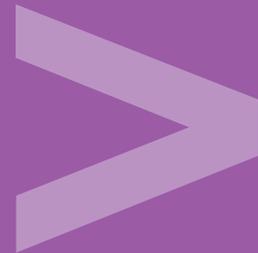


Parents as partners in their children's learning Toolkit



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Parents as partners in their children's learning

Toolkit

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This toolkit has been provided to all schools and is intended for use by Parent Councils.
It may also be photocopied for use by individual parents.

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Introduction

This toolkit has been developed by the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) to provide parents and staff in education authorities and schools with a practical resource to support partnership with parents in all aspects of children's learning. SEED is grateful for the help of all those parents, pupils and local authority staff who contributed to its development. Thanks also go to Outside the Box for their input and creative thinking.

It looks at the different ways parents and carers can be involved and includes advice and practical materials to support the arrangements introduced by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. The toolkit complements the Guidance to the Act published in September 2006. The toolkit is intended as a resource and readers should refer to the Act and Guidance as appropriate.

Our children mean everything to us, why would parents not want to be involved?

The toolkit includes:

- Checklists
- Practice examples that can be used or adapted
- Activities
- Methods to help people identify issues and express their ideas
- Ways of resolving parental complaints/concerns.

Who the toolkit is for

- **Parents:** there are ideas about how to get involved in their child's education and learning
- **Headteachers and school staff:** there are practical methods and good practice about how to develop effective partnerships with parents
- **Local authority staff:** there is material to support authorities as they develop their parental involvement strategies and set up Parent Councils in partnership with parents and schools.

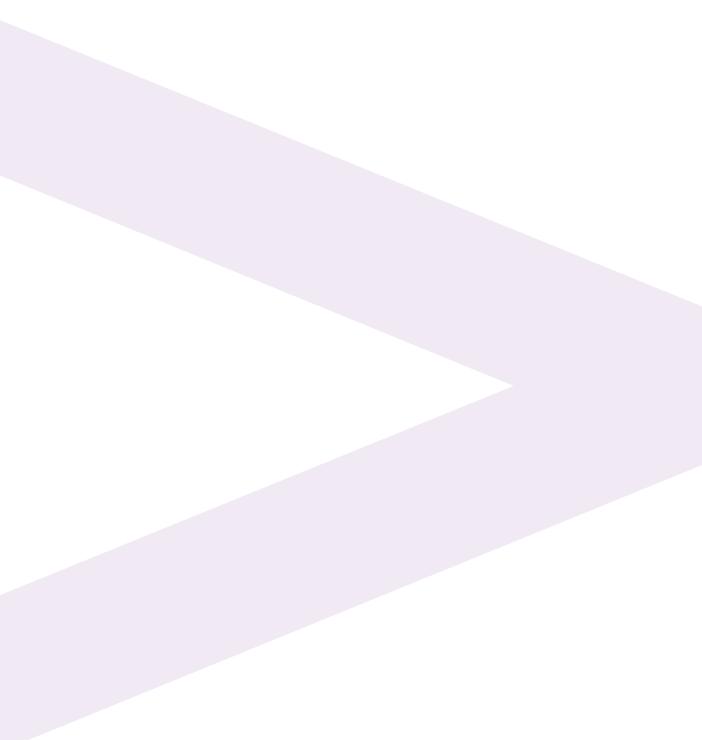
The toolkit will also be useful to other people, who are helping parents and teachers work together to support children's learning. This might include Community Learning and Development teams, Family Support staff, Home/School link workers and Learning Support staff. It will be useful to all those people who have an interest in making the school a part of the community it serves, including pupils at schools, children's extended families, local councillors and people from the local community.



Section 1

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What does parental involvement in children's learning mean?

There are three main ways parents can get involved in supporting their children's learning:

Learning at home: Parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home, in the community and at school.

Home/School partnership: Schools must be open to the involvement of parents in the work they do and they should consider ways of providing information that helps parents engage with school and their children's education.

Parental representation: The Act provides a framework for ensuring that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on policy matters affecting the education of their children. It makes provision for parents to be a member of the Parents Forum at a school and to have their views represented to the school, education authority and others through a representative Parent Council for the school.



Seeing where your child sits in the classroom makes a world of difference.

A parent



I'm desperate to know how I can help my child; it's just so hard to get the information.

A parent



The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 recognises the vital role that parents play in supporting their children's learning by modernising and strengthening the framework for supporting parental involvement in school education. It places a new duty on Scottish Ministers and education authorities to promote the involvement of parents in children's education and the wider life of the school. It aims to help parents to be:

- Involved with their child's education and learning
- Welcomed as an active participant in the life of the school
- Encouraged to express their views on school education generally.

A new Curriculum for Excellence is being developed for Scottish Schools which means that schools and parents will need to work together to help all children become:

- Successful learners
- Confident Individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors.



What are the benefits of parents getting involved?

The benefits for the children are:

- It is easier for children to learn when they get encouragement at home
- They will do better and achieve more when their parents are involved
- Children get access to more activities in and out of school when there are more adults to help
- Their concerns can be sorted out quicker when their parents have a positive relationship with school staff
- They are happy when their parents are enjoying events in the school.

The benefits for parents are:

- Their children do better when they are involved
- They are better able to help and encourage their children
- They have more information about their children's education
- Parents can build their own confidence and skills
- Where there is a positive relationship between parents and their child's school there are benefits all round
- Parents get reassurance that their children are receiving a good education.





The benefits for the school are:

- Parents bring skills which complement teachers' skills and expertise
- Parents contribute their time, so together parents and teachers are able to do more activities with pupils than teachers can do on their own
- Pupils' attainment and behaviour improve
- Parents have ideas about how the school can best support the children
- Teachers have people with whom they can talk over ideas and get help when developing plans for the school
- Parents can give advice and help around reaching other parents.

The benefits for the education authority are:

- The ideas and experience of a wider pool of people lead to a better strategy which will support participation for more parents
- The education authority gets information on how its policies and education provision are working out in practice
- The education authority is able to discuss plans and ideas for education developments with a wide range of parents
- Parents who are involved in other representative groups help make sure the education policies link in well with the other policies and provision for people living in that area.

example 1 – parents supporting healthy eating

A primary school in Highland involved parents in improving school meals. Parents tested school lunches and took an interest in the nutritional value of the meals, which led to the school meals service changing its menus. As the school meals improved more children chose to have them regularly.

With the help of a local trust fund and local gardening firm, a school garden was developed to grow fresh produce for use in school meals and for snacks.

example 2 – parents helping children get to school

A primary school in Glasgow works with parents to provide a 'walking bus service' to school. This encourages children to walk to school accompanied by at least two adults. The adults start the walk with the children and pick up others at agreed points along the way.

It encourages a healthy way of getting to school as well as an awareness of road safety.



What helps parents, teachers and the education authority work together?

People can work together most easily when three factors are all present.

- **Issues:** People are working together on issues which they think are important
- **Ways of working:** The way they work together respects and values each person's contribution. It is realistic in terms of the time and effort it takes. The process welcomes and encourages people who have less experience or confidence.
- **Getting results:** Working together gets results. People can see their effort has been worthwhile and that they have been listened to.



When I started coming to the parents' meetings I was scared to speak. Now I'm not, and I'd like to be able to speak in public like the others.



A big open message from the headteacher tells you that the school really wants parents involved.





checklist

questions to help identify and encourage healthy partnerships

- Are parents involved in deciding what the issues are?
- Do parents choose issues that are most important to them? Are all parents involved in this process in ways that are accessible to them?
- Do people know about other routes they can use to raise issues that are of concern to them?
- Do all parents have the opportunity to contribute?
- Is information available in the languages used by parents of children at this school or living in this area?
- Do parents know they can get access to supports such as translators to help them be involved?
- What arrangements are there to include parents who live a distance away?
- Do parents know they can contribute in many different ways – such as text, email, letter, phone, leaving comments and suggestions at the school, as well as through meetings?
- How are people who are less confident or less experienced getting encouragement to take part?
- How will people know if their ideas and views have led to changes?

