

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

PARENT COUNCIL RESOURCE

A guide to gathering views and ensuring
parents' voices are heard in your school

Note to readers

This guide aims to help Parent Councils represent the views of the wider Parent Forum at their school, and to help ensure those views are listened to and are taken into account. It has been written to complement existing Scottish Government resources for Parent Councils.

Definitions for this guide

Parents – ‘Parents’ refers to members of the Parent Forum. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act says the Parent Forum consists of all parents who have a child at the school. The definition of ‘parent’ includes everyone with a parenting role, for example non-resident parents, foster carers, and relatives who are caring for children for a range of different reasons.

PARENT COUNCIL RESOURCE

A guide to gathering views and ensuring
parents' voices are heard in your school

© Crown copyright 2013

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or e-mail: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This document is available from our website at www.scotland.gov.uk.

First published by the Scottish Government, March 2013

ISBN: 978-1-78256-237-5

eBook first published by the Scottish Government, March 2013

ISBN: 978-1-78256-238-2 (ePub)

Kindle eBook first published by the Scottish Government, March 2013

ISBN: 978-1-78256-239-9 (Mobi)

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Written for the Scottish Government by:

Children in Scotland

Princes House

5 Shandwick Place

Edinburgh

EH2 4RG

Registered Charity 83383

Designed by Creative Link

Produced for the Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland

DPPAS14045 (03/12)

Published by the Scottish Government, March 2013.

Contents

Part 1: Why parents' views matter	2
Introduction	2
Why parents' views matter	3
Laying the foundations	3
Think long term	5
Why consult?	6
Part 2: How to consult with parents	7
Introduction	7
How to consult	8
Resource 1: Surveys	16
Resource 2: Focus groups	22
Resource 3: Public meetings/events	27
Resource 4: Informal methods	30
Annex 1: Encouraging involvement	31
Annex 2: Additional resources and further information	35

Part 1: Why parents' views matter

Introduction

Your Parent Council has an important role to play in helping ensure parents' unique knowledge of their own child, their valuable life experience and individual personal skills help enrich children's education.

One way in which Parent Councils can do this is by helping parents to feed in their views and ideas, ensuring their input makes a positive difference to the life and work of the school.

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006:

Part 12. The Parent Council should have arrangements in place for ascertaining the views of members of the forum on the standards and quality of education provided by the school, or on other matters that appear to the Council to be of interest or concern to members of the forum. (Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006, Section D, Role of Parent Council): <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/08094112/0>

Part 14. The Parent Council may also be involved in consulting the Parent Forum about the full range of school policies, e.g. in relation to uniform, drugs, school ethos, etc. It can collate the views of parents and report them to the headteacher of the school and to the education authority as appropriate. It can also make representations on such matters to other persons, including HMIE... (Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006, Section D, Representing the views of parents): <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/08094112/0>

Why parents' views matter

Encouraging and supporting parents to share their views and ideas, and ensuring they influence what happens at the school, benefits everyone involved.

Parents have a unique knowledge of their own child, valuable life experience and personal skills, as well as energy and creativity and a vested interest in making sure the school is working well. Helping parents to feed in their views and ideas on a variety of educational issues, so that they are involved in educational planning and decision-making, will enrich children's educational experiences and help to ensure the school is responsive to its local community's needs.

Laying the foundations

Your Parent Council has an important role to play in helping to create an environment where all parents know that their views matter, and where they feel comfortable putting forward their views and ideas.

Sharing parents' views with the headteacher and staff, and ensuring those views are listened to and taken into account, will be possible if the Parent Council and the school have a positive working partnership.

From the outset it is important that the Parent Council and the school share a joint commitment to seek parents' views and ideas, and to ensure that these make a real difference to the work and life of the school.

Each school community is unique and there are a wide range of educational issues on which parents may wish to feed in their views. What is most important is that all parents feel able to contribute and are confident about doing so. Your Parent Council and school can work in partnership to create an environment that supports this. Annex 1 (page 31) provides some examples of how to encourage parents to get involved in the school more generally, which may in turn make it easier for them to feed in their views.

