



The Scottish  
Government

Engagement Events and Focus  
Groups to Support the Consultation  
on School Handbooks and  
Better Information for Parents:  
Final Report

**ENGAGEMENT EVENTS AND FOCUS GROUPS TO  
SUPPORT THE CONSULTATION ON SCHOOL  
HANDBOOKS AND BETTER INFORMATION FOR  
PARENTS**

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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

- 1.1 The Scottish Government Learning Analytical Services Unit, on behalf of the Parental Involvement Team, commissioned Rocket Science to design and facilitate engagement events and focus groups to support a public consultation on School Handbooks and Better Information for Parents<sup>1</sup>. The intention was to use the results of the consultation to inform the discussion on the need to review the current legislation around the information that schools provide for parents.
- 1.2 These events and focus groups have been complemented by other consultations: an online questionnaire (which some respondents have supplemented with written responses) which has been developed and analysed in-house by Scottish Government analysts; and engagement with Head Teachers and Local Authorities. Rocket Science's commission was for the events and focus groups only and these form the subject of this report.
- 1.3 The specific objective of these events and focus groups was to engage with parents to ensure a balanced and representative view on:
  - The usefulness of the information currently provided by schools
  - The information that should be provided by schools in the future in light of the current and future planned changes under Curriculum for Excellence
  - The format(s) in which this information should be presented
  - Who should decide about the type of information provided by schools?
- 1.4 Between 17/01/11 and 30/03/11 Rocket Science facilitated 11 evening engagement events for parents in locations across Scotland. In addition, Rocket Science facilitated 5 focus groups in this period. One further engagement event was facilitated by LTS in Shetland.<sup>2</sup> The events were organised by the Scottish Government working in partnership with Local Authorities and were hosted by the National Parent Forum of Scotland. The focus groups were organised by Rocket Science in partnership with host organisations.
- 1.5 In total, the engagement events and focus groups were attended by: 65 parents, 45 Parent Council Representatives, 10 National Parent Forum of Scotland representatives, 10 school staff (Head Teacher, Depute Head Teacher or teachers), 10 relevant representatives from local authorities, and 2 others. There were 142 unique attendees.

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<sup>1</sup> We have adopted throughout this report the definition of 'parent' as used in the Scottish Schools Parental Involvement Act 2006

<sup>2</sup> Three additional engagement events were expected to be facilitated, but were subsequently cancelled by the hosts because of a lack of demand. These would have been held in Argyll/Bute, Dumfries and Stornoway. An additional focus group in Raploch, Stirling was cancelled for the same reason.

## **Main findings**

### ***Core information***

- 1.6 There was general agreement that parents required a wide range of information, some of which could be placed in a document like the currently required School Handbook. This 'core information' needed to be supplemented by a range of information in a range of forms according to need. In other words most of the information included in current School Handbooks was needed in some form and at some time – though not necessarily in School Handbook form.
- 1.7 Parents want a source of 'core' information at the start of the school year/career which provides them with the basics – which includes a range of practical information together with insights into the school ethos and a clear 'map' of what their child's future school career (and specifically the year ahead) will look like.

### ***Understanding the 'pattern' of school***

- 1.8 The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence has reinforced the need for information. We heard some great examples of effective communication around this topic. Many parents wanted to know more about what it was and what it meant, and when and how it would make a difference to their child, their experience and their choices. This is an example of a significant change over a period of time which requires a carefully constructed communications approach involving a number of different strands using different forms of communication at different times.
- 1.9 This was complemented by a need to understand each year in advance – its key features and events and the topics to be covered and how they were going to be covered. Parents wanted this information to help them plan their year and ensure their full involvement but also to ensure that they were providing the right kind of support for their child's learning.
- 1.10 There are differences between what parents need at each school stage. There is a particularly strong difference between requirements at Early Years/Primary and at Secondary. The main difference is to do with the nature of direct contact between parents and schools (at early years and primary stage this can often be daily, providing the opportunity for quick words with teachers and other staff), the range of teachers and subjects and nature and significance of choices. At secondary the parental experience of the school becomes significantly more remote. In rural areas the use of school transport can introduce this 'remoteness' at primary stage.
- 1.11 Some parents (eg recent immigrants) found that school information made too many assumptions about what was already known and understood: they were familiar with a completely different education system and needed to understand the main features of the Scottish education system.

- 1.12 In general, parents wanted more relevant (as opposed to more) information and they wanted information at an earlier stage than then currently received it to allow them to plan ahead more effectively.

### ***The significance of the school 'ethos'***

- 1.13 There was a strong message from events and focus groups about the significance of the 'ethos' of a school in the School Handbook and other communication. This 'spirit' of the school is seen as central. It creates a common community between staff, pupils and parents. It is a reflection of the parents' articulation of what they want their school to be like. Parents want a clear description of what they are proud about in the school and they want to be involved in making the ethos real and further strengthening it.
- 1.14 This theme of the 'ethos' of a school was related to the sense that schools need the freedom to create the information their parents want and need. That is, the information produced by each school needs thoroughly to reflect the ethos and approach of each school. The content that is required of schools should be kept to a minimum.

### ***School performance information***

- 1.15 In general parents felt there was scope to produce the school performance information in more easily interpreted ways. They were interested in trends rather than snap shots; they wanted graphics rather than numbers; they wanted some description of what might lie behind the statistics; and they wanted to understand any response to the issues raised by the trends.

### ***Choosing and improving***

- 1.16 Parents wanted to understand both ethos and school performance when choosing a school. There is a case for drawing together into one place the core local information that parents need to inform their decision.
- 1.17 When they had chosen a school they wanted to understand how performance was changing so that they could contribute to improvement – either through providing more support to their child or to their school.

### ***Wider school/parent communications***

- 1.18 In all our discussions the content and format of the handbook was placed in the wider context of school/parent communications and the role of parents in this. There was less focus on the need for a comprehensive 'School Handbook' and more on the how the information requirements of parents needed to be met in a range of ways (and at a number of times) that met their specific needs.

1.19 We heard some clear messages about the perceptions of schools as ‘open’ or ‘closed’ in terms of communication with parents. These have helped us to describe the features of open and closed schools (see Figure 1, below).

<b>‘Closed’ schools</b>	<b>‘Open’ schools</b>
Gatekeepers who prevent or hinder access	Direct and easy access to who you want to talk to
Not responsive to approaches	Always responsive – within 24 hours
No tools for continuous engagement	Tools for continuous engagement eg homework diary
No open access times	Promoted times each week for open access to head teacher and teachers

**Figure 1:** The features of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ schools [Source: Rocket Science, based on parent contributions at events]

### ***Additional Support Needs***

1.20 For parents of children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) ‘everything feels different’. A key theme was that these parents in particular wanted more significant opportunities to help staff understand their child’s responses and needs better so the staff could provide more understanding and appropriate support at school.

1.21 These parents felt strongly that information relating to children with ASN should be integrated into all school communications rather than treated separately. It was felt that this was consistent with the principle of integration and provided an opportunity for other parents to understand some of the more common conditions and the support needs of children with ASN.

### ***Equality***

1.22 Discussions on issues around equality covered two main strands:

- There was a need to be clear about each school’s policy on religion: how it created opportunities for religious observance and the extent to which it reflected any particular religious affiliation.
- There was a need for core information to be available in the most commonly required translations. In particular there seemed to be scope to do this across a Local Authority area and deal with issues which all the schools had in common. This included issues like the form and structure of the Scottish education system which may be unfamiliar to recent migrants.

## ***An appropriate role for parents in school/parent communications***

- 1.23 We heard a range of views about the extent of involvement that parents wanted in the production and dissemination of information. Some wanted to review drafts of documents (like an annual School Handbook) while others would welcome (or had already successfully been involved in) a thorough co-design process. The main point was that parents wanted to be given the opportunity for involvement in a number of ways.

## **The objectives of school/parent communications**

- 1.24 We have been able to identify four objectives for school/parent communication:
- To enhance parental and child confidence in the school and minimise uncertainty and anxiety.
  - To provide parents with the information they need to support their child's learning.
  - To contribute to creating and strengthening a school community, identity and ethos.
  - To help parents make an informed decision about which school to choose and to understand how they can contribute to school improvement.
- 1.25 These objectives are consistent with the approach established by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 – in other words with the three pillars of:
- Helping parents play their 'vital role' in their child's learning and development.
  - Reinforcing 'the shared role and responsibility that schools, parents and the community have in working together to educate children'.
  - Ensuring that 'parents have the opportunity to express their views'.

## **Principles guiding communication**

- 1.26 We have identified a set of principles to guide effective communication:
- Schools need to be clear about the purpose of information. Different parents need different information at different times, and it can make sense to group this information for different purposes.
  - Parents should be given a choice of the means by which they receive information and schools should try to use the media that parents prefer (eg notes and letters, website, email, text).
  - A basic school manual should provide parents with essential and enduring information, supplemented by weblinks or updates (or both).
  - Local information about schools should be drawn together in one place.
  - Performance information should be relevant to parents' interests, and clearly presented, described and explained, focusing on trends and the response to these trends.