The National Standards for Community Engagement were developed by the Scottish Executive, community groups from a wide range of settings and staff from local authorities and other formal bodies. They include good practice which people may find helpful.

There is more information at: www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk

Section 2

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Involving all parents

Because **all children** benefit from the interest and involvement of their parents it is important to make sure that **all parents** have opportunities to be involved in their children's learning and education.

Every parent wants the best for their child but may have difficulty in participating in some activities. This does not mean that they are not interested or not doing what they can to support their child's learning but they may find it difficult to be involved in the school. The key is to ensure that as many opportunities as possible are available to parents. Information about the legal framework for equal opportunities that schools and Parent Councils need to take account of can be found in **section 2** of the Guidance on the Parental Involvement Act.

Some of the barriers to parental involvement

- **Time**

Parents are busy people. Parents might be:

- Working either full time or part time
- Bringing up young children on their own
- Have more than one child attending different schools.

- **Family circumstances**

Families come in all shapes and sizes and have different needs. Parents may find it particularly difficult to attend meetings if they:

- Have a child who is disabled
- Have a baby or other caring responsibilities
- Work shifts or work away from home
- Have a complex family structure with parents who are separated; some might have new partners.

- **Geography**

The area parents live in can be a significant factor in how parents are able to be involved with school based activities. This includes:

- Parents and pupils may have to travel some distance to the school and may have difficulty with transport or have to walk through unsafe areas
- Where children are being educated some distance from their home and live in a hostel.



- **Lack of confidence**

Parents may feel uncomfortable in school surroundings for a number of reasons:

- It may bring back unpleasant memories of their own school days
- Some may feel that their own lack of knowledge or skills puts them at a disadvantage
- Some parents may have difficulty themselves with reading or writing
- Parents may feel that there is no place for them in the school or that the school is not welcoming
- Some men may feel out of place and that they don't have a role because many activities held during the day are mainly attended by women.

- **Unfamiliarity**

Many parents feel that membership of a formal parent body is 'not for them'. They may perceive them to be 'closed', 'cliquey', 'elitist' or 'formal', or not see themselves as the right kind of person to be involved. These perceptions can be a real barrier to parents putting themselves forward.





Activity 1

involving all parents at your school



Purpose

- To measure where you are now in involving all parents. This activity can be repeated later to measure progress and to consider how you have achieved this



Who will be involved

- Parent Council
- Other agencies
- School staff
- Pupils

Work in pairs

> Step 1

On a scale of 0-5, where would you say you are now in relation to involving parents?

0 = lot of room for improvement

5 = things are exactly how parents want them

Why have you decided on this rating?

Make a list of the different ways parents are involved in supporting their child's learning

> Step 2

Where on the scale would you like to get to?

What needs to change to move up to where you want to be?

What kinds of things do parents, pupils and staff need to be doing to reach this score?

What difference will this make to pupils, parents and the school?

> Step 3

After working in pairs share your scores with others in the group on a blank 0-5 scale to get an overall picture.

> Step 4

Share views on why you think you are where you are on the scale and what you could do to improve. Plan out the action that is needed to reach where you want to be – keep this realistic and achievable.

Carry out this exercise again 6 to 12 months later to assess the progress achieved.

example 1 – monthly drop-in surgeries for parents

A secondary school in Aberdeen has introduced drop-in surgeries which are held on a monthly basis. The headteacher is available for a number of hours during an evening or a Saturday morning. Parents can drop in to the school to speak to the headteacher without having to make an appointment. If a problem or query crops up parents know that they will have an opportunity to take it up imminently. This enables them to overcome issues as soon as they occur. The flexibility makes it easier for working parents or parents with other commitments or child care issues to attend at convenient times.

What it looks like when things go well

- The school is a welcoming place with space for parents and clear indications that they are welcome and valued – e.g. a parents' room or welcome posters, possibly developed with parents, in all the languages represented in the school
- There are opportunities for parents to meet with teachers to discuss their child's progress at various times during the day, evening and possibly weekends
- School events and activities take account of any specific cultural or religious festivals that may affect the involvement of some parents
- Parents are able to get actively involved at various times – in both regular (e.g. weekly commitments) and infrequent activities
- The school is aware of any particular difficulties a parent may have in participating in school activities (e.g. through disability, access or language difficulties) and makes arrangements to provide appropriate support
- Parents are asked when their child enrolls if there is anything that would help them get involved, e.g. translation, interpretation, childcare, transport
- The School Development Plan provides an opportunity for staff, parents and pupils to have discussions about the different ways parents could be involved in school activities and how these will be developed and supported
- Childcare and/or transport is arranged (or paid for) for parents evenings, Parent Forum or Parent Council meetings or other events where some parents might need it
- There are social events that build relationships between parents, teachers and school staff
- Parents are asked directly and personally to participate in a particular activity by the headteacher or class teacher
- Parents are encouraged to get other parents involved – by bringing a friend
- No parent is turned away if they volunteer to help and the skills and enthusiasm that parent volunteers bring are matched to the needs of the school
- There are activities that make it easy for families to take part and develop positive relationships with each other, school staff and other families, e.g. outings, picnics, cultural events.



example 2 – supporting Gypsy and Traveller families

A primary school in Dunbartonshire supports Gypsy and Traveller families offering parents the chance to take worksheets and lessons with them when they travel away from the site for any length of time. Because the school facilities are so good, many parents will stay at the site for years to maximise their children's schooling opportunities. However, their travelling lifestyle may require them to leave on a temporary basis. The school accommodates this by making home based lessons available for their time away. That way the child can return to the school, without having lost ground.

This school also accommodates integration by having books in the school library that deal with the Gypsy Traveller lifestyle.





Checklist

questions to help you think about how you support equal opportunities and diversity

Parents' circumstances

- Do parents who do not use English as their first language get information about their children's learning and about opportunities to get involved? (This includes parents who are deaf and use British Sign Language as well as people who use other spoken languages.)
- Are parents who have a disability aware of support they can receive to get to the school and to other events such as consultation meetings?
- Do parents and teachers have access to aids and equipment, or to services such as translators, which will help them to communicate with each other?
- Do parents who find it difficult to come to the school on their own know that they can bring a friend or relative who may be able to support them?
- Are there arrangements in place for parents who have other daytime responsibilities to keep in touch with the school?
- Is there encouragement and practical help for fathers to be involved?
- Is the school environment welcoming for dads?
- Are both mothers and fathers encouraged to be involved in every aspect of parental involvement?
- Is there practical support to help parents – mothers or fathers – who are living on their own with the children to be involved?
- Do parents know that their partner or a relative can represent them in situations where the involvement is specific to their role as the child's parent?
- Do all partners of all parents feel they are welcome to get involved as volunteers at the school, and be part of events to involve families, so that each child is there with their family?
- Are there arrangements in place to make it easy for parents living in each part of the school catchment area to be involved?
- Does the school keep parents of children and young people who are temporarily absent from the school informed of school activities?

Children's circumstances

- Are the parents of children with additional support needs encouraged to take part in the same range of activities as the parents of other children?
- Are children who are looked after encouraged to identify the people who are taking on parenting roles for them and who they want to see being involved?



example 3 – bi-lingual reading club

Four primary schools which are part of a Learning Community in an area of Glasgow with a large number of minority ethnic families worked together to set up a Reading Club initiative for parents and children where English is not their first language.

Regular afternoon reading clubs were held for parents and children with interpreters present to translate and support discussion with teachers. Themed storypacks with activities (games, soft toys, puppets) were provided in the families' own language and sessions were held emphasising the value of reading together at home. Other resources available included:

- Dual language books – fiction and non-fiction
- Dual language dictionaries – Urdu, Slovakian, Russian
- Translation and interpreting services

Many parents reported a benefit to their own learning and felt that their English improved. Mothers reported social benefits in meeting with other mothers, and a general improvement in their own relationships with their children.