Carrying out more formal consultations can help to ensure that obtaining parents' views becomes an integral part of the school's decision-making process. Consultation provides a systematic way of collecting and measuring parents' views, which makes it easier to give those views prominence and ensure that they are heard and taken into account.

Areas in which parent views could be sought may include:

- How the school communicates with parents
- Supporting delivery of Curriculum for Excellence by tapping into parents' skills, experiences and expertise
- The processes involved in preparing children for key transitions, such as from nursery to primary, primary to secondary and leaving school
- Discussing the opportunities available to children during key periods of their school career, such as the Senior Phase (S4-S6)
- Formulating the school's priorities for improvement (the development of the School Improvement Plan)
- Revising existing school policies and introducing new policies
- Any significant changes (for example, moving to a new school building)
- Developing the School Handbook.

Think long term

Parent Council membership changes as children move on or personal circumstances change so it is important to plan for sustained involvement. Work in partnership with the school to ensure there is a process in place as part of the school's planning and decision-making to obtain parents' views. These could be highlighted in the school calendar each year.

For example, consultation with parents could become an integral part of preparing and updating the School Improvement Plan every year.

Example

An annual whole-school survey of parents, and also staff and pupils, is used to identify 3-5 areas of priority for the school.

When the priority areas have been identified, a series of parent focus groups are organised. Each group focuses on an identified priority area and discusses practical ideas for improvement in more detail.

In the example above, parents are being consulted and their views used to inform development of the School Improvement Plan. When the consultation is carried out on an annual basis, this enables sustained involvement by parents in the planning and decision-making process.

A similar approach could also be used in gathering parents' views on the content and format of the school handbook, to ensure that it meets the needs of the parent community (see School Handbook Guidance for more details).

Why consult?

“Consultation is the dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based on a genuine exchange of views, with a clear objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of change.” (The Consultation Institute)

Meaningful consultation is a worthwhile exercise because it presents an opportunity for parents to get actively involved in dialogue with the school about a variety of matters that affect them, their children and the school community. It is a way of finding out what their views and ideas are, and making sure the school is aware of these so that they can be taken into account when decisions are made.

The Consultation Institute has created a Consultation Charter, which describes seven good practice principles to help ensure consultation is meaningful.

Integrity: Honestly intend to listen to what parents say and genuinely consider the views expressed.

Visibility: Make sure all parents know about the consultation and get the chance to give their views.

Accessibility: Design the information, methods and activities so they are attractive and all parents are able to access them and join in.

Transparency: Make sure you explain to parents the consultation process and how their responses will be used.

Disclosure: Tell parents all the important information up front. In particular tell them why their views are being sought, the areas of the issue they can influence, how much influence they can have and what decisions have already been taken and are therefore not part of the consultation.

Fair interpretation: Collate and interpret responses to the consultation to reflect the views parents have expressed.

Publication: Publish the results of your consultation.

Further information is available from the Consultation Institute at www.consultationinstitute.org.

Part 2: How to consult with parents

Introduction

Part 2 focuses on some of the practical steps you can take to ensure that consultation with parents is meaningful.

The guidance is not intended as exhaustive or comprehensive, but to help you decide when to consult with parents; on what issues; and what methods to use.

Some Parent Councils will already use these methods extensively, or be familiar with them. Others, particularly new Parent Councils or a Parent Council that has recently changed office bearers, may be less familiar with them. 'How to consult' (page 8) focuses on the important things to consider for any consultation. The resources that follow focus on different methods of consultation – surveys; focus groups; meetings/events; and the option of taking a more informal approach. Annex 2 (page 35) includes links to further information and resources that you may find helpful.

How to consult

It is important that any consultation undertaken is meaningful for those involved. The points below will help ensure that all parents know why their views and ideas are being sought, have an opportunity to put their views forward, and understand how their views will be taken into account.