- Written/electronic communications should be supported by face-to-face opportunities (drop-ins/induction meetings/ parents' nights).
- For the most significant events/changes a carefully designed mix of communications should be used for both parents and pupils (eg transition between primary and secondary, introduction of Curriculum for Excellence).
- The principles of integrated ASN approaches should be applied to communication – that is, integrate information into wider information for all parents – but recognise that for parents of children with ASN *'everything feels different'*.
- Full account should be taken of equalities and inclusion issues in designing content, format and medium.
- Parents' questions should get rapid and complete responses.
- Ask parents about the role they want to have in developing and communicating information and work closely with them to respond to their offers.
- Create opportunities for parents (and pupils) to be co-authors, designers and disseminators.
- Present information in a clear and succinct way, avoiding jargon and acronyms.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Scottish Government Learning Analytical Services Unit, on behalf of the Parental Involvement Team, commissioned Rocket Science to design and facilitate engagement events and focus groups to support a public consultation on School Handbooks and Better Information for Parents. The intention was to use the results of the consultation to inform the discussion on the need to review the current legislation around the information that schools provide for parents.
- 2.2 These events and focus groups have been complemented by others consultations: an online questionnaire (which some respondents have supplemented with written responses) which has been developed and analysed in-house by Scottish Government analysts, and engagement with Head Teachers and Local Authorities. Rocket Science's commission was for the events and focus groups only and these form the subject of this report.
- 2.3 The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and Education (Scotland) Act 1981 require education authorities to provide specific information each year to parents/carers (usually known as 'the School Handbook') about the school which their child/ren attend(s). The Regulations cover a range of information such as transport facilities, school meal provision, post-school destinations, discipline and school rules, enforcement of attendance, specialist provision, examination achievement in National Qualifications and placing requests. Schools can supplement this information and choose how they present it (eg hard copy and/or electronic, different formats and styles).
- 2.4 The overall aim of the public consultation was to allow parents, and other key stakeholders (Head teachers, Local Authority officials, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and parent organisations) to share their opinions on school information for parents with the Scottish Government. The main aim of the engagement events and focus groups, was to allow parents and Parent Councils across the country to contribute their views on the Consultation in light of the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence across all schools in Scotland from August 2010.
- 2.5 The specific objective of these events and focus groups was to engage with parents to ensure a balanced and representative view on:
- The usefulness of the information currently provided by schools
  - The information that should be provided by schools in the future in light of the current and future planned changes under the Curriculum for Excellence
  - The format(s) in which this information should be presented
  - Who should decide about the type of information provided by schools.
- 2.6 In Section 2 of our report we describe what we have done in carrying out this assignment. In Section 3 we present our main findings in terms of what we heard from parents, and in Section 4 we set out the main issues we identified and our conclusions.

### 3 WHAT WE HAVE DONE

- 3.1 Between 17/01/11 and 30/03/11 Rocket Science facilitated 11 evening engagement events for parents in locations across Scotland. In addition, Rocket Science facilitated 5 focus groups in this period. One further engagement event was facilitated by Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) in Shetland.<sup>1</sup>
- 3.2 Each **engagement event** (with the exception of Shetland) was facilitated by a member of the Rocket Science team with another taking notes. LTS provided notes on the Shetland event and these have been incorporated into our analysis.
- 3.3 The events were organised by the Scottish Government in partnership with Local Authorities and hosted by the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFs) and were promoted locally by NPFs representatives and Local Authorities, using leaflets, posters and direct contact with head teachers and Parent Council chairs.
- 3.4 Each evening engagement event was held in a school and introduced by a representative of the NPFs with a short contribution on the context of the consultation from the Scottish Government.
- 3.5 Around 90 minutes was spent at each engagement event in a facilitated, open discussion of three questions:
- What information do parents need – and when do they need it?
  - In what format(s) and medium/media do they want this information?
  - What role(s) do parents want to play in creating, reviewing and disseminating information?
- In Dundee (three break out groups) and Glasgow (two break out groups) the event was broken down into smaller discussion groups because of the numbers present.
- 3.6 The objective of the **focus groups** was to gain the views of parents who may not have been strongly represented at the evening engagement events. The focus groups were organised by Rocket Science working with local partners and hosted locally by particular schools or groups. Participants in the focus groups were recruited by the school or group who volunteered to draw together participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Three additional engagement events were expected to be facilitated, but were subsequently cancelled by the hosts because of a lack of demand. These would have been held in Argyll/Bute, Dumfries and Stornoway. An additional focus group in Raploch, Stirling was cancelled for the same reason.

3.7 In these focus groups we targeted particular parent groups as set out in Figure 2 below:

Focus of parents	Location
Parents of children with additional support needs	Bright Sparks, Midlothian*
Parents of children with additional support needs	Bright Sparks, Midlothian*
Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) parents	Larkfield Centre, Govanhill, Glasgow
Parents living in an area of high deprivation	St Frances' Primary, Edinburgh
Parents living in an area of high deprivation (with significant proportion of children with ASN)	Hillend Children's Centre, Greenock

\*Two focus groups were held because of the number of parents involved.

**Figure 2:** Focus and location of focus groups

3.8 The **focus groups** were run by a Rocket Science facilitator (two facilitators in the case of Midlothian because of parent numbers) with no representation from NPFS or the Scottish Government. The discussion was structured around the same three questions as those used at the engagement events.

3.9 In setting the scene at both evening events and focus groups the facilitator emphasised that the consultation was about how schools could communicate effectively with parents. We were keen to hear parents' views on the range of ways in which their school communicated with them and the form, timing and value of these communications.

3.10 The discussion was therefore not just about the School Handbook, which is currently a document that schools are required to produce every year. Most parents had received a copy in advance of their child starting a new school. Typically, this was pre-P1 or pre-S1 entry. It was used by parents to help them select a school (ie as a prospectus, when a number were compared), and to prepare for school. Many parents used their School Handbook as a reference manual during the children's school career. Most parents seemed unaware that their school produced a revised version each year.

3.11 In total, the engagement events and focus groups were attended by: 65 parents, 45 Parent Council representatives, 10 National Parent Forum of Scotland representatives, 10 school staff (Head Teacher, Depute Head Teacher or teachers), 10 relevant representatives from local authorities, and 2 others. There were 142 unique attendees. Further information on the profile of participants is at Appendix A.

3.12 Although these numbers form a small sample of total parent numbers we heard messages that were consistent across events and focus groups. A significant proportion were Parent Council representatives who were keen to present the views of parents in the round and we encouraged participants to reflect on the views of the full range of parents in the discussions.

3.13 Information on feedback was collected in formatted sheets which has allowed us to create an 'audit trail' of number of times themes and issues were raised. In this report, we describe the full range of views but we focus on the themes and issues which were raised most frequently. This is presented in Appendix B.

## 4 WHAT WE HAVE HEARD

### Introduction

- 4.1 In this section we describe what we heard from parents using the structure of the discussions that we led. The information presented here is drawn from both events and focus groups.
- 4.2 We have structured the first three sections chronologically – in other words around the key progression points in a school career as follows:
- Choosing a school
  - Preparing for school
  - During school.

The final three sections cover the remainder of the questions we asked:

- The preferred form of information
- Making information parent-friendly and inclusive
- The involvement that parents want in the creation and dissemination of information.

### Choosing a school

- 4.3 Some parents actively go through a process of choosing a school for their child. Many schools currently use their School Handbook as a prospectus for the school – indeed regulations for the current School Handbook contents include sections that are at least in part intended to inform parents' choices.
- 4.4 There will continue to be a demand for schools to provide prospectus-type information. We found that parents want to choose schools based on more than just comparative statistics and so require a wide range of information about the school in time to make an informed decision.
- 4.5 By far the most frequently cited factor in choosing a school was the ethos of the school. This did not necessarily mean the section some schools include that is called 'ethos' but more the way in which ethos was conveyed through the content, format and production of the information – '*reading between the lines*'. Some parents added that they wanted to see the opportunities that would be available to their child, for example, a list of extracurricular opportunities available or the subjects offered to older pupils.
- 4.6 Parents looking to choose a school wanted to compare the ethos of possible schools, and parents who had made a choice wanted to feel reassured by the ethos or understand how they could contribute to it or enhance it.

- 4.7 We explored with some groups what ‘ethos’ meant. Parents suggested that ethos is...

*“What the school does differently” “What we [the school community] are proud of” (Irvine engagement event)*

*“Will my child be happy?” “How will they develop my child?” (Edinburgh engagement event)*

*“Capture a little about the school.” “What is the school all about?”  
“What does the school offer?” (Orkney engagement event)*

- 4.8 The school ethos was seen as ‘*the heart of the school*’. It describes to parents the school they want for themselves and their children, and parents described a sense of their commitment to making this ethos real. It is also about providing reassurance – that their child or children will be cared for and happy, it “gives comfort”<sup>1</sup>. It was notable that ethos was given more significance in discussion than the performance information, with the strong suggestion that it conveyed something significant about the school in the round and the way that children were developed as whole people.
- 4.9 How is ethos communicated? We heard straightforward comments about the value of a mission statement or school aims and objectives, but parents’ description of ethos went well beyond this and seemed to be more about ‘reading between the lines’. To give a complete ‘feel’ for the school some parents want to see their policies and understand the school’s approach from this. Others are looking for lists of the clubs available or the subjects that the school focuses on (eg Does it have a strong arts or music department? Is it strong in the sciences?).
- 4.10 Some parents suggested means by which the school can better communicate ethos. One idea was to have more photographs – photographs of happy children seem to reassure a small number of the parents who commented on ethos.

