

# NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK PARENT COMMUNICATION PLAN

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT/EDUCATION SCOTLAND  
2016

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## Introduction

The National Improvement Framework, published in January 2016, sets out the Scottish Government's vision and priorities for education. The aim is to use evidence at every level of the education system to support improvements for every family and child. This parent communication plan sets out the principles that should underpin all communication with parents, carers and families about the improvement framework. Although this is a national plan, the principles will be relevant at local authority and school level.

## Aims

- To provide key principles to guide all communication with parents, carers and families about the National Improvement Framework.
- To set out actions that will be taken by national organisations to ensure that parents are provided with accurate, helpful information.
- To encourage good quality dialogue between parents and education professionals.

The main audience for the plan are:

- national organisations such as Scottish Government, Education Scotland;
- regional/local strategic leads such as the Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network, and;
- school and early years leaders and Parent Council Chairs.

## Principles

All communication activity relating to parents, carers and families should be based on some core best practice principles. The following principles, which were developed in partnership with parent organisations, capture good practice, as demonstrated by head-teachers and teachers across Scotland on a day-to-day basis.

### 1. Simplicity and Clarity

- Every effort to communicate with parents and carers – every leaflet, conversation and news release – should be simple, relevant, straightforward and jargon-free.

### 2. Transparency

- Parents should receive comprehensive, honest, factual answers to their questions.
- Be prepared to clarify misunderstandings.

### 3. Relevance

- For parents, this is about improving their child's education. It is not about implementing a performance framework. The audience should drive what is said and how it is said. Focus on "what am I interested in for my child?" and "what does this mean for my child?" not "what does this mean for Scottish education?"
- Focus on the themes and issues which are relevant to parents.
- Concentrate on making the themes and principles that lie at the heart of the framework come alive for parents and families
- Be conscious of the different needs and preferences of parents and ask them how and when they would like to communicate.

#### **4. Partnership**

- Aim to develop all documents, guides, video and audio content in collaboration with parents and/or parent organisations.
- Communication should not be a one way street; it should focus on creating the opportunity for dialogue and discussion.

#### **5. Flexibility and adaptation**

- Be conscious of the multi-faceted nature of the parent community. In particular, be aware that some parents face additional barriers to engaging and communicating. Some of the most prominent are likely to be related to language, ethnic background, disability. A further additional barrier may be a parent or carer's perception of schools and education, informed by their own experience when they were young. Frame the way that you communicate with this in mind.
- Consider equalities issues in detail and seek to co-develop your approach with parents and families.

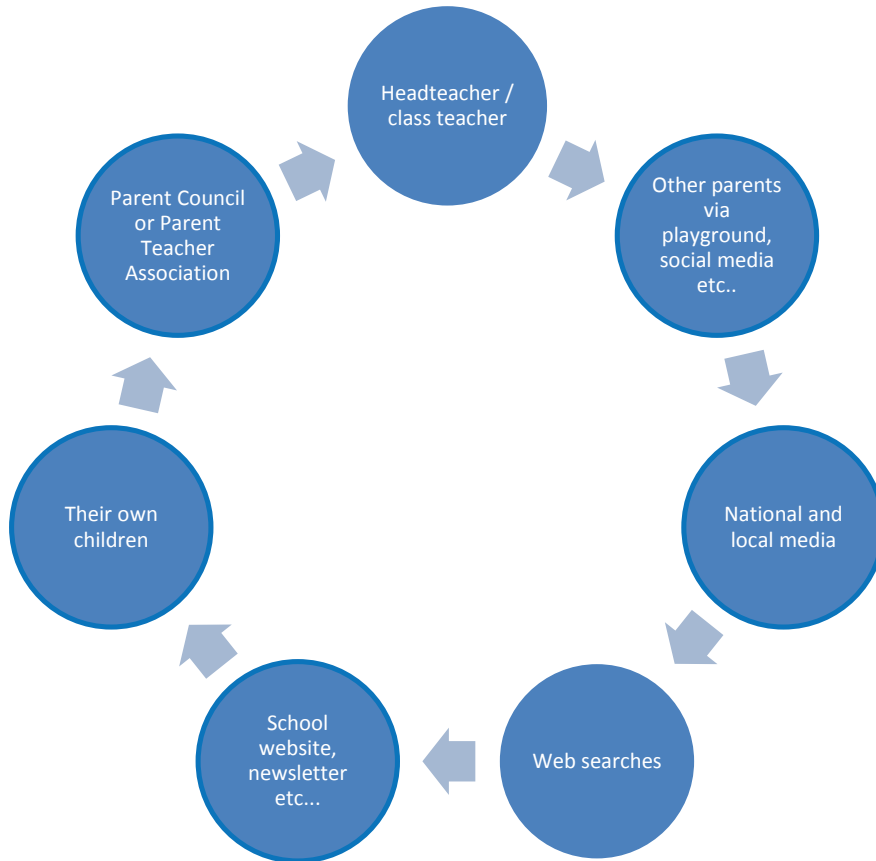
#### **6. Timeliness**

- Communication should be timed to fit in with the lives of parents and to fit in with the school calendar.