Planning the consultation



1 Be clear about why you are consulting parents

Reflect on the following:

- What do you want to achieve as a result of the consultation?
- Is the issue suitable for a public consultation? (Parent Councils should not consult on issues about individual pupils, families or teachers. However, it may be possible to draw a general issue for consideration from a specific concern e.g. consult on the school's general bullying policy but not on an individual case of bullying.)
- Do you require the views of all parents, or a particular group e.g. fathers or parents of children with additional support needs?
- Is there genuine scope for the consultation to make changes or improvements? (If the process can't influence decision-making, it is not a consultation.)



2 Be clear about how parents' views will be taken into account

Reflect on the following:

- How will you analyse results? (see point 9)
- How will you provide feedback on results? (see point 10)
- How will you work in partnership with the school to ensure parents' views are taken into account? (see point 11)
- How will you provide feedback on the final outcome? (see point 12)



3 Decide which consultation method is most appropriate

- Which method of consultation will you use? (Resources 1-4 each focus on a different method. Which one you use will depend on what you want to find out. A combination of methods may be beneficial.)



4 Consider how you can ensure all parents are able to feed in their views

Have you identified any barriers that may make it difficult for particular groups or individuals to take part, and tried to address these? Have you included non-resident parents in communications?

- Are there parents who may require questions to be translated?
- Are there parents without access to a computer who require questionnaires or invitations to be printed?
- Should consultation events be held during the day, the evening, or a combination of both?



5 Consider whether you should also get pupils' views

How can you work with the Pupil Council to obtain the views of pupils in the school? (Most issues relevant to parents are also relevant to pupils, and children have a right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to be involved in decisions that impact on their lives. The Scottish Government has published 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Explained: A report on your rights in Scotland,' which can be viewed at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/216011/0057744.pdf>)



6 Create a timetable for the consultation

How much time do you need? Build in time for: researching the issue; promoting the consultation and sending out background information (see point 7); response; analysis of the results; and communicating the results to parents.

TIP. Carry out consultations during term time, avoiding the start or the end of terms, which can be very busy.

Doing the consultation



7 Ensure parents are well informed about the issue

Are you confident that parents have enough background information about the issue you are consulting on to be able to respond in a meaningful way? (It may be necessary to send out information in advance.)



8 Ensure parents understand why they are being consulted and how their response will be used

Have you provided a concise introduction for parents? It can include:

- Who is carrying out the consultation and who is being consulted
- What you are consulting on and why you think it is important
- What the different options are (if applicable)
- Reference to any background information provided
- How parents' responses will be used
- Details of the timetable
- How you will feed back results and outcome of the consultation
- Parent Council's contact details for any queries.

This information can be communicated in a covering letter, as an introduction to a questionnaire, or perhaps to accompany an invitation to a consultation event, such as a focus group or meeting.

Analysis, feedback and review



9 Analyse the results of your consultation

Are you prepared to analyse the results objectively and for the results to identify issues that were not anticipated? (The outcome may need further discussion or consultation).



10 Make sure parents know the results of the consultation

- Is your report on the results of the consultation clear and accessible? (You could summarise key findings with bullet points and visuals e.g graphs and charts to illustrate statistics.)
- Is your feedback accessible for all parents? (see point 4)
- Does your feedback explain next steps? (Your report should also include how the results will be taken into account [see point 11].)



11 Work in partnership with the school to ensure the results of the consultation are taken into account

Are you working with the school to help ensure the views expressed through the consultation can influence decision-making? You could:

- Use Parent Council meetings to discuss the results, and how they will be taken into account, in a transparent way
- Create a sub-group that includes staff and parents to ensure the results of a consultation, and parents' views in general, are reflected in decision-making
- Hold a public meeting/event to enable a much larger group of parents to influence how the results inform decision-making (see Resource 3).



12 Make sure parents know what the outcome is

Are all parents aware of how their views were taken into account, any decisions that were made and the rationale behind them? (This is particularly important when the final outcome may not be what all parents had hoped for.)