Examples of schools communicating their ethos in an effective way included cover drawings by children, and photographs of children involved in school activities and trips.
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<sup>1</sup> Paisley engagement event

- 4.11 Some parents wanted to see more performance indicators for the school suggesting either statistics or links to HMIE reports (preferably parent-friendly version of reports). A few parents wanted to see truancy rates as a proxy for children's enjoyment of the school. While this is currently included in the School Handbook parents wanted it to be easier to see what these statistics mean and more about trends than a snapshot. Some of these parents were also keen to see any improvement plans that might help explain the school's results or suggest how the situation might improve.
- 4.12 It was clear that *"it's not only the stats that you are looking at"* and parents brought up a range of pieces of practicalities and policies that might make all the difference in choosing a school. Many parents are interested in practical details such as the number of pupils (or pupils per class). In general it seemed that while parents might not all want a depth of information about practicalities and policies it was clear that each parent wanted to see a different cocktail of information, and they do therefore need access to the full range whether they are choosing or already committed to their choice of school.
- 4.13 Some parents were interested in whether there was an inclusion policy (some wanted ASN inclusion; others, racial/cultural inclusion); one wanted to see a behaviour (specifically discipline) policy; the parents of ASN children wanted to see practical details that have implications for their child's particular need (one wanted to know whether the playground was grass and the school was on one storey). Absence of information about any one of these policies (or poor policies) could be sufficient to remove a school from a parent's short list.
- 4.14 Because some children may have specific requirements their parents may be looking for details that a school might easily overlook. One parent of a child with ASN suggested that for them a single storey school with a hard (not grass) play area was a vital requirement. The Muslim parents who attended the BME focus group and focus group members at a Roman Catholic Primary School indicated that religious information and suitable opportunities for religious observance within school time were of great importance. One parent living in a rural area suggested that small rural primaries can have a strong gender imbalance and wanted to be aware of whether this was an issue as they wanted to have the gender mix that suited their child.



- 4.15 Once armed with more information about a school, parents wanted to be able to *make comparisons with other schools they could choose*. It is clear that parents not only need information about one school, but do want help to access information about other schools. Many did not know what their options might be locally or where the catchment areas were.<sup>1</sup>

### Preparing for school

- 4.16 It was clear from the consultation that there is a significant need for information to be distributed to parents to help them prepare for school. Parents need practical information but also reassurance. This information is needed well in advance to help parents prepare thoroughly and carry out all the practical tasks that fall to them. An example is buying a uniform which can take time and sometimes must be completed well before the start of the new school year.
- 4.17 This preparation stage can be “*daunting*” to some parents and on the whole there was a sense that they needed more practical information directly relevant to preparing to enter school: “*you need to have your hands held with your first child*”<sup>2</sup>. However, there is a risk of overload and current School Handbooks – with their comprehensive coverage of everything parents may need at every stage of school – could be ‘*too much*’. The information received at this preparatory stage therefore needs to be judged carefully to “*balance between too much information and not enough*”<sup>3</sup>.
- 4.18 Some parents (both those choosing a school and those who had made the decision) stated that they wanted to feel reassured by their School Handbook information. This ‘*reassurance*’ included helping them feel confident that the school was suitable for their child and clarifying expectations about their role as a parent either in a crisis or day to day in practical situations such as absenteeism or phoning the school about a particular issue or concern.
- 4.19 Many parents cited a range of policies and practicalities which they wanted to know about. Some wanted to know policies in a great deal of depth, but all wanted to know the practical implications. These facts should present clearly what parents should expect and what they should do. While parents often just asked for “*practicalities*” or “*school policies*” some parents would offer examples. These are shown in Figure 3 overleaf with an indication of the number of groups<sup>4</sup> that gave that particular example.

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<sup>1</sup> A explanation of catchment areas would have to help both parents at a fixed address identify their options and parents willing to move to identify the boundaries of catchment areas of other schools.

<sup>2</sup> Haddington engagement event

<sup>3</sup> Irvine engagement event

<sup>4</sup> These were groups in the engagement events – large engagement events (Dundee and Glasgow) consisted of three and two ‘groups’ respectively.

Practicalities and policies	Frequency of citation*
Uniform (including make-up etc)	9
Timings of the school day (start, end, breaks, gym/PE, structure of the teaching day)	9
Holidays and study leave	6
Anti-bullying / behaviour policy	6
What to do in cases of sickness, lateness or absence	6
Arrangements for transport to and from school or pick-up/drop-off (public transport being a particular issue in more rural areas)	5
What to do in emergencies / crises (informing school or requiring additional support from school)	5
Map of the school (includes some suggestions of a virtual tour of the school)	4
Homework – when? How much?	4
Lunch arrangements (particularly regarding payments)	4
Internet safety policy	3
Entitlements (eg EMA, clothing grants, free school meals)	3
Information about trips/outings including <i>all</i> the details needed (bigger trips signposted with more warning)	3
Use of mobile phones	2
Religious observance <sup>1</sup>	2
*Number of events out of a total of 12	

**Figure 3:** Frequency of mention by groups of desired practicalities and policies

4.20 We found that many of the parents were keen to have more practical day to day information. In line with this, several parents suggested a need for a list of FAQs: the “silly questions”<sup>2</sup> that parents really want to know the answers to but might not always ask.

<sup>1</sup> This was identified in two engagement events and a focus groups of Muslim mothers in Govanhill – they wanted to know what provision there was for religious practices and wanted all parents to know more about what happens and when for children of other faiths in school (eg when is Eid?)

<sup>2</sup> Stirling engagement event

- 4.21 Parents offered anecdotes of occasions on which they might need to know the specific details of a policy. However, the prevailing need was around their practical implications. For example, many parents suggested that uniform policy was important, but one parent articulated that they wanted to know “*realistically*”<sup>1</sup> what they should do. Rather than what uniform is needed or even what uniform is available they wanted to know how many sweatshirts it would be sensible to buy and where they could get them.
- 4.22 There are many practicalities in current School Handbooks, but from the groups’ discussions it can be inferred that even more would be better. Schools may often underestimate the importance of these details to parents and the anxiety that their absence can cause:

*“[Our school’s] current Handbook says ‘please put your child in easy-to-change clothes on gym day’, but does not say which day is gym day”*

- 4.23 One parent suggested that they wanted to know about a typical day in the school. This would be to help parents and children have a feel for the physical reality of the school and would reduce their anxiety.

Virtual tours are one way to help give a feel for the school. At Charleston Academy, (Highland) , pupils have gone further and have made an introductory video guiding new students through the school.

- 4.24 This would give parents practical insights that enhance their understanding of the school, their child’s experience of it, and convey a more ‘open’ feel to the school (one parent said knowing where to find the reception desk made a big difference to her).

### **During school**

- 4.25 The most frequently mentioned pieces of information parents wanted was contact details for the school. Most parents felt there was scope to improve what they currently received:
- Ensuring that these details were regularly updated
  - Full details of who can be contacted
  - Help to identify who they should contact about each issue
  - The best time to contact the school – and when it might be appropriate and useful for parents to contact the school.
  - Photographs of staff members to help recognition and to put faces to names.

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<sup>1</sup> Paisley engagement event

- 4.26 A few parents indicated that it takes more than just a few contact details to help and encourage parents to contact the school (by phone, face to face or by email/letter). Barriers to contact include:
- Fear - *“it’s important to make parents feel comfortable talking to teachers”*. One parent described how nervous she felt about how to address a teacher (do you say ‘Mr Smith’ or ‘Bob’?). Several groups contained parents who were uncomfortable phoning school staff in case it was troublesome to teachers and unwelcome - *“I do feel awkward phoning the school and I really shouldn’t”*.
  - Gatekeepers – two groups noted that that some schools can have parental communications hindered by ‘gatekeepers’ such as a school secretary who (either against school policy or in line with it) may make it difficult for some parents to get the response they need.
- 4.27 As a result, a number of parents suggested they wanted more information to help combat these problems. Suggestions included photographs of staff members, more detail about how school communications work in practice (most importantly how to arrange a formal or informal meeting and how and when the school will respond to a parent request) and one suggestion that teachers’ email addresses be handed out to parents.<sup>1</sup>

*“The Handbook should set the scene for how to get information afterwards”*

- 4.28 Parents want to know how and when to expect information at a later date, and they also want to be shown signposts to further information as much as possible.

*“[The Handbook should] help navigate the information from the school”*

- 4.29 A few parents suggested that their schools had policies such as: emails will be sent out every Thursday; or all letters will be stapled into a child’s exercise book. Those parents seem to appreciate such reliable systems and being informed in advance that this is the chosen method for communication with the school.

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<sup>1</sup>This was suggested by a Dundee parent. Separate to this, a head teacher in Orkney described how she exchanges emails with parents. She reported that this works really well for her as email requires a less immediate response (than face to face or telephone enquiries) and it is much more inviting for parents as they don’t feel they are bothering the teachers.

4.30 We heard about the major changes children (and their parents) experience as children progress through school. Parents report that after S3 or S4 there are significant changes compared to S1-S3; one parent pointed out the different school life of a P7 child compared to P1 when they received the School Handbook (eg more responsibility within school). There was a need expressed for information to be communicated as it becomes relevant.

*“[I want information to] gear up for the S4 change”*

4.31 There was a clear need for regular updates, for example about predictable transition points for all children, notably annually changing year group, class, teacher, syllabus and timetable. There are also changes in school life and new opportunities, achievements and undertakings which will be happening each week.

4.32 Parents wanted to keep up to date with what their children are experiencing at school. Many parents referred to the difficulty of getting basic details from their children. Much of the information that parents want (see next section) needs to be kept relevant and up to date. In general, parents wanted to understand the pattern of each year – what their child would be doing, when, and what parents could do to support their learning and development.

4.33 This information is to help parents understand what their child is doing in school and how best to support their child. It helps them know what to do when they feel their child needs help. It also helps them plan ahead and fulfil their role as a parent (eg putting important meetings in their diary, preparing for a trip/outing).

4.34 Parents also commented on their desire for regular updates about the school throughout the year. Many either appreciated the newsletters they receive or wanted newsletters.

*“...newsletters are almost like updates and amendments to the Handbook”*

4.35 Parents suggested that newsletters might contain: updates on what has happened in the school recently, upcoming events, updates of School Handbook information (eg staff changes, building work or celebrating school or pupil achievements).

4.36 Parents want these regular updates to help them feel that they are part of school life, understand what their child has been/will be doing and be aware of any changes that might affect their child or the school. Regular updates such as these newsletters can be used for reminders, signposting new information or signposting important existing information. In addition, many<sup>1</sup> parents wanted to get regular information to help them support their child's learning.

