

## Parental Involvement Meeting report

In 2006 the Scottish government introduced the Parental Involvement Act and published Guidance Notes along with it. The Parental Involvement Act is designed to provide parents with the opportunity to take a more active part in the education of their children in connection with school and councils. Parent Councils were introduced to schools as a result of this Act and being seen as a vital tool to communicate not only between the schools and parents but also between the Councils and the parents.

In Section B the Guidance Notes to the Act state:

### **Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006**

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/08094112/3>

### **Section B – Parental Involvement**

#### **Why involve parents?**

1. Parents, carers and families are by far the most important influences on children's lives. Parents who take on a supportive role in their children's learning make a difference in improving achievement and behaviour. Their support can play a vital role at all stages of education. For example, where parents are actively involved in reading with their children at home, their children's reading scores improve, on average, by between 12–18 months. In the secondary sector, parents' active support for their child's learning can make a difference into adolescence. Evidence shows that most differences in achievement by 14 year olds in English, Maths and Science are due to home influences. <sup>3</sup>
2. When parents and schools work together, children do better. The active involvement of parents in the life of the school can help promote a learning community in which pupils can engage positively with school staff and their peers. Schools can benefit from developing positive partnerships with parents by involving them in all decisions affecting their children's education and learning. A relationship of mutual trust and respect can enable effective communication that supports both parents and teachers. The better the information that schools provide to parents, the more parents can support their children's learning and the school. Information that parents share with the school can assist teachers in adapting their teaching to suit the learning styles of pupils and take account of any particular issues that may exist.
3. Parents have their own perspectives on school education and what can be done to improve standards and quality. Schools should foster a positive and open ethos which encourages parents to share these perspectives. Their voice can make a positive contribution to how education authorities and schools determine their ambitions for schools and how they plan for improvement to meet these.

#### **Who do we mean by parents?**

4. The Act uses the broadly framed definition of 'parent' set out in the 1980 Act. This is as follows:

- "parent" includes guardian and any person who is liable to maintain **or** has parental

responsibilities (within the meaning of section 1(3) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) in relation to, or has care of a child or young person;

5. This is a wide definition which might, by way of example, include:

- non-resident parents who are liable to maintain or have parental responsibilities in respect of a child
- carers who can be parents
- others with parental responsibilities, e.g. foster carers, relatives and friends who are caring for children and young people under supervision arrangements
- close relatives, such as siblings or grandparents caring for children who are not looked after or are under home supervision arrangements.

6. Everyone who is a parent, as defined in terms of the 1980 Act, has rights under the Act. This includes the right to receive advice and information about their child's education, general information about the school, to be told about meetings involving their child, and to participate in activities, such as taking part in decisions relating to a Parent Council. Education authorities and schools should treat parents equally, the exception to this general requirement being where there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental rights and responsibilities. It is for education authorities to advise schools on the application of these rights in individual cases.

#### **What do we mean by involvement?**

7. The Act's provisions cover three broad levels of engagement with parents. These are:

##### **a) Learning at home**

The Act recognises the vital role that parents and other carers play in children's learning and development. Parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home and in the community.

##### **b) Home/School Partnership**

The Act reflects the shared role and responsibility that schools, parents and the community have in working together to educate children. Effective home/school partnerships are essential to ensure that children get the most out of their school and their education. Working in co-operation will allow potential difficulties and opportunities to be identified at an early stage. Schools must be open to the involvement of parents in the work they do and they should consider ways of providing information that helps parents engage with the school and their children's education.

##### **c) Parental representation**

The Act provides a framework for ensuring that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on matters affecting the education of their children, the school's arrangements for promoting parental involvement and other matters or issues of interest to parents. It makes provision for parents to be members of the Parent Forum at a school, and to have their views represented to the school, education authority and others, through a representative Parent Council for the school.

The Notes explicitly outline the right of parents to get involved on several levels with a clear focus on the Parent Councils as the main tool.

