

RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM:

Please complete the details below and return it with your response. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately. Thank you for your help.

Name: Alison Clancy

Postal Address: 83 Whitehouse Loan, Edinburgh, EH9 1AT

- 1. Are you responding: (please tick one box)
 - (a) as an individual go to Q2a/b and then Q4
 - (b) **on behalf of** a group/organisation, yes, go to Q3 and then Q4

INDIVIDUALS

- 2a. Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Executive library and/or on the Scottish Executive website)?

Yes (go to 2b below)

No, not at all We will treat your response as confidential

- 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

ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

- 3. The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Executive library and/or on the Scottish Executive website). Are you also content for your **response** to be made available?

Yes Yes

No We will treat your response as confidential

SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

- 4. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Executive 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 Yes

No

(B)

996

Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Clancy, Alison [Alison.Clancy@children1st.org.uk]
Sent: 08 June 2005 12:28
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Subject: 996



PASParInvConsJun
05.doc (1 MB)

83 Whitehouse Loan, Edinburgh EH9 1AT

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

Further to our telephone conversation yesterday, I attach a response from Parenting Across Scotland. If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me or Evelyn Gillan, PAS Coordinator on 0131 447 5918.

Regards
Alison Clancy
PAS

PLEASE NOTE: THE ABOVE MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED FROM THE INTERNET.

On entering the GSi, this email was scanned for viruses by the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) virus scanning service supplied exclusively by Energis in partnership with MessageLabs.

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**Making the Difference – Improving Parents’ Involvement in Schools
Response to the Consultation Document by Parenting Across Scotland**

Parenting Across Scotland

Parenting Across Scotland (PAS) is a multi-agency partnership funded by the Scottish Executive to research the issues and concerns affecting parents and the support available. PAS does this by bringing together organisations and knowledge to share good practice; increase collaborative working; provide information directly to families and represent the views of parents in policy. PAS is a unique partnership in that it brings together children’s charities, family support agencies and organisations working to support adult relationships to consider how best to meet the needs of parents and families in Scotland. The partner agencies involved in PAS work with thousands of parents and families across Scotland every week. However, PAS takes a broad view, promoting best practice and considering the interests of parents and families over and above the needs of any one particular agency or client group. Given that this is our focus, we will be confining our comments to the general objectives and key proposals outlined in the consultation document although individual partner agencies involved in PAS may well submit their own detailed response to the consultation.

General Objectives

PAS fully supports the main objectives listed in the consultation document and endorses the principle of improving parental involvement in education. We note the results of the research conducted by the Executive (2004) which showed that the majority of parents have relatively low levels of involvement in schools. This supports other research carried out by the Scottish Consumer Council (2002) which found a low level of membership of bodies that represent parents at school level.

Key Proposals

Given the evidence with regards to the low level of involvement of parents in schools and representative bodies, creating a new vehicle for parental involvement in education is a positive development. Similarly, rejecting a 'one size fits all' approach in favour of a more flexible structure to take account of local circumstances and different needs that may be identified seems appropriate. However, it is possible that the reasons why parents have not participated in existing bodies will continue to prevail with the new Parent Forums and PAS would suggest that specific steps should be taken to facilitate the involvement of the wider parent body. In our work undertaken to date (which includes a survey of over 1,000 adults in Scotland, of whom two thirds had a parenting role), PAS has found that many parents in Scotland today find family life stressful. We found that:-

- Parents in Scotland worry about how good a parent they are and most adults think it is harder to bring up children now than it was when they were young
- People in Scotland think there is too much emphasis on punishing parents and not enough on supporting families
- Over two thirds of adults think that balancing work and home life puts too much pressure on parents
- There is a need for more universal support for parents and families in addition to targeted support for those in greatest need and more support for parents at key transitional stages i.e. parents of teenagers. (Family Life in Scotland: MORI Survey, October 2004)

These findings support other evidence which concludes that parenting and family life in modern society complex and hard to do (Quinton 2004). It is important therefore that the new Parent Forums acknowledge the pressures that families face and the difficulties in engaging with the broad parent body as opposed to a small group of particularly active parents. PAS would suggest that a key task facing the new Parent Forums is to consider innovative ways to reach as many parents as possible. PAS will be piloting Parent Information Point (PIP) sessions in selected schools in Scotland in 2005/06 and it is suggested that PIPs may

provide a model which could be useful for the new parent bodies. PIP is a model which was developed and piloted by the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) in England and aims to provide parents with a 'single universal parent information session' where they can access information on a variety of issues that affect children and young people at three transitional stages – ages 5, 11 and 14. The evaluation of the PIP sessions found that the presence of PIPs won parents approval and that PIP reached a good range of parents in a variety of social circumstances and successfully reached parents who are deemed 'hard to reach'. This is particularly relevant given the research by the Scottish Consumer Council which found that members of school-based bodies were more likely than other parents to be middle-class professionals.