13 Review how successful the consultation has been

- Did you achieve what you set out to achieve?
- Did you ask the right questions?
- Did you ask the right people?
- Did you use the right methods?
- If reviewing a focus group or event, was it facilitated or chaired well?

Parent satisfaction:

- Were parents well supported? Were all parents able to participate? Did they receive enough background information?
- Do parents have faith in the process? Do they believe their views were listened to and taken into account and are they likely to participate in future consultations?
- Did parents feel they received the right level of feedback?

How parents' views were taken into account:

- How were parents' views considered by the school?
- Was the rationale behind any decisions made as a result of the consultation clearly explained and communicated to parents?
- What happened as a result of the consultation? Did anything change? For example, are parents' views reflected in the School Improvement Plan?

Resource 1: Surveys

Surveys are an effective way of finding out parents' views on a particular issue or subject in a structured way that enables you to analyse the results. You can use:

- Paper questionnaires sent home with pupils, and handed out at events and in the playground
- Email questionnaires in the body of the email or as an attachment
- Online questionnaires using tools such as Survey Monkey, which can make analysis of the results much easier.

If an issue is raised as the result of a survey, you can use focus groups (Resource 2) or a public meeting/event (Resource 3) as a way of exploring the issue in more detail.

Using surveys

A survey is a method of consulting with parents and the points described in 'How to consult' apply to any consultation that you undertake. **This resource provides some guidance that applies specifically to surveys.**

Drafting your questions

Online survey tools provide detailed information on designing surveys. Use the checklist below as a guide:

- Ensure each question uses clear, concise language and avoid jargon and acronyms e.g. write Curriculum for Excellence, not CfE
- Ensure each question relates directly to the purpose of your survey and make every question count. Too many questions will put people off

- Reflect on what type of question you need. Survey tools provide detailed advice on drafting survey questions.

There are four different types of questions and you can use a combination to create your questionnaire:

Open questions

Open questions allow parents to respond in their own words.

They are good for finding out parents' views and ideas on a range of issues, and for enabling parents to say what they think about the school generally.

Remember that large numbers of open responses may prove time consuming to analyse.

Example

A school would like to find out what parents think it does well and where they feel the school could improve. Parents' feedback can be used to inform development of the School Improvement Plan.

- What do you think the school does well?
- In what areas do you think the school could improve?
- Please use this space to let us know about any ideas you have for improving the school.

Closed questions

Closed questions require one answer or multiple-choice answers. Respondents select pre-set answers.

They are good for finding out parents' opinions or preferences where a decision could be made based on a majority vote, and for building a profile of respondents. They work best where lots of parents respond.

Examples

How would you prefer to receive communications? (please indicate your preferred method of communication)

- Printed copy
- Online version that can be downloaded (as a pdf file) from the school website
- Email (as an attached pdf file)
- Incorporated into a 'school information' section of the school website
- Other (please specify)

Which year is your child in?

S1 S2 S3 S4 ...etc

Ranking and rating formats

Ranking and rating questions enable parents to rank and rate a list of choices.

Unless you are using an online survey tool that analyses the results automatically, this type of question might require additional work to analyse if the response rate is high.

Examples

The school is embarking on a project to improve the school's outdoor grounds and wants to know what parents' priorities are

Q. In terms of investing money raised by parents into developing the playground, please rate the following in order of priority - with 1 being your highest priority to 9 being your lowest priority.

Against each choice, parents include a ranking from 1-9.

- Sports facilities
 - Seating areas
 - Developing outdoor learning (materials such as tools, microscopes and cameras)
 - Agility trail
 - Other large-scale play equipment such as slides, climbing frames and climbing wall)
 - Wildlife garden
 - Edible garden
 - Developing outdoor learning (staff training)
-

The Parent Council/school would like to find out what parents think about the new school handbook.

Q. In December the school published a new school handbook. How useful did you find this handbook?

Parents can choose 'Very useful, Useful, Not very useful, Don't know'

Reviewing your questions

Do a test run of the survey with a small group of parents or other members of the Parent Council.