Staff said that they have developed a greater insight to and understanding of the needs of bilingual learners and parents. They can now enjoy much more positive, supportive relationships with bilingual parents.

example 4 – involving fathers – the Challenge Dad project

The Challenge Dad project in Aberdeen engaged men in learning opportunities that valued their existing skills and experience as a parent and as a foundation for further learning.

A range of activities and events are offered through the project:

- Engagement activities, such as 5-a-side football
- Learning activities, such as joint parent and child events and one-to-one literacy work
- Parenting or social skills.

Challenge Dad activities were weekly or monthly dependent on the availability of the dads. Working dads, for example, prefer activities to happen at the weekend.



Other ideas for involving fathers

Some schools have developed successful programmes for involving fathers that are not based on the traditional models of activity based family learning. Examples include:

- Engagement with individual fathers about specific child's learning and behaviour
- Open House events for fathers, Dads into School days, Dads breakfasts, Dads lunches and 'celebrate Fathers Day' evenings
- Making use of father specific skills to support work in the classroom and also to support children in a mentoring capacity
- Father-support networks and adult learning programmes for fathers as part of an 'extended school' programme.



Activity 2

identifying skills and experience that parents bring to the school



Purpose

To conduct a survey at a parents evening to identify:

- The skills and experience parents have that they could offer to the school
- The times that best suit parents for involvement with the school



Who will be involved

- Parent Council members
- Headteacher
- School and local authority staff
- Parents attending Parent evenings

A sample parent survey is provided opposite. Some specific questions could be added. The survey is designed for an 'interviewer' to complete in one-to-one conversation with parents. Parents' evening or other school events might be good times to carry out the survey.

The survey could be extended outside the school to meet parents in places they feel comfortable. Visits to community groups and projects might help parents feel more at ease. Talking to parents at the school gate as they drop off or pick up their children is another option.

Once the survey has been completed the information can be used to help the school and the Parent Council to work out ways to involve parents by asking them to share their skills and experience. Information about times which are good for parents will help with planning activities, events or meetings.

The survey could be repeated at the beginning of the school year to include parents who are new to the school.



Sample parent survey

Anytown School Parent Council

Introduction

Hello. I wonder if you could spare a few minutes. My name is and I'm a member of the Parent Council. One of the things we do as a Parent Council is support the school by involving all parents as far as possible. We know that everyone is busy but it would really help us if you could answer a few questions about your interests and skills and whether you feel you have time to get involved in some way to support your child and all children at the school.

By answering this you are not making any commitment and you don't have to take part but it would really help us to plan activities for parents and children in the future. [If parent refuses, offer them the form to fill in at home and return to school if this is what they would prefer.]

Could you tell me your name and which classes your children are in.

Parents name	Child/Children's class(es)
--------------	----------------------------

Question 1

Do you think you have any particular interests, experiences or skills that could help the school in any way? May be just two or three things?

Prompt

There may be things that you already do at home, cooking, DIY, sewing or craft activities, gardening, decorating.

There may be skills that you use at work, IT skills, typing, web design, catering.

You may have interests or hobbies, sports activities, or arts and music skills or interests that you could share.



Question 2

We know that all parents are very busy people but we would like to ask if you have any time that you could spare to support the school or support school activities. We are not looking for any major commitment but just to get an idea of what times suit people best.

What time would suit you best?

Before school Immediately after school During the school day
Evenings [If yes] start time finish time
Weekends

Is there anything that would help you attend at any time – e.g. transport or childcare?

If you are interested in getting involved would you rather just do something occasionally (say once a term) or could you make a more regular commitment?

How much time do you feel you would be able to offer – even ten minutes can be useful?

Thank you very much. One of the things we would like to do is to share this information with the school to help us to plan future activities. Are you happy for us to do this?

Yes No

If yes could you please sign this form to show that you are happy for this information to be shared.

Are there any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make about the school or the Parent Council?

Signed

Thank you again.



Parents and carers of looked after children

Looked after children and young people face barriers to achieving success in education. A child who is looked after may be cared for in their own home, or in a foster home, residential unit or residential school. The guidance for the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 states, "Children who are looked after should have the same educational opportunities as all other children". In order to achieve this, it is vital that schools are aware of the children in their school who are looked after and that they keep in contact with the appropriate parent or carer. This may be a relative carer, foster carer, a local authority or another carer.

Unless there are strong reasons against it, parents in contact with their children should receive regular information about their children's progress in school, including end-of-session reports.

Learning with Care, HMIE, March 2001

Care planning for looked after children should clarify who is taking responsibility for keeping in contact with the school and helping the child with their education. Careful planning and effective joint working between carers/social workers and teachers is of equal importance.

In addition, all local authorities have developed or revised joint policies and protocols on looked after children and all schools should now have a Designated Senior Manager, who is responsible for their looked after children.



Checklist questions for schools working with looked after children

- Are your records of information about the young person's personal details accurate and up-to-date?
- Are your contact details for parents, residential staff, foster carers, relative carers and social workers accurate and up-to-date? Do you know which of these contacts is your primary contact (as identified in the child or young person's care plan)?
- Are there systems in place to ensure these records are treated sensitively and confidentially?
- Does the school consult and communicate with parents, social workers, foster and relative carers and others?
- Does the school link with carers to provide information and support to looked after young people on issues such as careers, further and higher education, and funding for education/training?
- Do you involve relative carers, foster carers and residential staff and others in making decisions about the Parent Council?
- Does the school support carers to ensure there are suitable arrangements for study and completing homework?
- Do the arrangements for parents' evenings include relative carers, foster carers and residential staff? Are invitations and communications handled sensitively?



example 5 – educational support for looked after children

One authority, which had a high percentage of its looked after children in residential care, made considerable efforts to make their residential units educationally rich environments. All the children had access to computers and special programs were purchased for children with learning difficulties. Children were encouraged to be library members and there was a wide range of books available.

Another local authority operates a tutoring support service for its looked after and accommodated children and young people. Due to its success, they are expanding the service to include children and young people who are looked after at home.

Many local authorities have created educational support positions for looked after children. These may include learning/behaviour support assistant, outreach teachers and/or educational psychologists for looked after children. They work with, provide support to and liaise between looked after children, parents, carers, schools and social work services, amongst others. They deal with a range of common issues including loss, trauma, attendance, exclusion, achievement and attainment.

checklist questions for education authorities working with looked after children

- Does the authority ensure relative carers, foster carers, residential staff and social workers, etc. are involved in developing the Strategy for Parental Involvement?
- Does the authority facilitate communication between schools, social work services, carers and parents?
- Is there advice and guidance given to social workers on identifying a key person who will take responsibility for contact with school and helping with the child's education?
- Is there guidance given to schools on liaising with carers and the parents of looked after children and young people?
- Is there guidance given to parents of looked after children, relative carers, foster carers, residential staff and social workers on liaising with schools?
- Is there guidance or advice given to social work staff and carers on supporting the learning of the children or young people in their care? For example through encouraging homework, providing areas for study, provision of books and IT equipment or knowledge of education system.



Section 3

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What does parental involvement in children's education mean?

There are three main ways in which parents get involved in supporting their children's learning and education.

Learning at home: Parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home, in the community and at school.

Home/School Partnership: Schools which are open to the involvement of parents in the work they do are the best schools for pupils learning and they provide information that helps parents engage with school and their children's education. There may also be support for schools and parents from others, e.g. Home/School Link workers, Community Workers or Family Support teams.

Parental representation: The Act provides a framework for ensuring that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on policy and practical matters affecting the education of their children. It makes provision for parents to be a member of the Parents Forum at a school and to have their views represented to the school, education authority and others through a representative Parent Council for the school.