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<sup>1</sup> this emerged in seven events

### **Reference information**

- 4.37 Parents wanted a ready reference source for information which most of the time was not needed but which occasionally became very important. An example is the finer details of the school's anti-bullying policy. This may be of little interest to a parent until a parent worries that they need to take action on behalf of their child (who they may perceive to be at risk of bullying) at which point they will require as much information as can be made available.
- 4.38 The key issue with this reference information, which is not related to a specific age or stage or otherwise predictable need, is ensuring that parents know where it is and how to access it. Currently the Handbooks received pre-P1 or pre-S1 contain much information of this sort, and this means that many parents value their School Handbook as a reference book. However, as many parents identified, much of the information might change either as the school changes and evolves (eg new policies, new staff, new procedures) or the child progresses (newly relevant issues eg drugs, alcohol). Although schools produce new School Handbooks every year, most parents seemed unaware of this and used their original copy for all their reference information.
- 4.39 We found that in six of the engagement events parents suggested that communications delivered at various points in the school career, but particularly the pre-P1 and pre-S1 communications, should signpost to other information which can be accessed as and when needed. Other parents talked of schools needing to provide a 'core' of information, which all parents should receive, with additional reference material to which they could be guided when the need arose.
- 4.40 Some of the information that parents wanted was related to specific issues or events arising during the school year. This included non urgent but time specific information (eg permissions for a forthcoming trip or details of forthcoming exams) and urgent information such as school closures or reminders of actions parents must take (eg attendance at events or returning necessary documents).
- 4.41 Parents did not distinguish between the ways in which schools communicated about general school matters and about the progress of their child. In other words, they saw both these types of communication as part of a mixed and (ideally) integrated flow of information between school and parents (and back). They expected their school to be open, transparent and consistent across the full range of communication.

### **Urgent information**

- 4.42 We heard of a range of ways in which parents received urgent information: letter, radio announcement, text, tweet, update, email or phone call. This might include information such as *health alerts* (outbreaks), *school closures* (in 2010 and 2011 there were above average numbers of schools closed because of snow) or notice of their child's *unauthorised absence*.

## ***Teaching and learning in the school***

- 4.43 Many parents wanted to understand better the teaching system and a few groups wanted information about what exams and assessments take place (including internal assessments at primary) and what they consisted of. An even greater number of parents suggested that they needed to understand what grades and assessment results mean (eg how to interpret a 'level 3'?). Some parents<sup>1</sup> took this further, wanting to know '*what a 'typical' child will achieve*' at the school.
- 4.44 Many parents wanted quite detailed communication from the school about Curriculum for Excellence. The consultation took place at a time of significant change in the curriculum. Parents recognised the significance of the change and many parents (both current and prospective) wanted to fully understand what was different and the practical implications for their child, for example, in terms of:
- How parents can interpret assessment results
  - When exams / assessments will be undertaken
  - How the teaching will be undertaken.

At least a basic introduction is seen as necessary for this new approach and its implications for parents.

- 4.45 Parents also wanted further information about a child's experience at school. They want to know more about teachers – a very small number going as far as wanting to know their experience and qualifications. One parent highlighted this as important when there are specialist teachers (eg sports specialists) who are not known to parents and their role in the child's education might be unclear to parents.
- 4.46 Parents wanted to know more – and in advance – about the different kinds of teachers their child may come across: for example, guidance teachers, Depute Head Teachers, support staff, supply teachers. They did not think it was acceptable for their child to come home saying that they had a new teacher without understanding the role and status of this teacher.
- 4.47 Some parents commented that at all stages in their child's school career they were interested in class sizes and class structures and they were keen to know this in advance. Several parents suggested that they wanted to know about composite classes – what are they, how will they affect learning and are they relevant to my child?
- 4.48 Parents also indicated a need for information around the subject choices offered at a school. This included some primary schools where parents may not even expect there to be choices. Parents want to know well in advance what is on offer.

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<sup>1</sup> Three groups suggested that this was important

4.49 In four groups at the engagement events there was a consensus that it would be useful for parents to see the bigger picture: a route map of “ages and stages”. This would help them look ahead and appreciate the way in which their child’s school career would progress, when choices needed to be made and where these choices might lead. One parent suggested that at primary it was important to start thinking about secondary earlier rather than later: “*it’s quite daunting...you are not quite sure where it is going from here*”<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, a limited number of parents suggested that they were only interested in the present: “*I am unlikely to look 5 years ahead*”<sup>2</sup> (this was an unusual response).

### **Performance information**

4.50 One of the striking aspects of our discussions was the responsibility shown by parents towards their children’s’ school once they had committed to it. They wanted the same kind of performance information about their school’s performance as some had wanted when making a choice, but the reason was to help them identify what needed to improve and how they could play their part in making these improvements. This might be about providing more support to their children or more support to their school.

4.51 Parents wanted to understand the performance of their school, how this was changing and what the school was doing to respond - and they felt that the statistics currently presented in School Handbooks did not provide them with useful insights. If there is a weak area in the school there might be a robust plan to rectify this: for example, if the school is achieving low results a new head teacher might be about to remedy the situation. In other words the School Improvement Plan was at least as important as current performance: performance is “*interesting*”, improvement plans are “*important*”. One group wanted to see more detailed performance within the school to help them identify shortcomings and plan subjects for their children to take.

4.52 Many parents noted that the statistics are currently not clearly presented. They are hard to read and to interpret – “*a lot of parents don’t understand this*”<sup>3</sup>. One particularly useful comment was that graphics might improve the readability and another suggestion was to include a clear explanation to improve interpretation.

### **Supporting children’s learning and development**

4.53 In most of the engagement events it was clear that parents wanted to have access to information to help their child learn at home. These parents wanted to know *what is being taught* at school. This information would help them understand how to help their child – examples include knowing what kind of books they might borrow or buy, talking to their child about history topics or planning days out that were related to current lesson topics.

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<sup>1</sup> Paisley engagement event

<sup>2</sup> Nairn engagement event

<sup>3</sup> Aberdeen engagement event



One parent explained that a group of parents from her child's school had attended a session to learn the new way primary maths is taught – it made sense to them and they can now help their children.

- 4.54 A few parents wanted to know about specific opportunities available to their child such as extracurricular activities *or* additional learning opportunities. These opportunities might not be fully communicated by children to parent even if they are aware to them.
- 4.55 A considerable anxiety expressed by several parents was around the support available for their child<sup>1</sup>. They want to know what would happen if their child was struggling (in nurture or learning progress), what type of support was available and from whom (including external agencies). This includes information about the action the school would take to provide support, but also, more importantly, how and when they would be informed and how they would recognise the signs and appreciate when to take action. A number of parents provided anecdotes about this: one finding that they could have provided additional support (eg tutoring), but they were unaware of the need until the opportunity had passed; another that their child had been attending catch-up classes for some time.

### ***The role of parents***

- 4.56 Seven groups stressed that there should be *details of the Parent Council* available to all parents. The groups wanted contact information and a clear explanation of the role of the Councils in the school<sup>2</sup>. A few groups suggested that parents should be told how they could get involved in the school apart from through the Parent Council.
- 4.57 A number of the parents felt that the information in the School Handbook should help parents in advance and during their child's school career understand their *rights and responsibilities*. Parents were conscious that their role both in relation to the school and in relation to their child changed over time and wanted to understand the practical implications of this.

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<sup>1</sup> This was strongly communicated in four engagement events .

<sup>2</sup> It might be considered that a large number of Parent Council representatives attended and no engagement event was undertaken with no Parent Council representatives present.

## Parents of children with Additional Support Needs

- 4.58 For parents of children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) the key message coming across at the three relevant focus groups was that parents wanted significant opportunities to describe their child and associated behaviours and responses and habits to their teachers. They felt this would help teachers provide appropriate and effective support for their children. There were some notable exceptions but in general parents felt that these opportunities were not there.
- 4.59 These parents also talked about the need for different forms of communication – replacing ‘*the chat on the way home*’ that most parents can have. This could take the form of notes, picture diaries etc. In other words they expressed a need for teachers to ‘*compensate*’ for the inability of some of the children to tell parents about their day. This is not just about non-verbal children – many are not able to provide the kind of feedback that most parents feel they want and need.
- 4.60 There was strong support for a significant section on ASN in the information prepared by schools (ie it should not be put in a separate document). This would help all parents understand that the approach is inclusive. It could provide an opportunity to explain to all parents some of the main conditions (eg autism) and how these may be reflected in behaviours and needs.
- 4.61 All parents thought that commissioning parents of children with ASN to produce the ASN section was the best way to do it. They did not see how teachers could fully understand their very different world (unless they themselves had children with ASN).
- 4.62 These parents wanted to see the progress routes, the decision points and where particular decisions may lead (ie the equivalent of the big picture view that has come across from many of the groups).
- 4.63 There are some important practical issues for these parents – eg how is the playground supervised, what help will their child get in the café (eg choosing food), and what the detailed ‘routine’ of the day looks like.
- 4.64 This need for a greater (or different) level of detail is reflected in the different information that parents of children with ASN think is significant in choosing a school, for example: Is it all on one floor? Does it have a hard surfaced playground that their child will be able to navigate?

4.65 Parents wanted a range of communications around support, its allocation and review. And they wanted to be informed about issues like specialist observation (*'if we knew when it was we would know whether it took place on a good day or an average day or a bad day and could challenge the outcome'*). They all felt that there should be much greater clarity about the opportunity they had to contribute their view and question assessments and how and when to do this (some parents said they had heard about decisions and had not had any opportunities to discuss these).