- How long will the questionnaire take to complete? Aim for no more than 10 minutes. Questionnaires that are too long will put people off.
- Will responses relate directly to the overall purpose of your consultation?
- Will respondents understand the questions and be able to answer them?

“The key thing with paper questionnaires is to be there when the parents fill them in. Handing them out at parents evenings and asking them to be handed in before they leave and putting young people on the door to collect them results in a significant increase in return rate from less than 20% to greater than 70%”
(Parent Council Member)

Survey checklist

- ✓ Each question should use clear, concise language and avoid jargon and acronyms. Respondents will need to understand the questions to be able to answer them.
- ✓ Each question should relate directly to the purpose of your survey. Make every question count – too many questions will put people off.
- ✓ Use a combination of questions (open, closed, ranking and rating) to encourage response.
- ✓ Review questions by doing a test run with a small ‘control’ group of parents or council members.
- ✓ Questionnaires should be short and concise – in total it should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.
- ✓ Make sure responses relate directly to the overall purpose of your consultation.

Resource 2: Focus groups

Focus groups are useful for finding out parents' attitudes, feelings and views on a wide range of issues or policies, e.g. the Homework Policy. They involve small groups of parents (no more than 6-8 people).

In a focus group, a facilitator encourages open yet focused discussion about the issue, which can give a deeper insight into parents' views. The quality of information obtained from a focus group is very different to that obtained through a questionnaire and can be an effective way of exploring an issue in greater detail.

Using focus groups

Focus groups are a method of consulting with parents and the points described in 'How to consult' apply to any consultation that you undertake. This resource provides some additional guidance that applies specifically to focus groups.



Ensure the focus group is inclusive and representative

- Either invite all parents to take part (or all those who fit the target group), or invite a randomly selected group of parents. If you opt for the former and expect to receive too many replies to your invitation, you could draw names out of a hat, or run additional focus groups.
- Try to ensure that the focus group is representative, for example across year groups.



Ask open questions to encourage open discussion

- Prepare questions for the facilitator to ask in advance. Use open questions in this setting to encourage parents to give more information. (see sample questions in the example below)
- Comfortable surroundings and informal seating arrangements will encourage parents to engage in an open discussion. Provide refreshments.



Understand the role of the facilitator

- The role of the facilitator is to manage the discussion and keep it focused, not to be involved in the discussion. The facilitator should:
 - Ask parents to introduce themselves
 - Confirm the purpose of the focus group and explain the complete consultation process, e.g. any other methods used such as a questionnaire
 - Start with a 'warm up' question – something easy to help parents feel at ease
 - Remain impartial and ensure the discussion stays focused on the purpose of your consultation
 - Keep to time
 - Summarise the discussion for participants at the end and explain next steps.



Decide how you will record the key points raised during the focus group

- Use a note-taker or record proceedings, and inform participants about this before the event.



Think carefully about how information from focus groups will be taken into account

- Think carefully about how you use information from a focus group. Focus groups are a small representative sample. For example, if the purpose of the focus group was to feed in ideas for improving the school's homework policy, proposals for the new policy should be sent to all parents for comment before being finalised.

Example

A survey, which asked parents about the school's strengths and areas for improvement, has revealed some concerns about homework. A focus group, representative across all year groups, is created to discuss the school's homework policy. The focus group discuss issues raised by the survey in more detail and identify possible ways of improving the existing policy. Suggestions for revising the policy are sent to all parents asking for their feedback before being finalised.

Here are some sample questions that could be used in the focus group described above to guide discussion:

- How do you feel about the frequency and level of homework given to your child?
- How well do you feel your child engages with the homework they are given?
- How could the school make it easier for you to support your child with their homework?
- [Closing question] Taking into consideration all the issues we have discussed today, what would be the most important improvement you would make to the existing homework policy?