This section focuses on learning at home. The following two sections cover home/school partnership and building links with the community. Sections 7 and 8 provide details on the Parent Forum and developing Parent Councils as the system for effective parental representation.

Learning at home

Children learn from the moment they are born as they begin to absorb information and make sense of their world. As well as providing the basics for growth and development: food, comfort and security, parents also provide stimulation through everyday activities, games, rhymes and language that help a child to learn. Many of these activities are part of everyday life – preparing and eating meals together, doing the washing, shopping, watching TV, visiting friends and family – but for young children they are opportunities for discovery and learning.

85% of the language we use as adults is in place by the time we are five years old and 50% is in place by the time we are three years old.



This emphasises the importance of parents and the home environment in supporting children's learning and development. Mostly this happens naturally as part of family life. Parents want the best for their children and do what they can to achieve this. However, once children start school it is not always easy to know how best to help your child. As children grow older it is easy to forget the strong influence that the home and the community still have on their learning and education. After all children only spend 15% of their time in school.

Schools can do a lot to make the links between what is being taught in school and learning opportunities that exist at home and in the community. This section looks at how parents can be helped to continue their children's learning at home.

What it looks like when things go well

- Parents get lots of encouragement from the school to take part in their children's learning – and there is evidence that they do take part
- Schools and teachers keep parents informed of what their children will be learning in school so that they can discuss this with their children at home
- Parents and staff tackle areas of difficulty and concern together
- Schools provide specific fun activities for children and parents to do at home
- Parents support their children's learning by helping with homework and making links with other areas of school work
- Parents spend one-to-one time with their children and also enjoy shared family activities/visits
- Parents and children know that everyone's contribution is valued
- Children receive additional support from the individual attention they get from their parents
- The ways of communicating with parents reflect the diversity of parents and their needs
- There are open channels of communication so that parents feel comfortable talking to teachers and making them aware of how children's learning is being supported at home
- Teachers discuss with parents and children the activities they undertake at home so that these can be incorporated into their learning in school.



Checklist

parents and teachers working together to promote parents' involvement in children's learning

- Do parents get information about how they can help with their children's learning? Is this provided in a variety of formats including written and face to face? Are other forms of electronic methods used?
- Do parents know how they can share information about their child with the school? How are they able to do this?
- Are parents asked about how they want to get information and communicate with the school and does the school make arrangements to respond appropriately?
- Is it easy for parents to communicate with the school in ways that suit them?
- Is there a school and/or education authority website? Does it include a parents' section? Does it contain details of what children will be learning each term? Does it contain suggestions of what parents can be doing at home to extend and reinforce this learning?
- Is there information in the school and in other places about access to adult learning and other ways parents can build their own confidence and skills?
- Are parents encouraged to share their interests and skills with their children? How does this happen?
- Does the school ensure that they understand the needs of all parents and provide ways of supporting them to help their children's learning at home? For example, some parents might need help with literacy and numeracy skills in order to support their child.
- Do parents who are not living with their children – for example, parents who are separated or someone who is working away - get regular updates on what is happening for their child?
- Is there support within the education authority to support parents, families and children who may be experiencing particular difficulties?
- Do parents know that members of the extended family can be involved too, if this is how the family want to do things?
- Are schools working together to help parents as well as children with the transition from Pre-school to Primary and Primary to Secondary school?
- Are there links with other agencies that can support parents in their role as educators – for example, Libraries, Community Centres, Family Learning teams, Social Workers, Home School Link workers, Community Learning and Development teams, Adult Literacy staff?
- Do parents know about and get access to the resources that are available, such as the 'Making the Difference' leaflets and useful websites?
- Have parents been involved with teachers and other staff in developing the school prospectus and any other leaflets that are sent to parents?

example 1 – supporting children's learning at home

A nursery class attached to a primary school in Orkney has developed a range of leaflets to keep parents informed on what children are learning in the nursery and how they can support this at home. There is a welcome leaflet and a general leaflet which describes the Aims and Curriculum, illustrated with pictures of children in the nursery. These are available to all parents in a display for parents by the entrance to the nursery.

In addition there are leaflets covering specific topics being covered by the nursery throughout the year. Each leaflet (an A4 sheet folded to provide four pages) has four sections:

- At nursery we are learning about ... (e.g. The jobs people do, night time)
- At nursery we will ... (indicates what it is that children will learn)
- We will learn by ... (describes the activities that will be undertaken)
- At home we can ... (suggests activities that parents and children can do together at home to support their learning)

The leaflets are simple, clear and attractively illustrated and each one highlights three or four simple activities that all parents can undertake with their child at home.





example 2 – involving Gypsy and Traveller families in their children's learning

Fife Council developed activities that would involve parents from Gypsy and Traveller families in their children's learning and education.

A lending library of resources was provided for use either as distance learning materials for families to complete during periods of travel or as short-term loans to Gypsy and Traveller families staying in caravans and houses throughout the area. Materials were available for all ages from pre-school to teenage years.

Benefits of the project included:

- Initial consultation included parents and pupils to consider the types of resources that they would welcome in this project
- Many of the activities were specifically designed to involve fathers
- Parents realised the skills that they could share with a child (e.g. how to use a glue gun) which led to an increased confidence in their ability to support the child. One dad, on becoming involved with a project, realised for the first time the progress his child had made in reading. He went out and bought a bookshelf and books for all the children in the family
- The project gave staff a positive reason to visit and get to know parents. The staff contrasted this with the more usual situation of making visits where there had been a problem
- Children wanted to take part in projects and showed greatly increased motivation
- Extended family members supported children. In one instance a pupil said that the World War II project had given her something to talk about with her grandfather.

example 3 – support for schools from other teams

Following the introduction of easy-to-use cameras in the nursery schools in Midlothian, a course was piloted by MALANI (the Midlothian Adult Literacy and Numeracy Initiative) to encourage parents to learn to use the cameras and support their child's learning at the same time.

Parents were invited to come along and have some fun with the cameras. They took the cameras home and recorded their child's learning at home. On return to the school an IT tutor and a literacy tutor, using the school's computer suite, worked with the parents to use the software to create storybooks with text and special effects.

Most parents had no previous computer experience, but over the 6-week course learned how to produce storybooks including some of the pictures they had taken. Parents and children were thrilled with the results and their new found skills which were put to use in the nursery, where the parents are helping the staff and children to use the cameras more effectively.





Activity 1

reviewing and developing a home learning policy



Purpose

- To identify and build on how parents already support their children's learning at home
- To make clear links between children's learning in school and at home



Who will be involved?

- Pupils
- Parents
- Teachers

Different methods can be used to gather parent and pupil views about the school's homework/home learning policy including:

- Carrying out a survey of parent and pupil views on homework/home learning. This could even be carried out by some pupils as part of a homework task
- Parent Council and headteacher establish a working group of parents, pupils and staff. The group could run a survey or hold meetings to find out parents views about:
 - What they already do to support and extend their children's learning at home and how they do this
 - Any additional support and information from the school they would find useful to support their children's learning.

Collating information

Collate the views and consider:

- What the priorities might be to provide clearer more specific information for parents, for example, developing Home Learning Logs or Diaries
- Organising activities for parents and children around specific subject areas, for example, involving parents in devising and developing maths games; building up a science lending library; setting up a book/reading club for children and parents
- Whether there are any specific issues or support needs for some parents or children
- What other resources there may be to support learning at home, for example, family learning or literacy teams
- How a policy could be developed to address the priorities.

Implementing and reviewing the policy

Once a policy and actions to implement the policy are identified, the next step is to inform all parents and pupils.

Agree when the policy and actions will be reviewed and evaluated to assess the difference it has made to parents and pupils.

example 4 – communicating with parents about their child's progress

A primary school in Dumfries and Galloway sent out questionnaires to get a clearer idea of parents and children's views of homework and what information they wanted from school.

