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Piaskowski K (Karen)

From: Michael McGrath [director@sces.uk.com]
Sent: 08 June 2005 16:53
To: Parental Involvement Bill
Subject: 1001 Catholic Education Commission

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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: Michael McGrath

Address: Scottish Catholic Education Service, 75 Craigpark, Glasgow G31 2HD

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? (Catholic Education Commission)

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 stated intention of the Scottish Executive to achieve more inclusive and effective parental involvement in all aspects of education by developing partnership between parents and schools and imposing a duty on all local authorities to prepare a strategy for parental involvement is a very worthwhile and laudable objective which has the support of the Catholic Education Commission.

We are not convinced that these specific proposals will improve parental involvement.

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

Yes – as 1, conditional upon certain changes to the draft legislation.

We are concerned that, in allowing such significant flexibility to Councils, these proposals will not promote a consistent level of parental involvement across the country. Indeed, they may actually restrict some involvement, as in limiting parents' involving in appointing teachers in some Councils.

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?

Parents are not greatly aware of Annual Statements of Education Improvement Objectives and only a little more affected by School Development Plans.

They require reassurance that they will be enabled to build trusting relationships with local Councils, schools and teachers.

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?

While the present School Boards have a statutory basis which clarifies their status and powers and also their role vis-a-vis headteachers and while the purpose of the proposed legislation is clear, it is not so evident that the specific proposals for the setting of the Parent Forum will achieve those objectives.

There appears to be a certain amount of vagueness and a worrying lack of detail in the proposals. Such "flexibility", while intended to encourage parents, may cause them alarm if they feel that a small number of parents can distort the functions of the Parent Forum for their own ends. Some more regulation of the new structures would seem to be required to obviate these concerns.

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. It is proposed that membership of the forum will be restricted to parents who will be able to decide on the arrangements that best suit them and their school including the appointment/election of members and how the forum should operate. In respect of Catholic schools there is a long established and effective partnership involving the Church, the school and the parents which has successfully promoted and delivered Catholic Education. There is a specific provision in the School Board legislation in respect of denominational schools for one of the members to be nominated by the denominational body in whose interest the school is conducted. The parent forum proposals do not contain such a provision. The concern of Catholic parents is that the education of their children will be adversely affected by this omission. They are anxious about a number of current issues particularly in the realms of moral and spiritual education. Parents, in partnership with the Catholic Church, are concerned that the curriculum in Catholic schools reflects their beliefs and practices and is not subject to further secularisation. The role of the Bishop, who is responsible for the moral and spiritual education of Catholic children, will be seen as being diminished and downgraded. A close relationship which has been developed for the benefit of the whole education community over many years will be adversely affected. It is respectfully suggested that the Scottish Executive reconsider the position and amend the proposed legislation to ensure the continued presence of the Church's representative in the parent forum. Anything less than such a clear provision confirming that arrangement will not be acceptable to Catholic parents.

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?

It is important that meaningful consultation is carried out by the local authority with parents in each school at the initial stages when any new schemes are being developed. Parents require to be actively involved and should be positively encouraged to participate in the consultation process to ensure that the proposed constitution of the parent forum reflects their wishes. Certain specific expectations should be set for all Councils to ensure a minimum standard of support for improving parental involvement.

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?

There is a provision in the proposed legislation for parents in combined schools or clusters of schools who may prefer to have one joint parent forum to represent all their interests. We are concerned that such a cluster arrangement may have an adverse effect on how an individual school is enabled to develop. What if a parents' forum becomes dominated by parents from one or other school who can then have a strong influence on schools where they have no children in attendance? If parents have children attending a particular school wish to have a forum specifically for that school, such a forum should indeed be put in place to comply with parental wishes. There could be significant issues here for a denominational school, depending on how a "cluster" is defined.

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?

We would have concerns about the possible variations in the level of support offered by various Councils across the country. We would suggest a minimum level of specification here.

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?

Few parents are greatly interested in devising constitutions. We could suggest a template which would guarantee a minimum level of service, with 'add-ons' or 'plug-ins' available to parents who wish to embrace additional functions.

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?

Such a restriction hits at the very principle of partnership. If parents are not to be encouraged to work in close partnership with staff and with the community, then what is the very purpose of any parent forum. It would be a colossal mistake to prevent staff from being involved, as the new legislation proposes. Simply allowing parents to involve staff is insufficient. Similarly, allowing parents to involve the local Church is insufficient in a denominational school, where partnership with the Church is central to many of its activities and its purpose.

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?

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?

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?*

Since the stated objective of the amending legislation is to establish a new partnership between parents and schools, it is vital that the important role of the head teacher is reflected in the new arrangements. Significant gaps in communication between parents and school management will arise unless the head teacher's position is clearly stated.

Councillors should have the right to attend, but not the right to speak without the agreement of the body.

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 range of functions should reflect the interests and priorities of parents who are acting in the interests of the school.

However, all Parent Forums should have the right to call the local Council to account for decisions affecting school provision.

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?

This is far too open-ended. Can parents actually be responsible for “raising standards”, or for reporting to parents on how this is being done? This should be the role of the school management and teaching staff, working in co-operation with parents.

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?

Members of parent forums are legally entitled to act as agents of the education authority. It is important that adequate insurance cover is put in place to protect both the education authority and members of the parent forum when carrying out legitimate activities.

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

Some further definition is required for what is, say, a “reasonable level of funding” to be supplied by Councils.

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?

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. Parents have a right to certain levels of advice and information.

We would have thought that much of this information is already covered in the provision of school handbooks.

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?

We agree that there is a need to improve the process for appointing Heads and Deputies. However, the bill merely requires an education authority to inform Ministers and parent forums about its procedures to fill the posts and also to involve the parent forum in the appointment process. Some Councils will use this opportunity to restrict the involvement of parents by merely informing them of their proposed actions. Greater specification is required in respect of this specific proposal so that parents' powers are not actually restricted.

It is noted with regret that there is no requirement for education authorities to consult with and seek the agreement of parent forums for the new arrangements.

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.

as in 20 above.

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?

Yes

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

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