Focus Group checklist

- ✓ Invite all parents to take part. Alternatively, invite a randomly selected group of parents who fit the target group.
- ✓ Prepare questions in advance to ensure you get the information you need.
- ✓ Use open questions to encourage parents to give more information (see sample questions above).
- ✓ Choose a facilitator who can guide and manage the discussion to ensure it remains focused.
- ✓ Accurately record the discussion. Use a competent note-taker or record proceedings but inform participants before the event.
- ✓ Provide refreshments, comfortable surroundings and informal seating arrangements to put parents at ease and encourage them to engage in an open discussion.
- ✓ Send a summary of the discussion and details of any next steps to all parents.

Resource 3: Public meetings/events

Organising a public meeting/event enables more parents to attend than focus groups. Bear in mind however, that if a large number of parents attend some may find it more difficult to speak out. You could arrange for parents to break into small discussion groups with a facilitator and/or note-taker to record their views.

Using public meetings/events

Public meetings/events are a method of consulting with parents and the points described in 'How to consult' apply to any consultation that you undertake. This resource provides some additional guidance that applies specifically to the organisation of public meetings/events.



Be well prepared

- Book the room well in advance. Is it too big/small and accessible for everyone? If you would like attendees to break into smaller groups, will they need tables?
- Decide who will Chair the meeting/event. The success of a public meeting/event can depend on the Chair's ability to keep to time and ensure discussion remains interesting and focused on the purpose of the consultation. Make sure the Chair is well prepared.
- Decide if you would like to involve other speakers (think about whether there are opportunities for pupils to get involved). Brief the speakers in advance.
- Decide who will facilitate group discussions and who will take notes to record the discussions (you could ask Parent Council members) and brief them in advance.

- Plan for any equipment you may need such as an overhead projector, laptop, sound equipment or flipcharts and pens for group discussions.
- Prepare questions for the discussion groups in advance. Use open questions to encourage discussion.
- Invite all parents to attend.
- Prepare an agenda and send it out to all parents.
- Check equipment before the event. For example, is the projector working properly? Is the sound equipment working properly? Can visuals be seen from the back of the room?

Examples

A school holds 'Curriculum Evenings' two to three times per year, each focusing on different aspects of the curriculum, such as literacy, numeracy, science, work experience opportunities.

Following a presentation and showcasing of curriculum developments, the parents are invited to engage in discussion in smaller groups. The purpose is to identify strengths and priority areas for action, which will then be used to help develop the School Improvement Plan.

Here are some sample prompts that could be used to guide small-group discussion in the event described above:

In your groups discuss and summarise on the flipcharts provided:

- What the school does well in science education
- Areas where science education could be improved
- Ideas you have for making those improvements

A school uses Parent Council meetings to provide opportunity for focused discussion on a particular issue. Issues have included bullying, homework and the transition from primary to secondary school. The meeting begins with a short presentation on the issue, sometimes delivered by pupils. Parents then break into small groups to discuss the issue and feed back a summary of their discussion at the end. This is followed by discussion about next steps. The key points and next steps are fed back to all parents using the school newsletter.

“Our school had a capacity crisis when we were told there was not enough room for all our catchment P1 children next year and that some would be redirected to out of catchment schools. There was outrage amongst the parent body and the parent council called a public meeting which was attended by the head of education, and also ran a media and social networking campaign. We are now working alongside the authority to ensure our community’s needs are met. It is a very exciting time for our effective parent council.” **(Parent Council member)**

Resource 4: Informal methods

Simply asking parents what they think about something can be a really useful and informal method of consultation and used to complement more formal methods. It can be a particularly effective way of finding out the views of parents who find more formal methods of consultation difficult or intimidating.

Example

A school holds a drop in surgery at a bigger school event such as parents evening or a school concert. Parents are familiar with and comfortable in these settings. The headteacher uses this as an opportunity to ask what their thoughts are generally, and on key issues and policies, collecting responses on tear off sheets collected at the end of the event, or by asking parents to put their thoughts onto Post-it Note, which are then passed on to the Parent Council.