A workshop for parents, the home link worker, teachers and pupils to explore purposes, expectations and communications in relation to homework was held. This was followed up with a small working group to develop a homework policy and communications system for home school links. Parents and children from P3 – P7 are involved in a weekly review of their learning using a new home school diary. The school also bought a number of books on learning and learning styles for the parents' library and the staff library.

The benefits were:

- Parents had a greater understanding of what goes on in school, could communicate regularly with the school and had a clearer idea of the school's expectations of homework
- Parents had a starter for discussion with their children about what they had been learning in school
- Children had a weekly opportunity to review their learning, assess their achievements and highlight their learning needs
- Staff had a clearer idea of the sorts of activities that parents wanted for home learning and had an easy and routine means of communicating with parents
- The home link worker had been involved in workshops with parents, provided links to Community Learning and Development and organised family learning events, giving the opportunity to make initial contacts with parents.



example 5 – including all parents in a playing with maths project

A Glasgow primary school in an area with many ethnic communities developed a project to help parents support their children's learning in maths.

School staff received training on the maths programme which was going to be used and P1 parents were given a personal invitation to attend an informal meeting about the programme. The headteacher, class teacher and the tutor who had developed the resource spoke to parents at the meeting. Interpreters were provided for Arabic, Polish, Mandarin and Urdu speakers.

Parents agreed to come to the school for an hour each week (for 6 weeks), to play maths games in school with their child. Interpreters were available to help communication between parents and school staff. Having helped their child to choose a game, parents took it home and agreed to play with their child for 10-15 minutes each day.

The benefits for parents were that they:

- Felt more comfortable in the school environment
- Became aware of the importance that school staff place on the parental role in children's education
- Gained input from staff that enabled them to support their child's learning
- Identified opportunities for learning that were not previously apparent
- Learned that helping to educate their child was fun
- Saw that school staff valued their first language.

The benefits for staff were that they:

- Became aware that links could be built with parents – it simply required the right kind of activity
- Saw that involving parents requires effort and good planning
- Valued parents involvement and saw them in a new light.

The benefits for children were that they:

- Enjoyed quality time with their parents
- Saw that staff valued their first language
- Experienced games that they may not have had at home
- Gained confidence in basic mathematical concepts
- Understood their parents are valued when they saw them working in partnership with staff.

This project helped the school identify other ways in which parents can be involved and it has already embarked upon a programme of book and toy lending. Since an initial session led by the Bi-lingual Support Teacher, a Polish parent in the school has led the project.



Activity 2

developing parent prompts



Purpose

- To develop home learning worksheets – called Parent Prompts – linked to various areas of the curriculum for parents to use at home with their children
- To provide information to parents on what is being taught in school and suggest activities to support this at home



Who is involved?

- Teachers
- Pupils
- Parents
- Local Authority Quality/Service Improvement Officers

What is a Parent Prompt?

The two questions that parents ask most frequently are:

- What is my child learning at school?
- How can I help at home?

Each Parent Prompt outlines the topic areas being covered in school, the skills that are being developed, what the child is doing at school and how the parent can support this with activities at home. The tasks can be undertaken by children and parents together at home using everyday objects and activities.

- > **Step 1:** Teachers identify the learning topics that will be covered in a term/year. Activities are identified that parents can undertake at home with their child that links with and extends the learning taking place in the classroom. The activities should be fairly short but encourage dialogue and discussion between parents and children.
- > **Step 2:** Teachers discuss with parents (possibly through the Parent Council) what prompts are most appropriate and develop a range of parent prompt activities to be issued throughout the term/year as a shared activity for children and parents. It is important that parent prompts avoid jargon.
- > **Step 3:** Parents and children undertake activities at home and discuss what is being learned and how it connects to what is being taught in school.
- > **Step 4:** Parents and children give feedback on the parent prompt activity to the class teacher.



Sample Parent Prompt

Parent Prompt

Any Town School	Class
Subject Science	

<p>Topic How things grow and develop</p>	<p>Learning in class Planting seeds and watching them grow– measuring them weekly</p>	<p>Home Learning Look through old photos to see how your child grew year on year. Is there a wall in your house where you measure your child's growth? Which year did he/she grow most?</p>
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<p>Feedback The parent can use a traffic light system to indicate whether the task was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy – green • Okay – orange • Tricky – red
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Resources

The 'Making the Difference' leaflets cover a number of areas of interest to help parents support their children's learning at home. The leaflets are free of charge and can be provided in community languages as well as alternative formats for example Braille, audio tape. They have been distributed to all schools to pass on to parents and are also available on the Parentzone website.



The 'Involving Parents: examples of good practice' CD-rom contains case studies from schools across Scotland highlighting lots of different ways that parents and schools have worked well together. The CD-rom has been distributed to all schools. You can get copies of the 'Making the Difference' leaflets or the CD by e-mailing parentzone@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or by phoning 0131-244 0956.

The Parentzone website (www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk) provides a lot of information for parents on education generally and offers practical advice on how parents can support their children's learning.



The Cross-curricular themes website (www.ltscotland.org.uk/crosscurricular) contains a section called 'Parents as partners in learning', providing information for teachers about what they can do to support parents' involvement as well as good practice examples. There are a number of other websites that provide information on how parents can support their children's learning at home, for example:

www.bbc.co.uk and

www.parentscentre.gov.uk



Section 4

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Home and school partnership

Successful home/school partnership working depends on the development of mutual trust and respect between school and parents. Schools need to use the skills, knowledge and experiences that ALL parents and ALL staff bring to the school to support children's learning.

The development of good relationships when things are going well can make it easier for both parents and teachers to make contact when either of them has a concern.

I wasn't worried about going to school to complain because I knew I got on well with the headteacher.

A parent

There are many opportunities to contact parents informally:

- Day to day contact in the playground or at the school gate
- At breakfast or after school clubs
- Fundraising events
- Social events – a school ceilidh or disco
- Community activities
- School events – sports day, concerts, etc.
- Introductory home visits.

Working in partnership with parents may be new to some staff who may also need support to make this work effectively. Education authorities may want to consider what staff development opportunities are available to staff to support them in communicating with parents. For example, workshops for staff on 'How to get the best out of parent evenings' and 'Making the most of one to one meetings with parents' can help develop ideas and skills.



What it looks like when things go well

- Parents feel that they are welcome in the school
- There are lots of opportunities for parents to get involved in different activities and there is evidence that they do get involved
- The school understands the needs of all parents and develops ways of working which are supportive and inclusive
- People are asked about what is important to them, and what they would like to see happening
- Pupils are contributing their ideas about what is important to them and how they want parents and others to be involved and these ideas are used to increase the involvement of parents
- Parents are motivated to continue their own learning
- Everyone recognises that parents have other commitments and responsibilities in their lives
- Parents are able to take part when and how they can. It is easy to step back and then pick things up later if circumstances change
- Parents have the confidence and skills to take part and the skills that parents have are used appropriately within the school
- Teachers engage with parents in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis in order to build a positive relationship
- The process recognises the diversity among the parents at that school and is inclusive. For example, there is information about the ways parents can take part in the life of the school in different formats and languages. Interpreters and signers are provided when necessary to ensure that all parents have access to important information
- The school recognises the reluctance of some parents resulting from their own bad experiences at school and provides positive ways for parents to be involved in their own child's school at a level which they are comfortable with
- Support and development opportunities are offered to everyone who is taking on a new role such as membership of the Parent Council or volunteering to help teachers with school activities
- The School Development Plan clearly indicates the different ways in which parents can be involved in the school and their children's learning.