## Priorities

The Scottish Government worked with members of the national Parental Engagement Steering Group to map the main sources of information for parents.

Diagram 1: Key sources of information /advice for parents



The group concluded that for many parents the main source of information – and their most trusted source – will be their child’s headteacher (or head of establishment) and their child’s class teacher or keyworker.

The national priorities and actions in this plan therefore concentrate on providing practical parent-friendly information:

- a) to heads of establishment and education practitioners, and;
- b) to Parent Councils, the wider parent forum and the local community.

The plan focuses on three key priorities:

<b>Priority 1</b>	Explaining what the National Improvement Framework is, why it has been developed, and where it is relevant to parents
<b>Priority 2</b>	Answering the questions that are most important to parents and families.
<b>Priority 3</b>	Supporting good quality dialogue between parents, teachers and head-teachers

Parents of children in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) will have their own specific needs in relation to communicating the key messages about framework. This should be taken into account by national, regional/local organisations as well as schools. Additional bespoke communication plans and activities for parents of children in GME will be developed under this plan.

**Priority 1: Explaining what the National Improvement Framework is, why it has been developed, and where it is relevant to parents**

Some of language associated with the improvement framework can be highly technical and difficult for parents to relate to. It can include professional or organisational terms which can serve to create additional barriers. As national agencies begin to implement the framework – and as schools engage with parents and other partners – they will need to provide straightforward, practical information to parents and carers. They should seek to explain in very practical terms what the framework means for parents and their children. Communication about the framework – indeed, communication with parents about any aspect of education – should be relevant to parents, developed in partnership with parents themselves and should use plain English, jargon-free explanations.

The national improvement framework for education is...	What does this mean for you and your child?
<p>A way to gather better information to help to improve Scottish education.</p> <p><b>Across all of Scotland's schools</b>, it is about each and every school considering what they need to do to improve and what support they need to improve.</p>	<p>For <b>your child</b>, it is about making sure that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have the best start in life;</li> <li>• develop their literacy and numeracy skills (reading, writing, listening and talking, maths and number skills), and;</li> <li>• have the right range of skills, qualifications and achievements to allow them to succeed.</li> </ul> <p><b>For your child's school</b>, it is about making sure that those who lead the school know how well they are doing and what they need to do next.</p>

At national level we will take the following steps:

1.	<p>Scottish Government and Education Scotland will work with the National Parent Forum of Scotland to promote and distribute its <b>Nutshell on the National Improvement Framework</b>. The National Parent Forum will make further changes to the Nutshell in response to the evolution of the framework.</p>
2.	<p>Scottish Government and Education Scotland will work with the National Parental Engagement Steering Group to provide <b>parent-friendly explanations for all of the improvement framework themes</b>. The explanations will seek to answer questions such as: “What does this mean?”; “Why should I be interested as a parent?”; “What are the key questions from parents?”. There will also be a jargon buster for heads of educational establishments, Parent Councils and Parent Teacher Associations.</p>

At school level, this will mean providing straightforward explanations of what is meant by improvement at school level. Rather than attempting to translate the technical terms within the framework, schools may wish to focus on the behaviours and experiences that lie at the heart of the improvement framework.

## Priority 2: Answering the questions that are most important to parents and families.

Discussions with members of the National Parental Engagement Steering Group identified **parental engagement** and **assessment of children's progress** as the two key themes that are likely to be of greatest interest to parents and carers.

### Parental engagement

Communication on this theme should focus on what it really means for parents and schools, namely:

- good quality communication between home and school;
- on-going, effective and meaningful reporting to parents about their child's progress;
- practical advice and support to parents to help with learning in the home;
- opportunities for parents to be involved as equal partners in activities to improve learning for children across the school;
- support for family learning programmes, where this is appropriate to the needs of parents and families;
- opportunities for parents and families to volunteer and to make a contribution towards the life and work of the school, and;
- opportunities for parents to be involved in making important decisions related to their local school.