Annex 1 (page 31) provides some examples of how to encourage parents to get involved in the school more generally, which may in turn make it easier for them to feed in their views.

Annex 1

Encouraging involvement

There are numerous ways of encouraging parents to get involved in the life of the school, and all types of involvement make a difference. **Parents as Partners in their Children's Learning Toolkit** and the **Parentzone website** (see Annex 2) are useful sources if you are looking for ideas. Involving parents in the wider school community may also give them the confidence, and make it easier, to feed in their views on issues relating to the school.

Parents should know that the school and their Parent Council are committed to ensuring their input counts. To help build a relationship with parents based on trust, asking for their views should be incorporated into everything that the Parent Council does. The following lists different opportunities for Parent Councils to engage with parents:

Class and/or Area Representatives

Parent Council representatives are more likely to know and meet parents of children in the same class as their own child or living in the same area. This exchange of information can provide important opportunities for feeding parents' views in to the Parent Council.

Email

A useful, no-cost way of communicating regularly with parents. Use this as an opportunity to encourage parents to feed in their views by including an invitation in your standard email signature (see 'Promotional literature').

Face-to-face contact

Talking to people face-to-face can help them feel valued and break down barriers. Identify key events throughout the year that are well attended by parents and provide opportunities for members of the Parent Council to speak directly with parents. These may include parent evenings, school concerts and Christmas and summer fairs. Consider having a Parent Council stand and/or presence at such events to recruit new members, and to raise the profile of the Parent Council and generate interest.

Newsletters

Useful for providing regular and concise information about a range of issues. They can be used to make parents aware of issues, meeting dates and also to ask parents what they think. Newsletters could be electronic, on the school or parent council website and/or hard copy via the school bag. Ask for parental preferences.

Parent Council meetings

Provide important opportunities for parents to discuss issues and put forward their views and ideas. Ensure all parents are invited and that they feel welcome to attend. If turn out is poor, try and reflect on why this may be.

Set the meeting room up in a way that will encourage discussion. Some parents may find sitting around a long table intimidating so arrange seats into an oval or circular shape. Or use the staff room where chairs are likely to be more comfortable.

Consider holding meetings on different days or times so that more parents have an opportunity to attend. During meetings the Chair should encourage all those attending to contribute to the discussion. Informal drop in sessions with a rota of parent council members, perhaps just before the end of the school day, or just after the start of the day, might also be an option that works for some parents/ Parent Councils.

Promotional literature

The Parent Council's basic contact details should always be available on all Parent Council literature and communications, with signposting to other resources such as webpages. You could also include some common phrases and subheadings on all communications, which would encourage parents to feed in their views.

For example: **Tell us what you think: Are there things you think the school is doing well? What could be improved?**

School handbook

Every School Handbook should include information about the Parent Council (see 'Promotional literature').

School notice board

Notice boards are an opportunity to showcase the work of the Parent Council. Put up photos of Parent Council members to give the Parent Council a 'human face' and invite parents to feed in their views (see 'Promotional literature').

Social media

Social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) are a way of communicating with parents and can be useful for letting parents know about Parent Council activities, and for enabling parents to get in touch with the Parent Council. It is important to promote responsible use of social media so you may wish to adopt your local authority or school's policy on responsible use.

Sub-groups or short-life working groups

Can be set up to focus on a particular issue. They provide opportunities to involve parents who are unable to commit to being full members of the Parent Council and can help channel parents' enthusiasm, commitment and expertise into driving improvement in a particular area.

Suggestion Boxes

Use 'Suggestion Boxes' in the school reception area. Make sure you publicise their existence and encourage parents to leave contact details so they can be involved in exploring any suggestions further.

Websites

Not all Parent Councils have the resources to develop their own website but can ask the school for their own page on the school's website. Some websites use online forms, to allow parents to send views directly to a Parent Council email address. Some also have links to social media sites (see above), and/or have their own social media facilities.