Checklist

working together to increase parents' involvement in school

- Is the school welcoming to parents – both in terms of how it looks when parents come in and in the way staff greet people?
- Is there a special area for parents within the school?
- Have you asked parents and pupils for their ideas?
- Can you identify the range of ways parents and staff are able to meet and share ideas about ways people could support the school?
- Do activities happen at various times including weekends, holidays, evenings, daytime?
- Are parents informed of and involved in new initiatives? Is there effective communication about these and opportunities for parents to discuss how they will be taken forward in the school and what their involvement will be?
- Are there opportunities to do one-off things with no long-term commitment as well as taking on longer-term tasks and roles?
- Are there fun activities to take part in and let people get to know each other outside the school – such as a barbecue in the summer?
- Is information made available in ways that reach everyone? Are there any groups of parents, or parents in particular situations, who might be missed out?
- Is there practical support to help parents be involved? For example, on a parents' evening, does someone organise lifts for parents who don't have much time after getting home from work? Is there a babysitting circle or a creche?
- Is it clear that members of the child's extended family are also welcome to be involved?
- Is the school aware of any specific skills that parents have and are parents encouraged to share skills and experience in the school setting?
- Are there are opportunities to take part that don't need much skill or confidence?
- Is there information in the school and in other places about access to adult learning?
- Do parents and teachers understand about the respective roles and responsibilities when parents (and other people) are there as volunteers and are working with other children as well as their own?
- Do schools and parents have easy access to resources for translators, getting information into several formats, etc.? How have they been asked about what support they would find most useful?
- Is it easy for schools and parents to get access to advice and practical support on matters such as recruiting and supporting volunteers?
- Do schools have the information they need on matters such as the Disclosure Scotland requirements for people working alongside children? Have they developed a system to support parents through the Disclosure Scotland process?

example 1 – involving parents in planning parents' evenings

Parents at a primary school in North Lanarkshire were consulted on how the school could improve their partnership with parents. Many parents felt that the arrangements for parents' evenings could be improved. The meetings were held in the school hall and waiting parents could overhear what the teacher was saying to others. This meant that parents could feel uncomfortable about raising issues with the teacher.

To solve this problem, the layout of the hall was changed. Plants and dividers were used to separate tables from waiting areas. Soft music was also introduced to help prevent others overhearing what was being said.

At a secondary school in North Lanarkshire, parents' evenings were held between 4.00pm and 6.30pm after parents were asked which time they preferred. Parents were encouraged to bring their children with them to parents' evenings.





Activity 1

a survey on arrangements for parents' evenings



Purpose

- To identify times and methods to make it easier for parents to attend parents' evenings/meetings



Who will be involved

- Parent Council
- Headteacher and other teachers
- Pupils
- Individual parents

> Step 1: Planning the survey

- The Parent Council works with teachers to plan the questions to ask – see the sample parent survey opposite which can be adapted.
- Agree how long parents will be given to respond to the survey – four weeks is standard

> Step 2: Contact parents

- Send the survey to each parent
- Put up a poster in the school entrance, asking similar questions
- Ask pupils what they think through their classes or through the School/Pupil Council
- Encourage pupils and their parents to ask each other what they think will work best

> Step 3: Analyse findings and agree the action to take

- Collate the replies and analyse the responses given
- The Parent Council could do this in partnership with the headteacher, other teachers and pupils

Step 4: Informing all parents

> Report back on the survey results and the action which will be taken

- Use a variety of methods to get the information across
- Report back to staff and pupils as well as to parents



Sample parent survey

Parents' evenings are held each term. We want to be sure that these are as useful for you as possible. We would appreciate any suggestions you have to make these meetings convenient for you and your children. Please tell us your views.

Question 1: Time and day of meetings

Parents meetings are usually held on a weekday evening from 7.00-9.00pm. Would you prefer

- the current time – weekday 7.00-9.00pm?
- a weekday from 4.00pm until 7.00pm?
- an afternoon at the weekend?

Question 2: The place meetings are held

At the moment the meetings are held in the main hall at the school. Some parents have told us they find this a bit noisy and cold in the evenings. Various things could be changed.

- What you would like to improve?
- Are there any aspects you like about the present arrangements?

Question 3: Providing information about activities in the school and community

The Parent Council and the Pupil Council have both offered to have a stall at parents' evenings. Are there other groups/activities in the school or community that you would like information on when you attend parents' sessions?

Please list any

Question 4: Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make?

Thank you for your help.

You can return this to the school office by: post, sending it back with your child or by email – the form is on the school website. Please return it by

Survey carried out by the school Parent Council in partnership with school staff and pupils



example 2 – parents developing the school library

A parent-led library was set up in partnership between a primary school in Renfrewshire and its parent body. The decision at the outset was that it would be financed and operated by parent volunteers.

In setting up the new library, some parent volunteers decorated the room while others attended a workshop at the local public library to learn how to use the library classification system.

The library is now managed and operated completely by parent volunteers who make a weekly commitment to working with pupils.

Good communication between school and parents

Both schools and parents agree that the basis for developing positive relationships is good communication. Thought needs to be put into this and some authorities and schools have developed communications strategies which outline some of the principles of good communication and the various ways it will be done.

These are some ideas that have been suggested by parents and teachers:

- Reach out to parents at places they already visit: shops, post offices, supermarkets, libraries, doctors' surgeries and ensure that information is available there and a positive image of the school is presented
- Use local media: TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, posters etc, to let parents know what is happening in the school and share 'good news' stories about what the school and children are doing
- All information should be attractive and easy to read, using colour and pictures where possible
- Avoid the use of educational jargon or terms that parents may be unfamiliar with
- Have one-to-one conversations with parents
- Have a direct approach to communications with parents – 'just ask them'
- Use electronic methods, for example, text messages and email
- Build relationships through contact with parents at drama, music and sport events, parents' nights, school concerts
- Make use of parent to parent contacts – 'snowballing' (where one parent agrees to bring along or introduce another), school gate, parents' nights, information sessions led by parents
- Make use of existing opportunities for example focus on transitional phases (pre-school to primary, primary to secondary)
- Share key facts such as the research findings on the difference parents make.



example 3 – use of email as a means of communicating with parents

A secondary school in the Stirling Council area identified the need for a more efficient means of communicating with parents and received support to develop an email system.

The project piloted a dedicated email address for parent/carer enquiries. All parents in the school were surveyed to ask if they were interested in using email and if so, for what types of communication. The email addresses were collected and entered into a new system and a protocol was developed to ensure efficient and effective responses or acknowledgments within a reasonable timescale. Guidance was given to parents/staff as to what the email system could and could not be used for.

Approximately 60% of parents in the school signed up to using the new system. During the 3-month trial period the school used the system to send out various information documents to parents including the school newsletter and information on drug awareness events. Parents' enquiries included pastoral care issues, fundraising and meeting arrangements.

The feedback from parents was positive. They were keen to make use of the system as a means of easier access to information relating to the school.

"Just to say that I am finding the system very useful and efficient."

"I am very pleased, as a parent, that I now have access to the info certain teenagers in my house leave lying in the bottom of their bags."

"I think this system will benefit many and has benefits perhaps not envisaged for parents like me working away from home."

example 4 – pupil focus groups

In East Renfrewshire, some Pupil Councils have developed separate Pupil Focus Groups. These special pupil sub groups address issues like Equality – one school has an 'E Team', The Equality Team. Other groups have focused on issues relating to inclusion, healthy eating and enterprise.

Parent Councils could benefit from establishing closer links with young people in these groups, both from the cross over of interest in topical issues as well as gaining opportunities to develop closer partnerships.



How pupils can help

Pupils have a really important role in encouraging their parents to get involved with the school. Once they are made aware of how important it is that their parents get involved and support the school they often have a host of good ideas about how this could be done. They often know what would work best for their parents and their families.

Schools are encouraged to develop pupil discussion groups as part of their work on Citizenship and Enterprise Education. There may be committees or groups considering Equality issues in the school; a Hungry for Success Committee; or an Eco Group. All of these groups could be asked to consider how parents and the wider community could be involved and support their learning in these areas.