### **Preferred form of information**

4.66 Parents gave many examples about how they currently receive information and how they would like to receive information. In these discussions the following methods of communication between schools and parents were mentioned:

- Hardcopy/letter by post
- Hardcopy/letter by pupil-post
- Available as hardcopy/letter from the school
- Available as electronic copy (CD/DVD) from the school
- Website
- Email
- Text message
- Broadcast on social media (eg Facebook, Twitter)
- Broadcast on local media (eg radio, newspapers)
- Face to face meetings with group of parents
- Face to face 1-2-1 meeting
- Telephone calls
- Note in child's homework diary (or similar)
- Leaflet in an accessible place (eg reception, playground noticeboard)
- Notice on a notice board in an accessible place (eg reception, playground).

4.67 In the discussions parents commented on positive and negative features of some of these methods of communication. They also suggested some particular occasions where specific communication methods should be used or should be avoided. There was also the opportunity to talk about how these methods interact with each other and thus what a good communication strategy would look like.

### **Appropriate formats**

4.68 All the discussion involved using multiple media to communicate with parents: all schools already send letters and use face-to-face meetings (either group or one-to-one), but there are schools using a whole range of communications. The choice of appropriate media depends on the type of information being conveyed and the key is that parents strongly wanted more choice in selecting the media they used to access information.

*"You have to give people a choice" (Nairn engagement event)*

- 4.69 Different parents have different needs and preferences and reaching all parents requires the use of many (or all) channels. Schools need to provide the same information in multiple formats/media so that parents could:
- Have access to multiple media when the information is published (choosing the one that suits them best).
  - Express a preference in advance to receive information by email and text.
- 4.70 Some parents went as far as to say that all information should be available in all possible media. One parent summarised the counter argument: the aim should be to choose the best channel, not broadcast on all channels. In general, parents recognise a balance where having more than one available option is important and these options should be selected to provide the greatest access to the parent population.

### ***Hard copies of the School Handbook***

- 4.71 We found that at least some parents at most events wanted to get a hardcopy School Handbook in advance of their child joining a school. Even among those parents suggesting that they would rather receive information principally in other media, many highlighted that there are parents who will only want information in hardcopy and will want to receive at least some information in a “welcome pack”<sup>1</sup> explaining the basics of the school.
- 4.72 The disadvantages of a hardcopy School Handbook were that it can be “*daunting*” for some and some of the information can rapidly become outdated. There was an emphasis on using communications throughout the school career to make sure the School Handbook is a source that “*grows with your child*”<sup>2</sup> adding new information and updating details that frequently change as the child gets older or the school evolves (eg staffing, policies, practicalities).
- 4.73 Parents wanted to see more signposting to other information sources in the information they receive. Signposting and providing more information when it is relevant means that a ‘School Handbook’ can focus on core information.
- 4.74 One suggestion, in keeping with the current School Handbook, was to make the School Handbook more widely available to parents each year so they would have the latest version – or to highlight its availability on the school’s website. Others wanted to see a separate School Handbook for the parents of older children (eg an S4 plus School Handbook). A further suggestion was that the School Handbook could be presented as a ring binder with new and revised sheets being issued as necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Haddington engagement event

<sup>2</sup> Paisley engagement event

### ***Electronic copies of the School Handbook***

- 4.75 We found that the School Handbook is sometimes available in electronic copy either on the school website or on a CD/DVD.
- 4.76 One parent suggested that an electronic copy on CD was right for them, but this was said in the context of parents needing a choice so that parents, even before going to a school can choose how they get information about the school.
- 4.77 Electronic versions can be provided on the internet (eg school's website). Such a resource can be accessed by parents choosing a school and preparing for school as well as those with children currently at the school. It was noted that a web version is more easily updated so parents can access an up to date version after P1/S1 starts.

### ***Communications by post/pupil-post***

- 4.78 Just as parents generally said that the School Handbook must be available in hardcopy, some parents always wanted access to letters in paper format: "I love my paper copies"<sup>1</sup>. They were seen as more immediate, readily accessible, and easy to stick up in the home for easy reference.
- 4.79 Letters are currently an important way of communicating with parents. A few of the parents asking for choice about how they receive communications wanted to opt-out of receiving letters (in favour of emails). However, overall, it seems there will continue to be at least some parents wanting paper communications and some parents would always choose this as their preferred medium.
- 4.80 The unreliability of pupil-post was highlighted on a few occasions. A system that helps parents know when there will be a letter coming home would be appreciated by many. Examples of suggested systems were: giving children an exercise book which is only for letters home and into which staff staple all letters sent home; sending notifications (by text, email, social media, notice board etc) telling parents to expect a letter; and a system where it is known which day letters will be received (eg there will always be at least one letter on a Thursday)<sup>2</sup>.
- 4.81 Some schools post a selection of letters to parents. While there is a cost some schools use it as a means to ensure that particularly important information reaches parents (one school used this to stress the significance of an evening meeting – the invitation felt special). A Parent Council representative at Hamilton explained that their school chose to send their regular newsletter to parents by post to ensure it was received.

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<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh engagement event

<sup>2</sup> This example was actually for emails and is the system used at Charleston Academy, Highland, but is applicable to letters.

### **Communications using a school website**

- 4.82 Parents commented on the potential of school websites to communicate a range of information, but a number of parents criticised their school's website saying there needed to be more uniformity between school websites to increase the value of the information on it. They were looking for a minimum standard to require their school to provide accessible information on the website.
- 4.83 While few parents talked in detail about what might be on a website, many who wanted information signposting in letters, the School Handbook, newsletters etc expected these signposts to be to the school website. This would make the school website the source of most or all reference material, such as full details about policies and practicalities – as one parent in East Lothian put it, information that might “*clog up*” a hardcopy version of the School Handbook.
- 4.84 Parents described the benefits of websites in terms of the ability for them to be regularly updated and to allow people to seek as much or as little information as they need. However, as many parents were keen to point out, it is not a resource available to everyone in their homes.

### **Communications by emails**

- 4.85 It was clear that at least some parents<sup>1</sup> would like to receive information by email.

*“Emails are great, they really suit me” (Edinburgh engagement event)*

- 4.86 Many of these parents wanted emails rather than letters (avoiding issues such as the unreliability of pupil-post, the cost of post and wasting paper).
- 4.87 However, not all parents wanted to receive emails and some of those who wanted emails also wanted some important information in hardcopy. Despite this, and despite the potential difficulty of assembling and maintaining an email database, there were some very promising examples.

95% of parents at Pencaitland Primary, East Lothian, have signed up to receive emails (they have around 200 pupils). Another school, in Aberdeen, reported 100% take up.
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- 4.88 Some of the suggestions for which email might be used included:
- Urgent information (accepting that it might not be read immediately)
  - Reminders and notifications
  - Newsletters
  - Signposting new/existing information.

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<sup>1</sup> At least five groups of parents contained parents who were positive about receiving emails.

### **Communications by text messaging**

4.89 Many parents<sup>1</sup> reported that they already receive texts for absenteeism and school closures. They almost all appreciated these because they were immediate. Those who did not currently receive texts generally wanted to start getting them. Most groups had some parents who specifically said they were in favour of text message communications:

*“We think this is a brilliant idea” (Haddington engagement event)*

4.90 The issues which schools use text messages about (absenteeism and school closures) appear to be appropriate – it is for urgent information. Tomnacross Primary School in Highland uses text messages to notify parents of school closures and road closures as well as pupil absence: *“that works really well”*.

4.91 Parents also identified the opportunity to use this for notifications (eg ‘There is an important letter coming home tonight’) or reminders (eg ‘It is parents’ evening tomorrow’). One even suggested sending texts to advise of updates to information in the School Handbook.

4.92 The value of text reminders about urgent matters is reduced by delays in delivery (ie it is not 100% reliable, though this depends on the process used). A very small number of parents complained about this.

### **Communications by social media and local media**

4.93 Social media (in our discussions Facebook and Twitter were raised) were recognised by at least some members of the groups as a means of effective communication. Some suggested that there are parents for whom this would be the best means of communication and the one they would be most likely to use.

4.94 Social media in this instance would provide a means for the school to broadcast messages to parents. Suggestions included updates about the school and signposts to more information.

4.95 Twitter in particular is already used in some instances and a number of parents commented that they relied on Twitter for school closure notifications during the recent snow – this seems to have normally been provided by the Local Authority.

<p>The Parent Council at a school in East Lothian has been trying to reach new and younger parents who have not previously engaged well with the school using their Facebook page – they report some progress but describe it as a slow and difficult task.</p>
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<sup>1</sup> At least six groups of parents contained parents who were positive about receiving texts.

4.96 The local media are also sometimes involved in broadcasting urgent information about schools such as closures. In Orkney the media (radio and local newspaper) is used to give some reminders and notifications to parents, particularly about events in the school.

### **Face to face communications**

4.97 Face to face communication with the school can be very important for parents. There are two main formats:

- One to one discussions (either formal or informal) which normally address a specific need or relate to a specific child's progress/support.
- Groups of parents being given information by the school.

4.98 All parents attending seemed to appreciate parents' evenings. Those voicing concern wanted more, not less, time for these one to one opportunities. Parents who felt that their school was 'open' also appreciated the opportunity to explore and resolve problems/concerns through one to one meetings. Some parents reported that they were able to informally meet primary school head teachers at the beginning of the school day and arrange a meeting. Others reported that there were specific times when they knew the head teacher was available for meetings each week. One Dundee school invites parents to help with and attend one assembly each month to get parents involved and familiar with school life.

4.99 Some parents hoped to have more opportunities to receive information face to face and on a regular basis (eg annually). Some had experienced some support (which they welcomed) when preparing for the school

Kemnay Academy, Aberdeenshire, provides a thorough approach to transition support for parents and pupils. A week long introduction to the school is made available for children; during this week there is also a parents' evening to include parents in the induction process. As a result there is greater familiarity with the school.

4.100 One parent in the Govanhill (Glasgow) focus group explained that they had been invited into the school for an explanation of what the children had been learning. They were given the opportunity to sit in the child's seat in the classroom, made familiar with the school surroundings and then talked through the ways they could help support their child's learning. All the parents in the group wanted this experience and all wanted this to be an annual occurrence.



