

906

Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Pam Simpson [pasimpson@aberdeencity.gov.uk]
Sent: 07 June 2005 16:39
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Subject: 906 Aberdeen City Council



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This email has been received from an external party and
has been swept for the presence of computer viruses.

Please find attached a letter and completed template, which together form the response from Aberdeen City Council to the consultation on Improving Parental Involvement. I trust these will be helpful. Pam

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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: Pam Simposn

Address: Aberdeen City Council, Neighbourhood Services Central, 1st Floor, St Nicholas House, Broad St, Aberdeen, AB10 1BX

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

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – INVOLVING PARENTS BETTER IN SCHOOLS

CONSULTATION QUESTION TEMPLATE [FOR PARENTZONE]

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

The most effective involvement takes place at school level and it is important that this is encouraged. Schools are good at involving parents using a range of methods and types of involvement. The Authority can enable this through supportive practice and procedures and through creating supportive structures but the emphasis has to be on local strategies to be effective.

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

There should be no requirement for a new strategy if the guidance is changed, as suggested below, to adopt a structure very similar to that of School Boards but with some flexibility built in to meet local 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?

Only if this results in action and can involve parents in discussion. This could become a bureaucratic exercise which further removes parents from the process and discourages involvement.

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?

No.

The over-riding view was that school boards should be maintained but improved to make them more accessible. This could be done by:

- **Changing the election process**
Everyone agreed that the current process is too formal and restrictive. There was less agreement on whether elections are necessary. There would be a large majority view that some kind of election process is essential to ensure accountability.
- **Making the structure more flexible**
Less restriction on the number of parent representatives. A more flexible system with a minimum and maximum number of members would reduce the number of elections required and place less pressure on those parents involved by sharing the work in a larger group.
- **Changing the name**
This was one area where there was a mix of views. Some people thought the name was familiar and understood, whereas the majority thought a name change would improve accessibility.
- **Community Capacity Building**
Working with Community Learning Workers using their community capacity building skills to support and enable parents to become involved. Having a range of groups involving parents so that there are clear but easily negotiated access routes.

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?

No. Overall the view was that there should still be an election process to ensure accountability. The existing very formal election process should be replaced by local elections. Some parents were concerned about the workload for existing parents' groups and school staff if the requirements became too onerous, so a simple method of election at an AGM was the preferred option. The lack of accountability in the document was of concern and was thought to enable the setting up of cliques or interest groups which were not representative of parents with no controls. Elections also reduce any combative element where more than one group wishes to form a Forum.

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?

Yes. Authorities should provide adequate support to parents groups. This should include support for administration and to allow the Forum to fulfil its functions, training and advice. Improved communication is required and support to communicate with the wider parent body. The creation of linked websites would be useful at national and local authority level. This would allow information to be communicated quickly and shared widely.

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?

Yes although none of the groups involved in the consultation thought that they would wish to use this option.

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. It is necessary that the Authority encourages setting up forums actively and positively.

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?

No. There was a very strong view that this places too much responsibility on parents and would discourage involvement. There must be some minimum standards nationally which can include flexibility at local level eg a minimum and maximum number of parents who can be involved, reporting arrangements, terms of office. The local authority scheme should refine this to reflect the local setting and this could be further refined at schools level.

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?

No. There was a very strong view that partnership cannot be built without involvement of all partners. The involvement of Head teachers and school staff in parents' groups is valued very highly by parents for the information and advice which they can give but more importantly for the relationships which can be built up through this type of contact. The involvement of Councillors was also valued, where they are able to be involved.

It was thought that co-options should be optional. These had been used very effectively in some areas whereas other Boards found it very hard to identify local community members.

The extension of the definition of parents to include parents of nursery pupils is welcomed.

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?

It is important that both the parents and carers of looked after children have opportunities to be involved in the child's education. This may create conflicts in some situations and it is important that services share information about likely difficulties. It is important to try to involve parents and carers in a Forum and specifically to support them to participate. The designated teacher for looked after children in each school could have a role to promote involvement.

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?*

No.

The headteacher should be **required** to attend.

The local councillor(s) should be invited to attend.

Meetings must be open to other parents to attend. This would increase accountability and would provide parents with an opportunity to see what goes on before deciding to become involved.

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?*

No

The functions appear to suggest that all the group will do is consult with other parents. There is little real purpose to this and parents would want to know that there were some areas where they had real influence. It was suggested that the school development plan and budget proposals should still be presented to Parents' Forums and that there should be clear guidance on other areas for discussion eg school standards and quality report, policy development and new initiatives in schools. This should be backed by statutory requirements for Parents' Forums to be consulted on certain issues, otherwise it becomes just a talking shop and this does not encourage commitment from parents.

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?

The discussion of individual staff members or pupils should be prohibited. Again there is the issue of whether the forum can represent the views of parents or has to constantly consult. It was thought that there has to be some element of representation, otherwise the forum will be unable to progress.

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?

Some parents are concerned that being designated agents of the authority would restrict their autonomy. The type of insurance which PTAs can currently access is crucial to much of the work of parents and therefore would have to be continued in some form.

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

Yes but the Headteacher and staff of the authority should be required to be available to give advice and information to the forum about any matter of concern.

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?

Authorities should provide a package of support which would include finance and support in kind and should be designed to enable Forums to get started and to fulfil their functions. This has to be designed in consultation with parents.

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?

This was thought to be unnecessary as it is common practice.