Ways for authorities, schools and parents to involve pupils include:

- School/Pupil councils
- An authority wide pupil forum
- An authority wide consultation forum for disabled children and young people in line with the Disability Equality Duty
- A representative on the Parent Council (properly prepared and supported)
- Circle time/golden time – where teachers and children in primary schools have a chance to talk together and share news and information informally
- Youth involvement in Locality Planning and Community Planning networks
- The use of suggestion or ideas boxes or perhaps through the local Dialogue Youth team
- Graffiti/notice boards which act as a permanent comment board
- Scope for joint work or projects between staff/parent members and youth/pupil representatives
- Including them in formal and informal consultation processes when new ideas are being developed
- Being part of the social events
- Helping in practical ways with activities at the school.





example 5 – pupils interviewing parents and teachers

In East Lothian, a Task Group of parents was established by a consultant to explore the development of a parental involvement strategy. The group decided to involve pupils in the process and the consultant met with representatives from School/Pupil Councils in several primary and secondary schools.

The pupils then interviewed their teachers and their parent or carer at home to get their views on parental involvement. Some children interviewed step-mums or dads which was a very good experience for them both and in some cases the first time they had ever been asked to consider their involvement. All views gathered by the pupils will help develop the strategy.

Comments from children and young people as part of developing this toolkit

“ It [the toolkit] should tell parents and teachers to remember to ask us. We can help them with lots of things. ”

“ It's not true that kids and their mums and dads won't want to work together. Just because we have arguments about tidying up at home and staying out late, it doesn't mean we aren't all interested in what happens at school. We want it to be a good school too. ”

“ The toolkit should tell people to ask grans to help. My gran teaches me lots of good things. Some of my friends don't have grans they see all the time. People could come and be grans for every child who needs one. ”



Activity 2

developing a capacity or skills poster



Purpose

This activity helps to:

- Identify the skills, experience and qualities that people bring to a group
- Develop people's confidence in using those skills
- Work together as a team



Who will be involved

- Parent Council
- Teachers and the parents
- Parents and teachers from several schools who want to work together on an issue which affects them all

> Step 1: Setting up the exercise

Nominate someone as a group leader to take people through the exercise. The group leader displays the poster and outlines the task. A sample poster is provided opposite. There is an image of a person in the middle, and in each of the corners there is a heading. Give everyone a copy of the poster and explain what each heading means. Here are some tips:

What's my identity?

This is a 'who am I?' type question and can include anything people feel is important about them. What is their job; do they have any children; are they the person who everyone talks to, the office comedian, the problem solver?

What are my hobbies, interests and passions?

This should list all the person's hobbies and interests, as much as possible.

What are my skills, talents and resources?

List all those things the person can do, is good at, and enjoys. Also list all the people the person knows who might come in handy, along with any equipment or resources they have access to, i.e. they drive a car, have access to professional fundraisers.

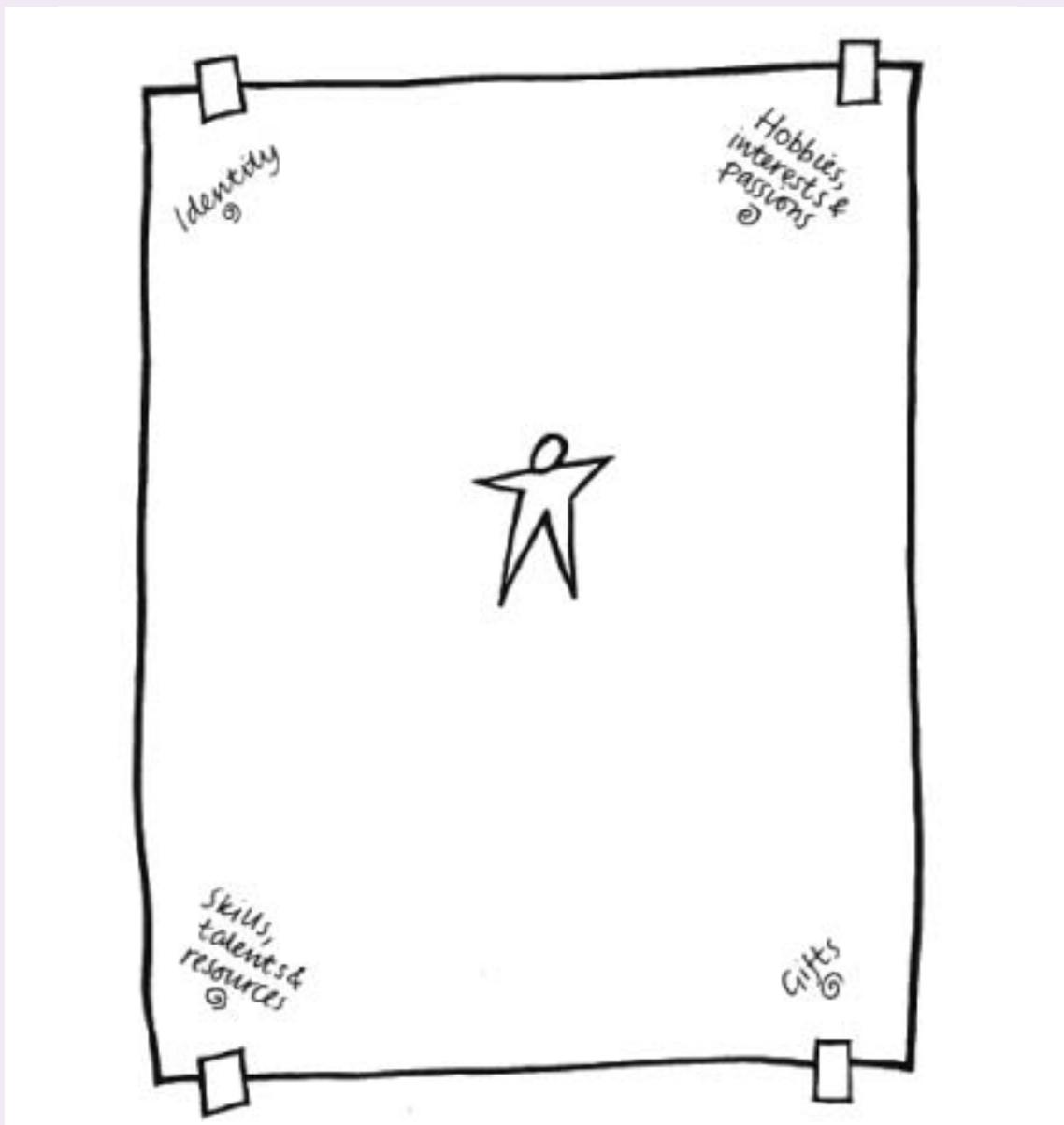
What are my gifts?

This can be difficult for people to do themselves. Think about what friends or work colleagues say about you – why do they like you? People might say you are a great listener, someone to lean on or that you make them laugh.



- > **Step 2: Making the poster** – allow 30 minutes for each person to fill in their poster
- Organise people into pairs. It is helpful if people work with someone they feel comfortable with
 - Fill in the details on the poster prompted by questions from their partner if they get stuck. Ask open questions e.g. "How would you describe yourself?" Remember to add your name to the poster
 - Answers can be written or drawn. For example, a flowerpot or a spade could be used to depict a keen gardener or a peaked mountain for a walker.
- > **Step 3: Sharing and displaying the posters**
After everyone has finished their work, hang the posters on the wall and let people walk round and see what others have put up.

In an informal way, people get the chance to see what the skills, abilities and contribution of other parents might be.





Resolving disagreements

No matter how good communications are, there will be times when there are disagreements or misunderstandings. Using some of the ideas in these guidelines can be a way of helping parents to communicate their concerns/complaints.