Subsequently Councils were asked to develop a strategy to implement the Act in their shires. Aberdeenshire's **Parental Involvement Strategy** can be found on the web under:

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/consultations/files/3C6AEC305BBB4D88802576CE00549127%5CParental%20Involvement%20Strategy.pdf>

This Strategy is currently under review and part of the task of the Parental Involvement Group meeting was to establish which parts of the Strategy has already become legislation and can be considered established and which parts still need work. There are various ways in which parents can get involved, one will be a survey that will be soon available but there also will be two conferences in March, one in Lochter and one in Fraserburgh, where parents have the opportunity to learn more about options of parental involvement but also to make their voices heard.

At the heart of Aberdeenshire's revised Parental Involvement Strategy will be the following statement that was already part of the previous version:

The key role of parents as prime educators and carers of a child is fully recognised and appreciated by the service. It will work with parents to develop a shared set of aims and aspirations for children that will ultimately lead to success in achieving the best outcomes for all Aberdeenshire children and young people

Why we as a Parent Council in co-operation with the Parent Forum should take an active part in the development of the Strategy respectively in its implementation is that previous aspects of it have not put into practise at the expense of our children. So, for instance, there has been extensive consultation been promised that would feed into policy developments but in regards to CfE nothing of that kind has happened.

Other examples include the involvement of parents in their child's learning in schools:

Under the header 'Involving parents in the curriculum and learning experiences in school and across the service' we can read:

School staff cannot deliver education on their own. They will work closely with other officers within the lifelong learning aspect of the service and in partnership with a range of agencies, young people and parents to deliver high quality educational experiences to Aberdeenshire's children and young people. The service fully appreciates that input from parents adds considerable value to the educational experiences received by young people. [...]

'Curriculum for Excellence' provides opportunities for schools to plan the involvement of parents in their child's learning and in the life of the school. The 'Curriculum for Excellence' will be used as the basis for planning parental involvement in children's learning. (pp5-6)

Currently we learn from schools about the formalities of the CfE in terms of qualification and course choices but other than that the parental role is a passive one where parents are neither informed about changes in learning styles (transferable skills, soft skills, experiences and outcomes) nor are asked to feed back to the school how their children fare with these changes.

Two other examples that have been previously addressed at our PC meetings and should have found satisfactory solutions according to the Strategy shall illustrate that, while CfE related problems constitute a large chunk of the shortcomings, there are others that are relevant to all parents. One of these are the question of how to monitor and know about our children's homework.

In the Appendix under the header

Key Element:4) Actively planning, supporting, encouraging and developing parents' involvement in their child's learning within service establishments and at home

we can read in the column with the title 'What will we do?'

Schools will engage with all parents to support their children's learning on a regular basis (p.15)

Parents brought up repeatedly the concern that they were unsure about the amount of homework, the timing and the quality. The reference most often provided by the school was that pupils should use the pupil diary to keep up to date with homework and that this would be also a reference point for parents. Glow was mentioned time and again as an online source but there was neither training provided for parents nor were they provided with access. Communication regarding homework is still largely based on the willingness and ability of a pupil to use the diary. Parents have no other means of accessing information about their children's homework.

The subject matter in those chosen quotes affect other areas of school life but shall be used here to illustrate examples pertinent to our PC meetings.

Another example that actually shows that the PC and the school are working together is summed up under the statement:

Make information readily available to parents on their children's progress, achievement and attainment (p.15)

Many parents were previously unaware that they could get an update on their children's progress by asking Guidance to compile an update by getting in touch with the teachers from which the parents would like to know how their child is progressing. Detailed information of this will be available in the near future in the next edition of the handbook and on the school's website.

Another important aspect that is more indirectly acknowledged but vital to the success of parental involvement is that all parents should have the opportunity to communicate with the school.