## **Making information parent-friendly and inclusive**

- 4.101 Many parents were keen to highlight that information for parents needs to be accessible.
- 4.102 Not all parents have access to all forms of communications. In particular, gaps in internet availability were frequently mentioned even though few attendees were affected directly by this problem. There are also parents who are disadvantaged by some forms of communication: this may be because it is not their preferred form of communication or it is not a suitable form of communication (eg problems reading English). In most of the engagement events there was a consensus that information must be available in at least hard copy. This applied to the whole range of information that parents need.
- 4.103 A small number of parents tackled the issue of English as a second language and low literacy. It was suggested that at least the basics of school communications need to be available in other forms (ie translated, in audio or both translated and in audio<sup>1</sup>).
- 4.104 Several groups of parents concluded that all the information needs to be easy to read and/or jargon free. Some suggested that making information look appealing (eg including photographs, graphics and children's drawings) would entice readers. One primary school currently includes children's activities in the School Handbook along with information encouraging parents to read through the information with their children. One or two parents suggested putting the School Handbook in "*kidspeak*"<sup>2</sup> which would make the School Handbook more inclusive.

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<sup>1</sup> BME parents noted that they know of some mothers who do not speak English, but nor can they read in their own language.

<sup>2</sup> Irvine engagement event

## What involvement do parents want in the creation and dissemination of information?

4.105 A number of suggestions emerged about how parents might get involved.

Suggested degree of parental input (greatest at the top)	Support from parents for this suggestion
Parents/Parent Councils should lead in the generation of content, and have the ability to control the format and style of major communications (eg pre-P1 or pre-S1 information)	A small number of parents were keen to take on as much of the task of producing the School Handbook as they could. There were examples of parents being commissioned to produce School Handbook information by their head teacher.
Parents/Parent Councils should have a role in reviewing major communications (eg pre-P1 or pre-S1 information) for content, style and format so the school can make changes	This was the most frequently given suggestion – parents review a draft document and have some editorial freedom including insertion of new content were helpful.
Parents/Parent Councils should have a role in generating information about their experiences that might help new parents at the school	A few parents wanted to see S2 parents helping new S1 parents by offering insights.
Parents/Parent Councils should have a role in providing feedback on the information they receive so the school can improve it	This was suggested a number of times, including ideas to have a tear-off feedback page at the back of a hardcopy School Handbook
Parents/Parent Councils should not be involved beyond Parent Councils' current role in producing some minor communications to parents	Only once was this the emerging consensus from an engagement event

**Table 4:** Range of parental input and related support from parents

4.106 Almost all parents at the engagement events and focus groups felt there should be more opportunity for input from parents, with most wanting a role supporting school staff in producing material for parents either through feedback or reviewing drafts. Parents felt they would be able to make the information more effective and more parent-friendly by influencing the content, the format and how the information is presented and disseminated.

4.107 There was a strong feeling that it should be the Parent Councils that should lead this process of involvement, although some would rather it was open to all parents and many hoped that Parent Councils would be seeking wider parental views. We heard one example of a Parent Council which did not see this as its role and the head teacher had therefore separately commissioned a group of other parents to review the current School Handbook. These parents reviewed the content, removing unnecessary or confusing words and restructuring the document to move the more important information to the front.

4.108 The content that the parents wanted to generate themselves was normally information about the Parent Council itself, the experiences of parents or specific information relating to a small number of parents (such as ASN issues).

### **What contribution might pupils make?**

4.109 Parents identified two objectives for pupil involvement in information for parents: improving the accessibility of the information and providing better insights for parents and their children. At four engagement events it was suggested that pupils should review a School Handbook before publication. At three of the events the inclusion of pupil's insights was recommended. This was envisaged to be undertaken by a pupil council or just a group of pupils (eg S2 or P7 pupils). They could help translate the information into "*kidspeak*", as one parent in Irvine noted.

## **5 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **Is a School Handbook needed?**

- 5.1 There was general agreement that parents required a wide range of information, some of which could be placed in a document like the currently required School Handbook. This 'core information' needed to be supplemented by a range of information in a range of forms according to need. In other words most of the information included in current School Handbooks was needed in some form and at some time – though not necessarily in School Handbook form.
- 5.2 Parents want a source of 'core' information at the start of the school year/career which provides them with the basics – which includes a range of practical information together with the school ethos and a clear 'map' of what their child's future school career – and specifically the year ahead – will look like.
- 5.3 Parents wanted more practical information before the start of each year and each term and schools often underestimated the value and significance of this to parents. On the whole, parents wanted information as early as possible to give them more time to plan and prepare.
- 5.4 Parents who were choosing a school wanted local information to be more accessible and in one place.

### **What types of information is needed – when?**

- 5.5 The timing of information was important to parents – there was some information which was important to reduce uncertainty and anxiety at key transitions (eg start of school or start of school year), but other information currently included in School Handbooks was more useful at other times.
- 5.6 At the largest (school career) scale, there was a common request from parents for help in understanding the overall 'map' of their child's school career – what the usual journey through school would look like, what the key stages were, when choices needed to be made and what the consequences of these might be.
- 5.7 This requirement was being reinforced by the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence. We heard some great examples of effective communication around this topic, but many parents wanted to know more about what it was and what it meant, and when and how it would make a difference to their child, their experience and their choices. This is an example of a significant on-going change which required a carefully constructed communications strategy involving a number of different strands using different forms of communication at different times.

- 5.8 This was complemented by a need to understand each year in advance – its key features and events and the topics to be covered and how they were going to be covered. Parents wanted this information to help them plan their year and ensure their full involvement but also to ensure that they were providing the right kind of support for their child’s learning.
- 5.9 There are differences between what parents need at each school stage. There is a particularly strong difference between requirements at Early Years/Primary and at Secondary. The main difference is to do with the nature of direct contact between parents and schools (at early years and primary stage this can often be daily, providing the opportunity for quick words with teachers and other staff), the range of teachers and subjects and nature and significance of choices. At secondary the parental experience of the school becomes significantly more remote. In rural areas the use of school transport can introduce this ‘remoteness’ at primary stage.
- 5.10 There was a strong message from events and focus groups about the significance of ‘ethos’ in School Handbooks and other communications – this ‘spirit’ of the school is seen as central. It creates a common community between staff, pupils and parents. It is a reflection of the parents’ articulation of what they want their school to be like. Parents want a clear description of what they are proud about in the school and they want to be involved in making the ethos real and further strengthening it.
- 5.11 This theme of the ‘ethos’ of a school was connected to the sense that schools need the freedom to create the information their parents want and need – that is, the information produced by each school needs to thoroughly reflect the ethos and approach of each school. Required content should be kept to a minimum.

### **Wider school/parent communications**

- 5.12 In all our discussions the content and format of the School Handbook was placed in the wider context of school/parent communications and the role of parents in this. There was less focus on the need for a comprehensive ‘School Handbook’ and more on the way in which the information requirements of parents needed to be met in a range of ways (and at a number of times) that met their specific needs.

5.13 We heard some clear messages about the perceptions of schools as ‘open’ or ‘closed’ in terms of communication with parents and these have helped us to describe the features of open and closed schools (see Figure 5 below).

‘Closed’ schools	‘Open’ schools
Gatekeepers who prevent or hinder access	Direct and easy access to who you want to talk to
Not responsive to approaches	Always responsive – within 24 hours
No tools for continuous engagement	Tools for continuous engagement eg homework diary
No open access times	Promoted times each week for open access to head teacher and teachers

**Table 5:** Features of ‘closed’ and ‘open’ schools

### School performance information

5.14 In general parents felt there was scope to produce the school performance information in more easily interpreted ways. They were interested in trends rather than snap shots; they wanted graphics rather than numbers; they wanted some description of what might lie behind the statistics; and when comparing local schools they wanted the information collected in one place.

5.15 Parents wanted clearer and more useful performance information to help them choose between schools – but more important to most parents was performance information when their child was at school, so they could understand the way in which performance was changing, what the school was doing to respond, and the way in which they could support improvement, either by providing more support to their children or more support to their school.

### Additional Support Needs

5.16 For parents with children with Additional Support Needs ‘everything feels different’. A key theme was that in addition to wanting opportunities to find out how they could support their child’s learning and development effectively – these parents in particular wanted more significant opportunities to help staff understand their child’s responses and needs better so the staff could provide more understanding and appropriate support at school.

5.17 These parents felt strongly that information relating to children with ASN should be integrated into all school communications rather than treated separately. It was felt that this was consistent with the principle of integration and provided an opportunity to understand some of the more common conditions and the support needs of children with ASN.

## **Equality**

5.18 Discussions on issues around equality covered two strands:

- There was a need to be clear about each school's policy on religion: how it created opportunities for religious observance and the extent to which it reflected any particular religious affiliation.
- There was a need for core information to be available in the most commonly required translations. In particular there seemed to be scope to do this across a Local Authority area and deal with issues which all the schools had in common. This included basic issues like the form and structure of the Scottish education system which may be unfamiliar to recent migrants.

### **An appropriate role for parents in school/parent communications**

5.19 We heard a range of views about the extent of involvement that parents wanted in the production and dissemination of information. Some wanted to review drafts of key information (like an annual School Handbook) while others would welcome (or had already successfully been involved in) a thorough co-design process. Again, the key conclusion was that parents wanted to be given the opportunity for involvement in a number of ways.

### **The objectives of school/parent communications**

5.20 We have been able to identify four objectives for school/parent communication:

- To enhance parental and child confidence in the school and minimise uncertainty and anxiety:

On the whole current School Handbooks did not provide enough detailed practical information to allay anxieties and uncertainties, particularly at key transition points.

