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Date 07 June 2005

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**Renfrewshire  
Council**

Education and Leisure Services

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

Dear Sir

**THE RESPONSE OF RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL TO THE PROPOSALS CONTAINED  
IN THE DRAFT SCOTTISH SCHOOLS (PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT) BILL**

I enclose a copy of the response of Renfrewshire Council to the draft proposals on parental involvement in education in Scotland.

I trust that you will find this helpful.

Yours sincerely

John Rooney  
Head of Support for Learning

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## **IMPORTANT NOTICE**

### **Council headquarters refurbishment - temporary relocation of departments**

The South Building of the Council's Headquarters (adjacent to Mill Street) is currently being refurbished and will re-open in 2006. During this period, the departments of Planning and Transport and Environmental Services and the Technical Services division of the Housing and Property Department will move to Gilmour House, Gilmour Street, Paisley (near Gilmour Street railway station). Visitors and general enquiries for these services will be dealt with in Gilmour House. Please continue to send any correspondence to these departments to the HQ South Building where they will be redirected.

At the same time, finance staff dealing with council tax and benefits payments will move from the HQ South Building to the ground floor of HQ North (adjacent to Gauze Street).

All public access to the HQ will be through the HQ North Building for the period of the refurbishment.

We hope that these arrangements will not cause too much inconvenience.

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IMPROVING PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

respondee information form

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

Name: Renfrewshire Council

Postal Address: Cotton Street, Paisley PA1 1LE

Consultation title: Making the difference – Improving parents' involvement in schools

1. Are you responding as: (please tick one box)

(a) an individual?  (go to 2a/b)

(b) on behalf of a group or organisation?  (go to 2c)

2a. INDIVIDUALS:

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

Yes (go to 2b below)

No, not at all

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

Yes

No

## **Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Bill**

### **Response to Consultation**

#### **General**

Renfrewshire Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on Scottish ministers' proposals for encouraging greater involvement of parents in the education of their children.

Since its inception in April 1996, Renfrewshire Council has worked hard to promote the involvement of parents in schools. All schools have school boards which are regularly consulted and requested to consult with the broader parent body on the full range of issues related to the development of education services. In addition, the majority of schools have parent associations or parent teacher associations which make a positive contribution to involving parents in the life of the school.

In seeking views of parents and others on the proposals, a number of meetings were held. These included a public meeting, advertised in the local press, a meeting of parents and teachers involved in school boards and parents' associations and a seminar for elected members of the council. Over 100 people attended the various meetings. In addition, a small number of written submissions on behalf of school boards were received and the local association of the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) also made a detailed submission.

In general terms, the council supports the view of Scottish Ministers that the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 should be repealed. While a number of respondents felt that the 1988 legislation could continue to serve if amended rather than be replaced, the council's view is that new legislation is appropriate.

The council is in broad agreement with proposals regarding the rights of parents and the duties of councils; but, it contends that councils require some power under the legislation to ensure that there is some consistency across its schools and the ways in which forums operate. Many respondents strongly expressed the view that there were opportunities within the legislation as drafted which could be exploited by sectional interests to pursue single issue agendas which may not be to the advantage of the school as a whole. The draft Bill does not give due recognition to the role of Councillors as the democratically elected representatives of the community, including parents. Renfrewshire Council considers that whilst the involvement of parents is essential, this must be balanced by the duty of councils to ensure that the needs of the wider community are also taken into account.

There was also concern as to the lack of specification of which issues, related to the management and operation of a school are within the competence of the forum to consider and influence. Examples include issues related to the employment of staff, policies on learning and teaching and the management of the establishment's resources.

Responses to specific questions raised within the consultation document are included below.

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

Yes, the council is in agreement with the proposal to place such a duty but is concerned that no powers for the council are included to ensure that there are consistent structures and procedures established across all of its schools to allow for the views and interests of all parents to be promoted and protected equally.

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

Yes, this is agreed. However, the council is of the view that clearer specification of duties and responsibilities related to parents, councils and teachers requires to be outlined either within the legislation or through subsequent regulation.

**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?*

The council has no difficulty with the suggestion although it is concerned that it is an unnecessarily bureaucratic requirement. Renfrewshire Council already has a well developed strategy for involving parents in the education of their children. This council has established a strategic framework to communicate its educational policies and strategies to parents.

**Question 4:** *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?*

Renfrewshire Council agrees in principle, that the system of school boards should be replaced by a more flexible system of parent forums. However, it has reservations regarding the lack of powers defined for councils to ensure that forums established are constituted in a way which is supportive of the rights and interests of all parents.