"Schools increasingly combine parents' individual and collective views with those of learners and teachers to gain a fuller understanding of how successful learning is." (p15)

In order to develop a comprehensive picture there are structures like the Guidance System and the PC in place. In the majority of cases these are sufficient as communication tools between school and Parent Forum. Yet there are individual cases where parents felt that they were let down, in one case a parent felt he couldn't speak at all to his child's Guidance teacher and in

another case a mother felt that the chosen subject taught by Guidance was inappropriate for her S6 child.

It is frustrating and a sign of the inefficiency of the PC when parents tell us about concerns like these but do not see a point in actually trying for change and instead simply have given up.

Concluding from the above given examples I would like to make the following suggestions:

Part of the problems Guidance is experiencing is due to a considerable lack of staff, teaching and otherwise. Together with the school the Parent Council could address this in two ways, there could be areas identified where parent helpers could provide support in non confidential areas (which could also be extended to other areas of the school) while at the same time the PC could take this problem up with Aberdeenshire Council as they have committed themselves to its effective implementation in the Parental Involvement Strategy.

The Parent Council will continue to improve its communications with the Parent Forum. There will be training coming up in March that is dedicated to this topic but we also should look to ways to encourage parents to address issues without being afraid that this might result in negative consequences.

Generally reviewing the existing communication systems in place to invite parental involvement could be a step forward by simultaneously assessing how aware parents are of their rights and the availability of communication options with the school.

One aspect that really stood out for me at the last Parent Involvement Meeting was the discrepancy between the importance of the PCs, seen by many officials now as primary tool to pass on information to the parents, and on the other hand the unawareness of parents of the options and possibilities that are available to them through the Parent Council and that important information is not only distributed through the school but also through the PCs.

My final suggestion would be that the PC and the Gordon Schools work together on a communication model that will direct parents either to the PC or Guidance depending on what their concern is and illustrate their options. A "how to get in touch with whom and when", that is concise, can be published on an A4 sheet and be readily available.

Please find also attached below the minutes of last meeting. And, as usual, any comments and questions are welcome.

Minute of Meeting  
Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2013

Attending: Uschi Mitchell-Schrage, Maureen Stansfield, Dinka Rees, Karen and Marjorie Temperley

Apologies: Sarah Sleahy, Fiona Alderson, Scott Strachan, Karen Scott, Mary Bomphrey, Carol Cocker, Mike Lloyd-Wiggins, Lynn Murphy, Fiona Cooper, Dee Panes, Tricia Barnett, and Gary Wade who has had to withdraw from the group.

**1 Minute of previous meeting**

Marjorie Temperley apologised for reading the apologies of Sarah Leahy and Fiona Alderson but not noting them in the appropriate section of the previous minutes.

Dinka Rees indicated that SQUIP reports should have been noted in the minutes.

**2 Parent Event/s**

√<sup>1</sup> Variety of information stands updated to include GLOW and technology coming to schools, website templates to be available after March 2013, Survey Monkey, Banchory Alcohol Project, SPTC, CLD, Active Schools combining with Sports and Leisure and Library Services. Marjorie Temperley has a contact for Healthy Eating and Early Years and is awaiting confirmation of their different contributions to the events and is awaiting a reply from the National Parent Forum Scotland.

√<sup>1</sup> Suggested discussion groups were revisited and discussed further with the final groups being agreed -

SPTC - Parent Forum and Parent Council

Parental Involvement - How parents want to be involved

Qualifications – National 3, 4 and 5, clarifying content where it has been confirmed and internal/external assessment

Assessment/Attainment – How are primary children assessed/tracked and how this feeds into pupil school reports, SQUIP reports – how should they be interpreted? \_\_\_\_\_

Transport, safety concerns

The topic of MIDGIS and how the results are used in secondary schools was raised – M Temperley to confirm if schools still use this assessment with C for E.

Qualifications were included as a group discussion even though there is the National Parent Forum of Scotland evening session in Cults Academy, entitled SQA Qualifications and Beyond, on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March (between the 2 parent events) -

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/NPF/>

as not all parents can access the Cults event.