PAS agrees that parents at local level should be involved in deciding the actual structure of the new bodies but believes that parents should receive appropriate support from local education authorities in making this transition. In light of the comments above, it is suggested that local authorities should assist parents in considering a wide range of measures that seek to improve the involvement of all parents through for example, universal information sessions, rather than directing all efforts into establishing a single measure i.e. a new representative body. In doing so, education authorities and the new Parent Forums should be guided by the demographic evidence which confirms that we have an increasingly diverse range of family forms and structures. Every day the partner agencies involved in PAS support a range of different families including traditional nuclear families; cohabiting couples with children; lone parents; grandparents with parenting responsibilities; stepparents; same sex couples with children; carers and individuals and couples without children. PAS believes that it is the activity of parenting that counts rather than a biological relationship and suggests that the new Parent Forums should be encouraged to develop an inclusive definition of 'parents' which recognises the diversity of family life as this will be a critical factor in engaging as many parents as possible.

PAS would also support the education authority establishing the first constitution and would suggest that clear guidance on constitutional arrangements for parent forums is necessary. In the absence of clear guidance, there is a danger that a myriad of constitutional arrangements develop which may leave parents more confused than ever. PAS agrees with the definition of membership of the forums outlined in the document and supports the principle of head teachers attending to maintain communication between parents and the head teacher. However, it is unclear whether the head teacher would be under a duty to attend the parent



forum if they were invited or alternatively, if they could insist on a right of attendance, so some clarification on this is required.

PAS supports the placing of a new duty on education authorities to promote parental involvement and to promote the establishment of a parent forum in each school. PAS supports the obligations on the education authority listed in the document and agrees that they should provide financial support *and* support in kind. The new Parent Forums will require resources if they are to be effective in engaging with the wider parent body and they should be embedded in the policy structures of both national and local government. PAS also supports the proposed duty to provide advice and information to individual parents on request, on matters relating to the education of their children. With regards to the appointment of head teachers, PAS agrees 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 and agrees with the proposals to establish complaints procedures.

PAS notes that the Scottish Consumer Council research found that 49% of parents with children in secondary school felt that their views were not represented in national debates on education. PAS believes that the proposal to establish a national body for parents outlined in the discussion paper produced by the Scottish Consumer Council is worthy of further discussion. However, PAS would urge caution in making education the sole focus of a national body for parents. There is a growing evidence base which suggests that we need to make links between different policy areas in order to support parents and families more effectively and facilitate their participation in civil society including parental involvement in schools. Research has identified that:-

- there is a need to 'join up' child and family policy (Henricson and Bainham 2005)
- the quality of parents' relationships is associated with how children adapt academically (Cowan and Cowan 1997)
- family breakdown leads to problems for children at home, *at school* and in adult life (West and Sweeting 2002, Pagani et al 1998, Rodgers and Pryor 1998, Sweeting et al 1998)

We know that parental involvement has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation (DfES 2003), but we also know that many families today find family life stressful. This suggests that we should consider parental involvement in education within the overall context of how we might 'join-up' policy to support parents and families and help to facilitate their involvement in schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, PAS supports the principles informing the consultation document and agrees that new structures are required to encourage a greater involvement of parents in schools. The key messages which PAS would highlight are as follows:-

- Specific steps should be taken to facilitate the involvement of the wider parent body in schools
- Parent Forums should consider the pressures that many families are under and with support from education authorities, develop innovative methods of engaging with as many parent as possible
- Education authorities should assist parents in making the transition to the new forums and should develop an inclusive definition of 'parents' which recognises the diversity of family life
- The proposal to establish a national body for parents is worthy of further discussion
- Parental involvement in schools should be considered within the overall context of how we might 'join-up' policy to more effectively support parents and families to facilitate their involvement in schools.

Parenting Across Scotland, June 2005

Working in Partnership

Aberlour Childcare Trust, Capability Scotland, CHILDREN 1ST, Couple Counselling Scotland, Family Mediation Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland, Scottish Adoption, Scottish Marriage Care, Stepfamily Scotland