposed parent forums.</p> <p>There have been suggestions of a need for effective clerks/secretaries for meetings, to ensure accurate records are maintained. This should be decided locally, although guidance from the local authority should outline the possible options for forums in producing accurate records.</p>
14.	<p>Yes. The forum should be required to report at least annually to the parent body on its activities. A duty should also be placed on the Parents Forum to promote contact between the school, parents, and the local community.</p> <p>It is to be welcomed that forums, unlike boards, will not have the right to approve part of the school budget, to control use of the school premises out-of-hours, or to fix occasional holidays. These are matters for the local authority and its head teachers.</p>
15.	Clear guidelines should be established in terms of the areas in which the Parents Forum should not involve itself, e.g. the forum should not discuss or investigate any complaints from parents about the school, the head teacher or the staff. As with boards, forum members should always direct parents to the head teacher in the first instance.

16.	<p>Yes. Like school boards any proposed parent forums should be designated 'agents' of the authority. Additional insurance should be taken out for activities undertaken by fund-raising groups.</p> <p>For a number of reasons, this issue needs to be clarified before the legislation is eventually enacted. Whilst no difficulties have arisen as a result of School Boards being seen as "agents" of the local authority, separate arrangements are in place for PTAs to enable them to undertake a variety of activities that would be likely to be continued by the new Parent Forums. COSLA is currently investigating the options for insurance.</p>
17.	<p>Yes, all things considered, the duties set out in the draft Bill do appear to be reasonable and sufficiently general to avoid generating excessive red tape.</p>
18.	<p>Authorities should fund forums to the extent that the funding required to enable them to do so is forthcoming from the Scottish Executive</p>
19.	<p>Yes. Parents have always had the option of approaching the school or the authority for more specific advice or information about their child` s progress. This represents good practice.</p>
20.	<p>Yes, we agree that appointment procedures for senior promoted staff in schools should be designed to secure high quality leadership, but with the continued involvement of local parents. Each authority will put in place its own arrangements to ensure best recruitment and selection practice, including parental involvement. We welcome the move away from the rigid arrangements that currently apply.</p>
21.	<p>N/a</p>
22.	<p>Yes. Complaints procedures are essential and good practice. Indeed, it is not clear why this needs to be contained in a piece of statutory legislation, as they already exist.</p>