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?

Yes but with some guidance.

As Education Authority, we would like to have control over the appointment and deployment of HTs and DHTs in schools with the involvement of parents.

The current School Board Act places considerable restrictions on the effective and flexible deployment of these 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.

Agree that there should be involvement

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?

This was thought to be unnecessary. Parents should be made aware that the Authority's existing complaints procedure can be used to make complaints about the way the Authority exercises its functions under the bill.

If you wish to reply electronically, please email your response by **Tuesday 7 June** to parentalinvolvementbill@scotland.qsi.gov.uk

Or please return it to the following address:

Parental Involvement Bill

Schools Division

Area 2B

Victoria Quay

Edinburgh

EH6 6QQ

Confidentiality

Copies of all responses received will be placed in the Executive library and will be available to the general public. Responses will also be made available to the public on the Scottish Executive website. The views expressed may be quoted or referred to in any future review of responses. **If you do not wish your responses to be made public, please ensure that you indicate clearly that all or part of your response is to be treated as confidential.** Confidentiality will be strictly respected. We will still count confidential responses in any statistical analysis and your views will of course be taken into account in the same way as for non-confidential responses.

Electronic publication and additional copies

This publication and a summary leaflet designed for parents are available via the internet at www.scotland.gov.uk/.....

Several copies of this consultation paper have sent to each school. Summary leaflets have also been sent to all schools for onward distribution to parents. If you would like additional copies or if you would like this document in another format or language or more copies please contact us on 0131 244 1860. We will try to accommodate your wishes.

The Scottish Executive Consultation Process

Consultation is an essential and important aspect of Scottish Executive working methods. Given the wide-ranging areas of work of the Scottish Executive, there are many varied types of consultation. However, in general Scottish Executive consultation exercises aim to provide opportunities for all those who wish to express their opinions on a proposed area of work to do so in ways which will inform and enhance that work.

While details of particular circumstances described in a response to a consultation exercise may usefully inform the policy process, consultation exercises cannot address individual concerns and comments, which should be directed to the relevant public body. Consultation exercises may involve seeking views in a number of different ways, such as public meetings, focus groups or questionnaire exercises.

Typically, Scottish Executive consultations involve a written paper inviting answers to specific questions or more general views about the material presented. Written papers are distributed to organisations and individuals with an interest in the area of consultation, and they are also placed on the Scottish Executive web site enabling a wider audience to access the paper and submit their responses¹. Copies of all the responses received to consultation exercises (except those where the individual or organisation requested confidentiality) are placed in the Scottish Executive library at Saughton House, Edinburgh (K Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh, EH11 3XD, telephone 0131 244 4552).

The views and suggestions detailed in consultation responses are analysed and used as part of the decision making process. Depending on the nature of the consultation exercise the responses received may:

- indicate the need for policy development or review
- inform the development of a particular policy
- help decisions to be made between alternative policy proposals
- be used to finalise legislation before it is implemented

If you have any comment about how this consultation exercise has been conducted, please send them to:

Name: Karen Piaskowski
Address: Schools Division
2-B
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

E-mail: karen.piaskowski@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Our Ref : PS/MG
Your Ref :
Contact : Ms P. Simpson
Direct Dial : (01224) 523364
E-Mail : PaSimpson@aberdeencity.gov.uk

9 June 2005

**NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
(CENTRAL AREA)**
St. Nicholas House
Broad Street
Aberdeen AB10 1BX
Switchboard 01224 522000
Text Phone 01224 522381
Fax 01224 522605
DX 529451 Aberdeen 9

Dear Sir/Madam

Consultation

Making the Difference – Improving Parental Involvement in Schools

I have prepared this response on behalf of Aberdeen City Council. This response is based on meetings with:

Parents' groups, Councillors, education officials, Head Teachers, and community staff.

The groups which met were generally fairly small but discussion was very focussed and productive. There was a high level of agreement within and between groups. It must be acknowledged that most parents who were involved were members of School Boards, despite attempts to encourage wider representation.

The paper was welcomed as it has raised the profile of this very important issue and offered a basis for discussion. It was thought that the decision to review the operation of parents' groups was positive and this consultation, involving a wide range of people, was helpful.

Some issues were raised which do not directly fit with the questions asked and I would like to raise these here.

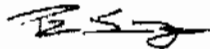
The paper considers parental involvement in isolation from other types of community involvement. There are a number of initiatives at present which are building community capacity – Community Learning and Development Strategy, Neighbourhood Community Planning and Strengthening Local Democracy. This paper does not embed parental involvement in these other initiatives. Parental involvement has to be supported and encouraged, this can often be achieved through involvement in other groups initially. Similarly, involvement in education can lead people to become more active in their local community. This can be encouraged by a clear relationship between Parents' Forums and other groups in the community. This should not be prescriptive but should be for local authorities to

decide in their strategy. It is important, however that it is recognised as part of the context of the work.

The paper is not clear on whether it will still be possible to have more than one parents' group fulfilling different functions. There were mixed views amongst parents about this, with some valuing the range of opportunities provided by different groups, where others would welcome some integration of functions. Consideration should be given to the stepping stones which some parents require to become involved but aiming for a body of parents which can engage with schools on matters of policy and development. Clear guidance should be given on this.

I trust that these comments, together with the attached template are helpful in promoting parental involvement.

Yours sincerely



Pam Simpson
Education Officer
Children and Families