There is a need to tackle fears and uncertainty around contacting schools (eg telephoning the school).

There is a need to provide time and resource to provide face to face 1-2-1 and group communications with parents who want it.

There is a need to be inclusive and provide and promote opportunities for communication with parents that might otherwise be overlooked.

Improving communications can be in part achieved through choice of format.

On the whole parents wanted key information earlier than they currently received it.

- To provide parents with the information they need to support their child's learning

What does the overall 'map' of progress look like?

What is being covered when and how – and what expectation is there of appropriate support by parents?

- To contribute to creating and strengthening a school community, identity and ethos.

What is important to the school and its staff?

How does the school seek to help each child develop its potential in the round?

What are the ways in which parents will be given an opportunity to contribute to and support the school?

What are the particular strengths of the school?

- To help parents make an informed decision about which school to choose and to understand how they can contribute to school improvement:

A rounded set of relevant information (HMIE and performance statistics)

Clear presentation: charts not figures, trends not snapshots, annotations and explanations, and a clear context for the information

How the school was responding to performance issues

An opportunity to gain an insight into the school 'ethos'

Opportunity to have access to all information they may need to make their personal decision (including specific practicalities relevant to their child)

Clearer information on what choices are available

5.21 These objectives are consistent with the approach established by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 – in other words with the three pillars of:

- Helping parents play their 'vital role' in their child's learning and development
- Reinforcing 'the shared role and responsibility that schools, parents and the community have in working together to educate children'.
- Ensuring that 'parents have the opportunity to express their views'



## Principles guiding communication

5.22 We have identified a set of principles to guide effective communication:

- Schools need to be clear about the purpose of information – different parents need different information at different times for different purposes, and it can make sense to group this information for different purposes.
- Parents should be given a choice of the means by which they receive information and schools should try to use the media that parents prefer (eg notes and letters, website, email, text)
- A basic school manual should provide parents with essential and enduring information, supplemented by weblinks or updates (or both)
- Comparative information about schools should be drawn together in one place
- Performance information should be relevant to parents' interests, and clearly presented and described, focusing on trends and the response to these trends.
- Written/electronic communications should be supported by face-to-face opportunities (drop-ins/induction meetings/ parents' nights).
- For the most significant events/changes a carefully designed mix of communications should be used for both parents and pupils (eg transition between primary and secondary, introduction of Curriculum for Excellence)
- The principles of integrated ASN approaches should be applied to communication – that is, integrate information into wider information for all parents – but recognise that for parents of children with ASN 'almost everything is different'
- Full account should be taken of equalities and inclusion issues in designing content, format and medium.
- Parents' questions should get rapid and complete responses
- Ask parents what role they want to have in developing and communicating information and working closely with them to respond to these offers.
- Create opportunities for parents (and pupils) to be co-authors, designers and disseminators.

## APPENDIX A – ATTENDANCE AT EVENTS

The total number of attendees at the engagement events and focus groups were: 66 parents, 45 Parent Council representatives, 14 National Parent Forum of Scotland representatives, 10 school staff (HT, DHT or teachers), 10 relevant representatives from local authorities, and 2 others. Total of 147 attendees.

Some individuals attended on more than one occasion. The total number of unique individuals attending the engagement events and/or focus groups were: 65 parents, 45 Parent Council representatives, 10 National Parent Forum of Scotland representatives, 10 school staff (HT, DHT or teachers), 10 relevant representatives from local authorities, and 2 others. Total of 142 unique attendees.

	School based	LA	Parents	NPFS	Parent Council	Rocket Science, Scottish Government and LTS
<b>Aberdeen (E)</b>	0	1	4	0	1	3
<b>Dundee (E)</b>	4	0	9	0	13	3
<b>Edinburgh (E)</b>	0	0	5	1	0	5
<b>Edinburgh (F)</b>	0	0	4	0	0	1
<b>Glasgow (E)</b>	0	0	8	2	1	3
<b>Govanhill (F)</b>	0	0	4	0	1	1
<b>Haddington (E)</b>	0	2	6	2	4	3
<b>Hamilton (E)</b>	0	1	2	1	7	4
<b>Hillend (F)</b>	2	0	4	0	0	1
<b>Irvine (E)</b>	0	2	2	2	1	3
<b>Midlothian grp1(F)</b>	0	0	6	0	0	1
<b>Midlothian grp2 (F)</b>	0	0	4	1	0	1
<b>Nairn (E)</b>	0	0	5	1	3	3
<b>Orkney (E)</b>	4	1	1	1	1	3
<b>Paisley (E)</b>	0	0	1	1	7	4
<b>Shetland (E)</b>	0	1	0	1	5	1
<b>Stirling (E)</b>	0	2	1	1	1	6*

\*Initial event involved 4 Rocket Science staff  
(E) Evening Event; (F) Focus Group

## APPENDIX B – AUDIT TRAIL

We have created an ‘audit trail’ to describe the frequency of mentions of particular specific comments made under each topic. To do this we have grouped comments that are similar in meaning but not necessarily in exact wording.

In the following pages we describe the frequency of comments under each of the headings we used to record information during the discussion. This recording structure was used for engagement events only – the facilitator of focus groups took their own notes as they could.

Under each heading we present the comments in three columns:

**First column:** comments raised most frequently or those raised frequently and with emphasis.

**Second column:** Comments raised less frequently or emphasised by a group

**Third column:** Comments which were not raised frequently but were emphasised by at least one group

Information wanted when choosing a school					
7	Ethos (see next section for ‘what ethos is’)	3	Simplified HMIE / Standards and Quality reports	2	What subjects are offered?
		2	HMIE reports	1	Gender mix (important in rural areas)
		2	Performance of school (exam results) (although “it’s not only the stats you are looking at”)	1	Staff turnover - “can be telling”
		3	What extracurricular activities are offered?	1	Existing information is important
		1	Ongoing improvements (response to inspections/stats)	1	What other schools are available nearby?
		2	Class sizes / structures	1	Should advertise opportunities to visit the school before choosing
		2	Catchment area (full details) “especially...where there are so many schools it can be hard to know which you can choose”	1	Guidance on what to look for in a school
			Practicalities 1 No further details	1	Stats - School roll

Information wanted when choosing a school	
	1 Transport
1	Policies
	1 Stats - truancy
	1 Approach to 4 areas of CfE (at primary)

Information wanted before/during schooling		
7	Who and what are the Parent Council?	3
4	Practicalities: 4 map/virtual tour of school 2 drop-off / pick-up 6 holidays (and study leave) 9 uniform (what is "realistically" required) 6 timings of school day 4 lunch arrangements 3 transport arrangements	Indication/expectations of 'typical' achievements – is my child normal?
4	Policies 6 Anti-bullying / behaviour 3 Internet safety 2 Mobile phones 4 homework (How much? When? etc) 3 What to do in emergencies/crises 6 Lateness/sickness/absence 1 complaints 1 child protection	Glossary of terms used in the school (and School Handbook)
3	Opportunities for parents to engage (including and beyond Parent Council and PTA)	2
3	Additional Support Needs 3 no more detail 1 impact in classroom	1
4	FAQs / "Silly questions"	3
4	Communications policy – when will important information be received?	A formal agreement/declaration with parents that lays out parental engagement in the school
4	Communications policy – how will school communicate with parents? "Handbook should set the scene for how to get information afterwards"	Entitlements (eg EMA, clothing grants, FSM)

Information wanted before/during schooling					
					Budgeting info around CfE
6	Signposting to other information sources "Help to navigate the information from the school"	2	Extracurricular opportunities	1	
5	CfE	4	A "map", includes references to "looking ahead" or "seeing the bigger picture" or seeing "ages and stages" Photos with contacts/teachers list	2	What to do in emergencies/crises
9	Contacts – Who to contact? About what? When?	3	Class sizes/composition	2	Extracurricular achievements
7	Outline of parents rights/responsibilities?	2	Information about teachers (not just contact details) "in secondary school you really don't know who the teachers are"	1	Typical day
6	Ethos "Gives comfort" "What school does differently" "What we are proud of" Involvement in community What the school offers After school activities "Will my child be happy" "How will they develop my child" "What is the School all about" "What does that school offer" "Capture a little about the school"	2		1	Exam info
7	Timing of events that require parental involvement (eg parents' nights, children's performances)	4	Specific details about coming exams	1	Implications of the parental involvement act
7	Learning at home –What is being taught to children	3	Trips	1	Details of specialist teachers (eg sports)
6	Learning at home – how can parents help?	4	Subject options and choices (includes primary school)	1	Training of teachers
6	Updates to School Handbook information	4	Understanding assessments/gradings	2	Induction arrangements
2	School Handbook is about avoiding fears/uncertainty	3	Which internal/external assessments take place and when?	1	School / teacher email addresses
		4	Support policy – what happens if child is	1	"Gear up for S4 change"

Information wanted before/during schooling		Struggling? How would parents know?		
			2	Nurturing information – what is offered by whom?
			1	Performance results for reassurance
			2	How to receive personalised information about child's progress
			2	Additional learning opportunities available
			1	Learner journey after leaving school
			1	Catchment area
			1	Access to Glow
			1	Mainstream parents need to know the positives and the logistics of sharing a class with ASN children.
			1	Parents need to understand their changing role
			1	Need for availability in other languages
			1	P7-S1 children need handbook too
			1	CfE makes transitions "woolly"
			1	S4 upwards is a "totally different ball game"
			1	Desire to pare back / avoid duplication
			1	Three way relationship (parents-schools-children) needs to be considered
			1	There is a lack of secondary understanding when in primary. "It's quite daunting...you are not quite sure where it is going from here"
			1	School Handbook information is for children also (they have different questions to parents)
			1	Currently School Handbooks are quickly out of date
			1	There is a core of information with many other complementary sources
			1	Need for handbook pre-nursery
			1	PreP1/S1 School Handbook needs to be given out early enough to be useful (6 months prior)
			1	School Handbook needs more regular publication – not just P1 and S1

Information wanted before/during schooling	
1	"You need your hand held with your first child"
1	There is a change into upper Primary (P4-7)
1	Overall there is currently "far too much in it"
1	There is a different set of requirements for ASN – a whole separate handbook is necessary
1	"The more things they can put in advance the better"
1	"I am unlikely to look 5 years ahead"
1	With signposting there needs to be an explanation of how to access these materials (eg online at library)
1	Which of the policies can be changed at a school level? (When can parents seek change to policies?)