### Assessment of Children's Progress

The Scottish Government's aim is to establish a rounded picture of how children and young people are progressing in all aspects of their life and learning. National standardised assessments, as one part of this wider picture, have received a large amount of coverage in the media. The assessments will provide one source of information – alongside a range of other sources of information – to inform teachers' judgement of progress in aspects of reading, writing and numeracy. Communication on this theme will aim to provide a comprehensive picture of the various aspects of children's progress that will be measured. This includes what assessment is (and what it is not) and what achievement of a curriculum for excellence level means. It will aim to explain the role that will be played by standardised assessments as part of a broader package of information. Finally, it will seek to answer the practical questions that may be posed by parents and carers about standardised assessments

At national level we will take the following steps:

- |    |  |
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| 3. | We will promote the <b>important role played by parents across all six of the improvement framework drivers</b> . This will be emphasised in all communications with headteachers and schools.   |
| 4. | Scottish Government and Education Scotland will consult with parent organisations on a <b>parents' pamphlet on assessment</b> accompanied by a <b>question &amp; answer document</b> . This will include answers to the practical questions that parents may have about standardised assessment. |

At school level this is likely to mean answering the practical questions that parents are likely to post. For example:

On parental engagement:

- What does this mean to me?
- What is my role as a parent in my children's learning and in their school?
- What support and advice should I expect to receive from my child's school to help me support my child/children and to support my family to be involved in the life and work of my child's school?

On assessment and reporting:

- What is assessment?
- What will the new standardised assessments mean for my child?
- What information will I receive?
- What changes will be brought about by the improvement framework?

### Priority 3: Supporting good quality dialogue about improvement amongst parents, teachers and headteachers

The third priority is to support good quality discussion with parents and families about the vital contribution that parents can play in improving their local school.

At national level we will take the following steps:

5.	Education Scotland will work with parent organisations to develop <b>national guidance to schools and local authorities on reporting to parents</b> by January 2017. In line with the principles within this plan, the guidance will emphasise the importance of dialogue between parents, teachers and other practitioners.
6.	Education Scotland and Scottish Government will work with all partners to consider the specific <b>role of Parent Councils at the heart of improvement in their local school</b> . This will include discussions with the Scottish Parent Teacher Council to learn lessons from their Partnership Schools initiative and to consider the findings from the National Parent Forum's review into the 2006 Parental Involvement Act.
7.	Education Scotland will work with parent organisations in making further updates to the <b>Parentzone</b> Scotland website to reflect the introduction of the National Improvement Framework. This will include plain English explanations of terms such as achievement of a level, and broad general education. The information will be provided in a way that is relevant and meaningful to parents, providing appropriate context and explanation. The publication scheme will be developed with the Parentzone Scotland Strategic Stakeholder Group which includes parent organisations.

At school level this will mean creating opportunities for productive conversations with parents about what is important to them and what role they would like to play. Again, the focus should be on answering practical questions, demonstrating the collaborative approach that lies at the heart of the framework.

### Monitoring

We will monitor the impact of this plan in partnership with the national Parental Engagement Steering Group. We will continue to adjust and improve the plan over time and in response to comments from parent organisations, parents and carers, local authorities, headteachers and leaders in early years settings.

Scottish Government and Education Scotland

September 2016



## Annex A

**Membership of the National Parental Engagement Steering Group<sup>1</sup>**

The Scottish Government would like to thank the members of the national Parental Engagement Steering Group for their involvement in an initial workshop session to develop the key principles that should underpin this plan. We would also like to thank the National Parent Forum of Scotland and Scottish Parent Teacher Council for contributing to the final development of the plan. We will work with the national Parental Engagement Steering Group to monitor the delivery of this plan, and to adjust and improve the plan over time.

ADES <sup>2</sup> National Transitions Officer for Service Children and Young People
Parenting Across Scotland
Families Need Fathers
National Parent Forum of Scotland
Scottish Traveller Education Programme
BEMIS Scotland
Families Outside - organisation offering support and information to families affected by imprisonment.
Scottish Parent Teacher Council
Comann nam Pàrant - the national organisation which offers advice and support on Gaelic medium education to parents
Parent Network Scotland
Al Qalam School
Scottish Qualifications Authority
Skills Development Scotland
respectme - Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service
Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network - the local authority network of officers with a lead responsibility around involving and engaging parents
Enquire
Save the Children
Scottish Catholic Education Service

<sup>1</sup> As at September 2016

<sup>2</sup> Association of Directors of Education in Scotland



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