Welcome packs

Develop a standard letter of welcome, or a welcome 'pack' to introduce the Parent Council to parents of children just starting at the school (for both P1/S1 parents and those new to the area). The Scottish Government has produced the **Parents as Partners in their Children's Learning Toolkit**, which could form part of this Welcome Pack. Use this to promote the purpose of the Parent Council and to encourage parents to get involved and make their views known.

A note on contact lists

Many of the communication methods above rely on having an up-to-date contact list. Some Parent Councils choose to send out information via the school but if your Parent Council decides to maintain its own list, keep information safe and ensure it is only used for the purpose for which it was given and not shared with others. More information on data protection can be found at: www.ico.gov.uk.

It is important to be clear with parents about the purpose of your database and to develop protocols for its appropriate usage.

“As a result of the Parent Council Consultations a year ago we set up an email list of interested parents as a way of improving communication. Through this we've also set up our Facebook page as parents were keen to have this developed.”
(Parent Council member)

Annex 2

Resources

The Consultation Charter can be downloaded from:

www.consultationinstitute.org

Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006

Guidance for education authorities, Parent Councils and others on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

Scottish Government; 2006

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/08094112/0>

The National Standards for Community Engagement

The standards set out best practice guidance for engagement between communities and public agencies.

Scottish Community Development Centre

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>

Parents as Partners: information for Parent Council members

A leaflet for new Parent Council members to help them understand their role and signpost them to sources of information and support.

Scottish Government, 2011, www.scotland.gov.uk

Parents as partners in learning: a CPD resource

Includes activities designed to help practitioners reflect on parental involvement and to develop strategies/ideas for engaging all parents and carers to become actively involved in their children's learning. Also includes links to case studies.

Education Scotland

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/partnerships/engagingparents/parentsaspartners/introduction.asp>

Parents as Partners in their Children's Learning Toolkit

A practical resource to help parents and schools look at how they can work together in partnership. Accompanies the Guidance on the Parental Involvement Act.

Scottish Government; 2006

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/07091311/0>

Partnerships: Collaboration and representation improvement guide

One of series of improvement guides for schools. This guide focuses on what is expected of schools in relation to parental involvement and consultation.

Education Scotland

<http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk/partnership/improvementguides/collaborationandrepresentation.asp>

School Handbook Guidance

Scottish Government; 2012

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/09/8694>

School inspections: Support and advice for chairperson of Parent Council

Education Scotland; 2012

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/SupportandadviceforCPPC240712_tcm4-684364.pdf

Further information

www.consultationinstitute.org – The **Consultation Institute** aims to promote the highest standards of public, stakeholder and employee consultation.

www.educationscotland.gov.uk – **Education Scotland** is the national body responsible for supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching.

www.engageforeducation.org – **Engage for Education** is a platform for Scotland's education community) to engage directly with the Scottish Government.

www.enquire.org.uk – **Enquire** is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning.

www.npfs.org.uk – **The National Parent Forum for Scotland** (NPFS) is the representative body for Parent Councils in Scotland, working with key partners such as Education Scotland, Local Authorities, the Scottish Government.

www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone – **Parentzone** is a dedicated site containing information on education in Scotland tailored to the needs of parents.

www.scotland.gov.uk/Parents – The **Scottish Government** website provides information on a range of educational issues of interest to parents.

www.sptc.info – The **Scottish Parent Teacher Council** is a national organisation for parents' groups in Scottish schools offering help and advice to parents and providing a range of leaflets, reports and resources.

www.surveymonkey.com – **Survey Monkey** is an online survey tool. A basic account is free.

Notes



**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

© Crown copyright 2013

First published by the Scottish Government, March 2013

ISBN: 978-1-78256-237-5

eBook first published by the Scottish Government, March 2013

ISBN: 978-1-78256-238-2 (ePub)

Kindle eBook first published by the Scottish Government, March 2013

ISBN: 978-1-78256-239-9 (Mobi)

This document is also available on the Scottish Government website:

www.scotland.gov.uk

APS Group Scotland
DPPAS14045 (03/13)

w w w . s c o t l a n d . g o v . u k