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Parental Involvement Bill Consultation  
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Dear Sir/Madam

**CONSULTATION ON SCOTTISH SCHOOLS (PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT) BILL  
RESPONSE OF ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL**

I attach the response of Aberdeenshire Council to the above consultation which has been approved by the Council's Education & Recreation Committee.

I should be grateful if you would note the comments contained therein and take them into consideration when moving to the next stage in the process.

Yours faithfully

MAITLAND I WILSON  
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Enclosure    Response

**MAKING THE DIFFERENCE – IMPROVING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS  
CONSULTATION ON SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE PROPOSALS**

**RESPONSE OF ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL**

**Introduction**

Aberdeenshire Council, in common with certain other consultees, is disappointed that the questions contained in the consultative document are closed and appear designed to elicit responses favourable to the proposals. It also regrets the lack of clarity in certain parts of the document and in the draft Bill. It has, nevertheless, decided, in the interests of consistency and clarity, to respond to the questions given.

- 1. Do you agree with the placing of a new duty on education authorities promote parental involvement?**

*Whilst the need for parent involvement and the value it adds to the educational process are acknowledged, it is strongly felt that education authorities are already enthusiastically promoting such involvement, that the proposals will not necessarily result in increased involvement and that they could be regarded as the Executive 'taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut'. What appeared to be the original intention of the Executive of building on existing strengths and removing the negative aspects of the current system would be equally effective.*

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

*Most authorities, if not all, already have in place policies and procedures for ensuring parental involvement. As these could be incorporated relatively easily into an SPI, there is little to object to in this proposal.*

- 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?**

*Once prepared, the SPI could quite easily be incorporated into the Statement of Education Improvement Objectives. It would, however, be equally valid and, indeed, perhaps have a greater impact – as a free-standing statement.*

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 forums, as decided locally by the parents, in a way which suits them and their school best?**

*It is acknowledged that the current system, in the form of School Boards, could be improved; it is bureaucratic, inflexible and formal. However, it is the view of the Authority that this would be better achieved through the modification rather than the replacement of Boards. Whilst 'one size may not fit all' and individual circumstances should be taken into consideration, to allow parents complete freedom to determine the nature of a Parent Forum will lead to confusion and a lack of consistency of application and clarity.*

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?**

*As the overly bureaucratic election process is one of the aspects of the current system which deters parents from seeking membership of a School Board, the removal of this is to be generally welcomed. However, there is concern in certain quarters that such a move would reduce the status conferred on that body – or any successor body – and lessen any impact it might have.*

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?**

*As has been stated above, education authorities already promote and support School Boards. This duty could be transferred to the establishment and operation of Parent Forums. Furthermore, if education authorities do not carry out this duty, which body will? The Executive itself?*

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?**

*This would dilute the important link between parents and the school attended by their child(ren) and does not find favour.*

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?**

*Such involvement would provide an element of consistency and clarity – at least initially – and is, therefore, to be welcomed. However, as a Parent Forum may amend its constitution at any time, such consistency and clarity may subsequently be lost.*

- 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?**

*Whilst it is acknowledged that there are disadvantages to a 'one size fits all' approach, it should be possible to create a framework which provides both consistency and flexibility – eg a Parent Forum will require a management structure and the number of parents involved in it could vary. An education authority scheme could provide this.*

- 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?**

*It is strongly felt that the presence of co-opted members who are neither parents nor members of staff would enrich the work of a Parent Forum through the provision of a different perspective. This is currently the case with School Boards. It is also strongly felt that members of staff – both teaching and non-teaching – should have a right to representation on any Parent Forum established, other than through co-option. Parents, however, should be in the majority.*

*However, it is also vital that the Head Teacher should have a right to attend and to speak at any meeting of a Parent Forum, although he/she need not formally be a member of the body.*

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

*Although, for the purposes of the Bill, the term 'parent' includes a child's guardian and any person who is liable to maintain or has parental responsibilities in relation to a child or has care of the child or young person and this latter group has, therefore, the same rights as parents, this area requires further examination*

- 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.

- 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?**

*As has already been stated in the response to Question 10, it is vital that the Head Teacher, as one of the key partners both individually and representationally, has the right to attend and to speak at meetings of the Parent Forum. The same applies to the local Elected Member(s). Neither the Head Teacher nor the Elected Members need, however, be members of the Forum.*

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

*The functions are similar to those already exercised by School Boards, with the exception of the ability to amend the constitution, and as such are acceptable.*

*Some concern, however, centres on the inclusion in the text of the consultation document, rather than in the Bill itself, of the function of 'seeking to raise quality and standards in the school' among those in which a Forum may engage to the extent it considers appropriate, as it is felt that this should be of the prime functions of a Forum in partnership with the school and the education authority. Indeed, the wording of the Bill seems to indicate that the latter should be the case.*

- 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?**

*There are no concerns about the seeking and reporting of matters which are of interest or concern, provided that such matters are discussed in general rather than individual terms – eg bullying within the school rather than the bullying of pupil X. It must be remembered that it is the Head Teacher who is charged with the responsibility of managing the school on a day to day basis and that procedures for the addressing of individual concern already exist.*

- 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?**

*This requires further research.*

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

*The Authority already fulfils these obligations.*

- *complying with any reasonable request for information\*;*
- *ensuring that the Head Teacher and staff are available to give advice\*;*
- *making available a reasonable level of funding and offering services or accommodation\*;*
- *informing parents about arrangements for consultation between parents and teachers\*;* and
- *ensuring that replies are given to any representations made\**

**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?**

*There are financial implications for education authorities; these include staff time as well as the provision of funds to Parent Forums. In order to allow the best use of limited funds and reduce the financial burden of the proposals on authorities, consideration should be given to Forums receiving their funding directly from the Executive.*

**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?**

*The Authority already discharges this duty.*

**20. Do you agree that education authorities should be enabled to replace the current system of appointing Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers with more modern, flexible processes and procedures?**

*Without being aware of the detail, it is difficult to provide a definitive answer. However, the principle is accepted and it is acknowledged that the current system should be reviewed. The fact that there will be further consultation on this, focusing on best practice, is welcomed.*

**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.**

*The principle of parental involvement is accepted; subject to there being professional checks and balances.*

**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?**

*As the Authority already has a comprehensive complaints procedure, the need to establish another one in connection with Parent Forums is questioned.*

## **Conclusion**

*Whilst the desire to enhance parental involvement in their child(ren)'s education is to be applauded, it is not at all certain that the proposals, on their own and in their present form, will achieve this. Equally, whilst many are in favour of making School Boards less bureaucratic, less formal and more flexible, few appear to believe that they should be abolished altogether. The Authority strongly supports this view and believes that the aims of the Executive would be more easily and effectively achieved through amending the existing procedures to remove those aspects which deter many parents from involvement – ie the removal of the formal election process and of the limit to the number of parents who may be members of a Board and the revision of the current structure.*

*As most School Boards currently work closely with the school's PTA, consideration should also be given to the amalgamation of the two parent bodies; the new body could be named a Parent Forum. It is unlikely, however, that this would find universal favour in these groups.*

*Finally, the Authority would reiterate its main concerns about the inconsistencies which would result from the 'wooliness' of what might constitute a Parent Forum; the absence of a requirement to involve staff; and the removal of a Head Teacher's and Elected Member's right to attend and speak.*

**May 2005**