Parents attending will need to indicate which venue they will attend and their choice of two sessions to ensure there are a suitable number of groups established and to help with catering arrangements which will include tea/coffee on arrival and soup/sandwich lunch.

Feedback from discussion groups will be given at the end of each session and a panel will be present to take questions.

M Temperley still investigating webcast/recording of any speakers to allow access for parents not attending the event.

### 3 **Parental Involvement Strategy**

Discussion of the existing strategy concluded –

√<sup>1</sup> There needed to be a definition of parental involvement – page 4, second last paragraph of existing strategy was suggested as a suitable start point –

“The key role of parents as prime educators and carers of a child is fully recognised and appreciated by the service .It will work with parents to develop a shared set of aims and aspirations for children that will ultimately lead to success in achieving the best outcomes for all Aberdeenshire children and young people”

√<sup>1</sup> There needs to be a summary stating that at this review of the strategy the following were now in place .....

√<sup>1</sup> Update on changes to legislation need to be summarised

√<sup>1</sup> If Aberdeenshire Entitlements are mentioned they should be expanded – Coherent 3 – 18 Curriculum, Creative and Enterprising, Health and Wellbeing, Cultural, Vocational and Environmental

Mrs Temperley suggested that discussion should then focus on the Key Elements listed with each appendix at the back, from pp 8 to 19 inclusive, as the “What will we do?” and “How will we measure impact?” sections would need to be agreed by The Review Strategy Group with the various services contributing to the review.

The Review Strategy Group will consist of –

Avril Nicol, Manager of Communities and Partnerships, Marjorie Temperley ESO Parental Involvement, a Secondary Head Teacher nominated by ASHTA, a Primary Head Teacher nominated by PHTC, and representatives from CLD, Educational Psychology, Enhanced Provision, Early Years, Union representation and Curriculum for Excellence. There will be three parent representatives, ideally one from secondary, one from primary and one as a parent of a pupil at special school provision or receiving enhanced provision.

If you wish to be considered for joining the full strategy group please let Marjorie know by **Monday 25<sup>th</sup> February** at the latest by emailing

[marjorie.temperley@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:marjorie.temperley@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

Marjorie Temperley also suggested that after the review had been completed a smaller leaflet summarising the full Aberdeenshire Parental Involvement Strategy could be considered to be given out to parents.

Key Element Discussion –

√<sup>1</sup> Key Element 1 – needs changing as parent councils are established in the majority of Aberdeenshire schools, roles of parent councils and parent forum needs to be defined clearly, two way communication needs to be highlighted - collect parents views but ensure feedback is given.

- √<sup>1</sup> Key Element 2 – “Opening up opportunities and removing barriers for Parental Involvement” this should be underpinning all of Aberdeenshire’s approaches
- √<sup>1</sup> Key Element 3 – LAC children etc mentioned in element 2 could be combined into element three
- √<sup>1</sup> Key Element 7 - this could be expressed as a statement as parent councils should be involved in promoted post appointments to their school

During the discussion Marjorie Temperley raised points that had been emailed to her or notes that had been added to copies of the original strategy document.

The group were unanimous that all communication should be through different medias wherever possible to allow parents/carers direct access to the information.

## 6 **Survey Monkey**

A survey will be designed and made available across Aberdeenshire to allow parents/carers to give their opinion on parental involvement and the Parental Involvement Strategy.

Survey will be advertised through a wide range of electronic resources and include paper copies for those not able to access the internet or smart phone facilities etc. including being available at the parent events. Parent councils and schools will be contacted and Community Learning and Development (CLD) will also be involved as they are actively supporting parents to be involved in their children’s learning.

It was agreed that the questions should avoid being leading wherever possible and not seek opinion on statutory provision unless it is to comment on how it has been implemented.

## 8 **Next Meeting**

To be confirmed - depending on when the Strategy Review Group are to meet at Woodhill House.