How to tackle statistics and which stats are wanted before/during schooling					
5	Stats are hard to interpret appropriately "a lot of parents don't understand this", "It's really hard as a parent to understand the stats"	1	Simple format - graphics	2	How the school is performing
1	Performance measures are "interesting"; improvement plans are "important".	2	Class sizes and structures	2	Current stats are not valuable/necessary
		1	Need explanation of stats – what do they mean, why are they at that value?	1	Stats can be useful for parents moving into an area
				1	There are stats elsewhere as a result of the parent charter
				1	Inclusion of stats can promote change/improvement
				2	School roll
				1	"I think stats are important"
				1	Would not expect league tables at Primary

**How to tackle statistics and which stats are wanted before/during schooling**

				2	Signpost to performance stats elsewhere
				1	Signpost to HMIE reports

**Links to making schools feel open**

1	Feeling of accessibility is important	2	Open door policy should be included in School Handbook info "Can I knock on the glass and talk to the teacher at 9.15?"	1	Primary schools are more closed than nurseries
		2	"Gatekeepers" make a school more closed	2	Parents' questions should be directed to Parent Council
		3	Secondary schools are more closed than primary	1	"If you are a working parent you sometime miss the whole playground thing – the chance to network is important"
		1	Contact details "Important to make parents comfortable to talk to them"		
		1	"I do feel awkward phoning the school and I really shouldn't"		

**Email**

5	At least some parents at meeting saw opportunity in email "Emails are great, it really suits me"		Should be used for: 1 reminders (eg meetings/ performances/ trips) 1 signpost new/existing information 1 absence/ truancy 1 newsletters	1	Difficulty might be encouraging take-up
3	Not all parents are online	1	Difficulty of email might be maintaining database	1	Parents wanted teachers email addresses



				1	Eco friendly
				1	Opportunity to access information when parents want it
				1	Not suitable for prospectus

**Hard copy**

6	A hard copy School Handbook must be available (at least to those that want one in this form)	2	Some parents at meeting specifically wanted a hardcopy	1	Should be available to all parents not just S1 or P1
2	Hard copy important for reference/reassurance	2	Immediately out of date	1	Hard copy School Handbook can be "daunting"
1	Should be used to signpost to other sources of information	1	Desirable as a "welcome to the school pack"	1	Hard copy suggests information to be kept

2	<p>Don't use it to provide volatile information "it is really frustrating if there is something that is wrong – out of date info is worse than no info"</p>		1	Electronic copies are more easily updated
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**Face to face**

1	Face to face is important for relationship building		Should be used for: (parent evenings) 1 induction meetings 1 explaining CfE 1 primary teaching methods 1 choosing subjects 1 introducing teachers	1	Face to face meetings (eg parents' nights) offer Parent Council opportunities to engage more parents
		2	Encouraging attendance can be difficult		Attendance can be encouraged by: 1 including a social occasion 2 getting children involved (eg performance) 1 parent evenings
				1	Better communication will reduce need for face to face communications
				1	Need to be able to plan ahead when there will be face to face opportunities

**Websites**

3	Not all parents are online		Should be used for: 1 hosting electronic copy of School Handbook 1 pictures of school (virtual tour) 1 PTA/PC details 1 Parent evenings 1 learning at home 1 policies	1	"Everything should be available electronically"
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1	Use website to store resources that would "clog up" hardcopy School Handbook.	1	School websites can be poorly maintained/updated	1	Not all parents will use website
1	Levels of a website mean that you can have as much or as little info as wanted	1	Can be continuously improved and updated	2	Need more uniformity (between schools) on what should be provided on website
				1	Needs to be maintained regularly to be useful
				1	Danger of website information being used in media

**Letters (pupil post and posted)**

4	Pupil post is unreliable "it is useful to know when [a letter] is coming out – it is never in the school bag"	1	Post can be used to distribute essential information	1	Should be used for: 1 update of major changes 1 policy updates
		1	Post can be expensive	1	"I love getting my paper copies!"

### Newsletters

	1	Should be used for: 1 update on what has/will happen in school 1 updates of volatile information 1 signpost to new/existing information elsewhere 1 extra curricular opportunities 1 reminders 1 issues legally requiring response	1	"newsletters are almost like updates and amendments to [a hardcopy] School Handbook"
			1	One every 2 months is about the right frequency
			1	Pupils could be involved in newsletter

### Texts

		Should be used for: 1 signpost to new updates 4 reminder/prompt (eg meetings/ deadline) 2 absences/ truancy 2 notice of letter via pupil post 2 school closures Especially good for hard to reach parents		Difficulty might be up to date contact information
1			1	Difficulty might be that sometime the system doesn't work (is slow)

8	At least some parents at meeting saw opportunity in texts "We think this is a brilliant idea"				
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**Social Media**

6	At least some parents at meeting saw opportunity in social media		Should be used for: 1 updates about school 2 signpost to new/existing information elsewhere 1 pupil specific information	1	On Facebook "be prepared for all sorts of [wall] comments"
2	Especially good for hard to reach parents	1	Especially good for parents with low literacy levels	1	Twitter is well used for school closures
				1	At least some parents at meeting were very negative about Facebook
				1	Difficulty will be maintenance
				1	These don't rely on schools updating a database – parents subscribe themselves

**Other media**

		2	Homework diaries are an existing communication channel	1	Schools in Orkney use the local media (radio, newspapers to communicate with parents)
		3	Ring binder	3	There is an opportunity around Glow
				2	Glow is not in a position to be used by parents (yet)
				2	DVD/CD School Handbook desirable for some parents
				1	Parents want an anonymous place (like a 'bully box') to place concerns
				1	There is an opportunity around notice boards
				1	There is an opportunity around leaflets to pick up in playground

**Approach to formatting information**

4	Handbook information should be available in a number of formats	1	If there are too many places to put information parents don't know where to look	1	Aim should be to choose best channel not broadcast on all channels
7	Parents should choose how they receive information "you have to give people a choice"	1	It is important that critical information is not communicated in a way that requires good/best practice from school	1	non-English speakers need to be considered
		3	Opportunity to choose (and get correct contact details) is around Emergency Contact Details	1	Plain English (as opposed to plain English) is impractical (Stirling)
				1	School Handbook is "a document that grows with your child"

**What makes information friendly to parents?**

		1	"Do it in kidspeak"	1	Pre P1 / Pre S1 might not be the best time to tell parents all the details of CfE etc
		6	Easy to read (plain English) inc no jargon	2	Photos of the school



	2	Not too much information/ too much detail "A balance between too much information and not enough"	1	Involving children might incentivise parents to read it
			1	It is the most basic information that needs to be really easy to read. The rest does not have to be.
			1	Make information look appealing to encourage parents to read it
			1	Remember the parents who can't read (in English)

**How does School Handbook information overlap with children's needs?**

			1	School Handbook information is for children also (they have different questions to parents)
			1	The need of parents and children is different

**How might Parent Councils get involved in the production and dissemination of information?**

5	Document reviewed by Parent Council before publication	1	Need to clarify what rights the Parent Councils have around reviewing the School Handbook	
2	Parent Council provide feedback on School Handbook draft and communications generally for missing details	4	Some content could be generated by Parent Councils	
3	Parents can help make it parent-friendly	1	Head has responsibility to take to PC, PC has right to make changes	

**How might parents get involved in the production and dissemination of information?**

		3	Document reviewed by parents before publication	1	There should be some tweaking by parents but LA should lead
		3	Consult parents on what they want or for feedback on School Handbook	1	Involve parents of ASN children in ASN information communication
				2	Feedback form within School Handbook

			1	Parents (and Parent councils) have a role in encouraging other parents to engage
			1	Parents should not generate content

**School's role**

1	Schools role is to produce the main information	1	Head teacher should have final say on School Handbook / communications	Prospectus should be school's opportunity
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**LA or SG role**

		1	Schools and PC would appreciate a crib sheet of dos and don'ts	There should be more standardisation within LA areas
				Minimal role of LA. SG clarify expected content (schools decide the detail)

**How might children get involved in the production and dissemination of information?**

		2	Involve pupil councils	1	Children can make the info into "kidspeak" themselves.
		3	Include the insights of pupils	1	What are pupils FAQs? Include them.
		4	Document reviewed by children before publication		

## APPENDIX C – WHAT IS WANTED WHEN

This chart shows when each type of information is needed. Stars show the specific time of need – this may be focused around a particular transition, or the need may be regular but infrequent (scattered stars) or may occur at any time (continuous stars).

	Pre-School	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
<i>Major Transitions</i>	*							*						
<i>Smaller Transitions</i>														
<i>Annual Transitions</i>														
<i>Need help to choose school</i>	*					*****	*							
<i>Greatest uncertainty</i>	*****	*						*****	*					*****
<i>Want info on subject choices</i>							*				*		*	
<i>Want info on exams</i>								*****			*****	*****	*****	*****
<i>Want updates</i>		*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
<i>Want face to face opportunity</i>	*	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
<i>Want info about home learning</i>	*	*****	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *	*****	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *
<i>Need access to reference info</i>	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
<i>Want to see bigger picture</i>	**				*	*	*	**	*	*	*	*	*	*

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