**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?*

While it is agreed that formality of elections through parent forums is an inhibiting factor for numbers of parents, it is difficult to envisage an alternative, mutually acceptable set of arrangements for establishing membership of a forum. If parents forums are intended to represent the views of parents, it is important that the forum has a mandate established through some type of democratic process.

**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, this is an appropriate duty for education authorities.

**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?*

The council has no difficulty with the Bill providing for such "composite" arrangements.

**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?*

It is agreed that education authorities should be involved in the process of establishing the parent forums initially. However, this does not go as far as the council would wish. It is important that the council has some powers regarding the forums as well as duties. The Council considers that whilst "rogue" forums are rare, there have been cases where a vested interest group is at odds with the wider parent body and, under present legislation, the Council has no powers to intervene.

**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?*

The council would be happy to establish model constitutions for parent forums and to make these available to parents for their consideration. Thereafter, there are issues related to matters which a forum is not competent to deal with. These include employment issues, finance and resourcing issues and certain aspects of learning and curriculum policies.

**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?*

The definition of "membership" requires to be clarified. Almost all of those consulted by the council were of the view that teachers, in particular, should be involved in the forums. In the view of the council, it is also necessary to give a right of attendance to local elected members. This is only reasonable in recognising their democratically elected function to represent the community. It is also accepted that co-opted members have a contribution to make although it is agreed that parents should be in the majority within the overall forum membership.

**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?*

Foster parents should have the same rights of inclusion in the forums as all other parents. Some further consideration requires to be given to representation on behalf of those children who are accommodated by the council. This is a complex issue given that those responsible for accommodated children may also be council employees.

**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?*

It is agreed that the Bill should not augment or contradict legislation which is currently in force to protect children. Disclosure checks should only be required when the individuals involved are engaged in activities defined under the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003.

**Question 13:** *On balance, do you agree that 'rights of attendance' for certain non-members of a parent forum should not be 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 head teacher should have the right to attend, with the councillor or other individual by invitation?*

It is the council's view that "rights of attendance" at forums should be a devolved power to be established by councils in consultation with the broader parent body. Such an arrangement would be compatible with the duty on the council to establish a strategy for parental involvement. It is considered that it is appropriate for head teachers, the director of education and elected members to have such attendance rights. This position is supported by parents in Renfrewshire.

**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?*

The functions outlined in the draft Bill are appropriate in the main but rather generalised. The council has concern about the inclusion in clause 7 (1)(g)(iv) "such other matters as appear to the forum to be of interest or concern to those parents". This generalisation of function could be exploited by individuals or sectional interest groups and may impinge on statutory duties related to the council's role as an employer and as the provider of resources for education.

The council is also concerned about the power allocated in clause 7 (4) of the forum to enter into contracts and agreements. As a potentially unelected body, there are dangers in individuals or groups of individuals undertaking commitments on behalf of the council.

**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 council does not agree with this open-ended provision and contends that areas of "interest to parents" requires clearer definition. Areas on which it would be inappropriate for parents to express collective views include:

- conditions of service of teachers and other staff;
- national and local agreements between employers and employees;

- individual children or groups of children;

**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?*

This suggestion is not acceptable as the law stands at the present. In terms of section 56 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 functions of the Council can only be carried out by members sitting in Council, committees or by delegation to officers. It is also unacceptable for the Council to be held accountable for the consequences of actions taken by groups over which they have no control. The proposals as presented do not see members of the forum as either employees of the Council nor are they elected as agents of the Council and this reinforces difficulties of accountability.

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

In general terms the obligations outlined are appropriate.

**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?*

In principle, Renfrewshire Council supports the provisions requiring education authorities to provide financial support to parent forums. However, some attention requires to be given to the delegated authorities to forums to allocate and be responsible for public funds. There may be difficulties with this, if forums are not elected bodies.

**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, the council agrees with this proposed duty. It is already complying with the spirit of such a duty.

**Question 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?*

It is agreed that authorities should be enabled to replace the current system for appointing head teachers and depute head teachers. However, it should be noted that many councils have already adopted improved procedures for making appointments to senior promoted posts.

There is a potential tension between establishing revised appointment procedures in consultation with parents while at the same time recognising that such procedures are subject to the national agreement on teachers' salaries and conditions of service "A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century". According to this agreement, such procedures are subject to local negotiation and agreement between employers and the recognised trade unions.

**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.*

It is agreed that there should be parental involvement in appointments to senior promoted posts.

**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?*

It is agreed that there should be complaints procedures established by education authorities to deal with the issues related to its functions under the Bill. Such a complaints procedure already exists within Renfrewshire Council.