Guidelines for parents

If your complaint/concern is in connection with an individual child:

- Raise the matter with a member of the school staff in the way that is easiest for you, by talking, email, phone, or in writing. Most concerns parents have are resolved by talking about things at the earliest possible stage. The school will want to know if you have a concern. The sooner you tell them about it the better the outcome is likely to be.
- If your concern is urgent make sure you let school staff know this.
- Complaints/concerns are usually resolved by people coming together, talking and making agreements. However there are some situations where a complaint will have to be investigated and a decision made at a later stage. If this is the case the education authority will tell you how long that will take.
- If you are going to a meeting in the school you may want to take someone with you for support.
- Sometimes it helps to write things down in advance of a meeting or talk things through with someone else.
- Try to stick to facts and feelings. Expressing how you feel is very important and it will help school staff.
- Decide whether it would be helpful to have your child with you, if you are meeting with school staff, or if it is a matter which would be better discussed among the adults first.
- If you feel you are not being heard or taken seriously, you can ask to speak to another member of staff, have someone from the education authority to support you, or an independent advocate or mediator.
- The headteacher should be made aware of any unresolved concerns, but if the complaint is about the headteacher and it cannot be resolved, you should contact someone from your education authority. Your education authority will have a complaints procedure. If you contact them they will tell you about it.
- If your complaint is not resolved by the education authority you can bring it to the attention of the local authority Chief Executive or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

If your complaint/concern is about something general:

An example of something general might be bullying, discipline, healthy eating or the curriculum.

The same applies as in a complaint about an individual child and you should start by talking to school staff. However, you can also raise your concern with the Parent Council. If, after discussion with the school and education authority, the Parent Council is unable to reach a satisfactory outcome for these concerns, they are able to refer the issue to HMIE.

Section 5

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Links with community

Schools do not exist in isolation. They are based in communities and are there to serve those communities. Some larger schools may serve more than one identifiable community and they therefore need to be aware of any differences in approach that are necessary for each community. Schools provide a service that is available for everyone which makes them a key resource for children and families in that neighbourhood.

Schools are also part of a network of statutory and voluntary organisations that provide services and support to communities. Parents can encourage or build on links between the school and the local community. The starting point, as always, is what is important for this school. Schools may already involve some people from the community working in the school alongside parents.

Community venues can often be good places to make contact with parents who may lack confidence in approaching the school or getting involved there. For some parents, school can be rather daunting and it is important to meet people where they feel most comfortable.

Parent Councils are well placed to make links with other agencies. In particular they are encouraged to develop links with pre-school and further/higher education establishments to ensure continuity of education for children and young people.

What it looks like when things go well

- Parents get information from the school about a range of services and activities available in the community
- The school and Parent Council of primary schools have positive relationships with the pre-school groups in their community and parents with children at those groups are welcomed at school and parent activities
- Information about the school is available in other community venues in particular; libraries, post offices, community centres, doctors' surgeries and shops
- The school has established relationships with Faith Groups in the area, churches, mosques and temples and is sensitive to religious customs and practices in school
- Bi-lingual community members support parents for whom English is not their first language in communicating with the school
- The school accesses additional help for families that need it from a range of other services; speech and language therapy, health, educational psychologists, family support teams
- Home Link Integration Teams and/or Community Learning and Development Teams support parents and run groups for parents within the school in order to help them support their children's learning



- The school uses other community venues for some of its activities, for example swimming pools, sports and leisure centres, theatres and museums
- Local businesses contribute to children's learning by offering visits or work placements and coming to school to talk about their work
- Local shops and businesses support fundraising events or sponsor particular school activities
- The school participates in major community events – for example summer fete, carnival or local celebrations.

Checklist

parents and teachers developing links between a school and the local community

- Do parents and teachers work together to identify the priorities for your school and where help from other people could be useful?
- Have you identified people in your community who would like to offer their time and skills to help the school? Have you identified what particular skills community members might have that would be of use in the school?
- Does the school encourage people who are not parents of children at that school to get involved? This could be people who are part of children's extended families, or people who have a close association with the school. This can be a good way of bringing in people who might have more free time than many parents do.
- Have you looked for ways to draw in people who have interests or skills that the children would enjoy – such as people who are keen about sports or art or music?
- Have you identified people and organisations in the local community who may be able to give you access to premises? This can be useful if you want to hold meetings or other activities outside the school.
- Do you want help from other local groups around fundraising for the school? Could you do some joint activities where you share the work and the money raised?
- Do you have events coming up where the school could work with other people in your community?



example 1 – parents and teachers working with a local young people's project

Teachers and parents at a secondary school in Dundee were concerned about increasing numbers of young people drinking. They had tried to tackle this within the school and in families, and thought that a fresh approach would help.

They contacted a Young People's Health Project. Staff from the project worked with young people at the school to develop a peer education programme. Young people designed posters and information cards about looking after yourself, respecting yourself and looking out for your friends. They had material about the impact of drinking, but in this wider context.

One of the issues that the pupils raised through the project was a growing problem with bullying in the school. This has now been taken up as a priority by teachers and parents.

The young people, the parents and the teachers are positive about the benefits of the joint project.

example 2 – a community working together to help the school

Parents at a primary school in the Scottish Borders decided to tidy up the playground over the summer holidays. This included painting the markings in the playground, some inside painting and tidying the woodland garden area.

They put up a poster in a local shop asking for volunteers as well as sending a note home with the children. The work happened over several weekends and there were many helpers.

- The people who took part included a lot of parents who did not have time to help on a regular basis or through the week
- Some older children who were now at secondary school came along to help
- Other people who were not parents came because they were keen to help or because they were friends with one of the parents
- Some people were there on most days
- Others just came for a few hours on one day
- People did different tasks
- Some people handed in food, so everyone could share sandwiches and home baking each day.

One person took lots of photographs. They were all posted up inside the school and some of the best and funniest went into the window of the local shop with a big thank you sign.

Activity

making the most of your community



Purpose

- To identify the resources that are available to support children's learning in the community
- To share this information with parents through a community directory or a community learning showcase



Who will be involved?

- Parent Council, pupils
- School staff
- Family Learning or Community Learning and Development Teams
- This might be an activity you could undertake with other schools in your area/cluster as a joint activity

> Step 1: Identify key organisations and community groups

Draw up a list of all the organisations, individuals and groups that members of the school community are already involved in or aware of who may have an interest in the school. If the Parent Council, Pupil Council and Staff Team each produce their own list, this should cover most of the groups and organisations. This will help you identify sources of information already available and will prevent duplication.

The list might include:

- Children's groups; early years groups, after school clubs, youth groups, 'uniformed' groups
- Sports clubs/activities for children and adults
- Religious and cultural groups and organisations
- Voluntary and community groups
- Key services such as doctors, clinics, libraries, dentists
- Community and adult learning providers
- People who represent the community such as councillors, MSPs.

> Step 2: Identify those which could help the school, its pupils and parents

Discuss how they already contribute to the work of the school and how their role might be developed. You will have a long list and might want to organise it in some way by grouping them together. Identify those you feel most closely support what the school is trying to achieve and which support parents and promote children's learning and development in the community.



➤ **Step 3: Share your findings with parents and pupils**

Invite these groups to a community showcase where they can display information about their organisation and tell others about what they do. Invite all parents and pupils and encourage them to come along and find out what is available in their community.

➤ **Step 4: Prepare a community directory**

Ask the groups to write a short paragraph on what they do to support children's learning and development and collate these into a Community Learning Directory – make sure not to duplicate resources already available. Make this widely available to pupils, parents and staff.



Fundraising for the school

Fundraising has traditionally been an activity that many parent groups have undertaken very successfully over the years and have raised many thousands of pounds to support their children's schools. The new Parent Councils also have the power to fundraise and may want to consider how they go about this.

In their discussions of the school development plan, Parent Councils may identify particular items or activities that would benefit from additional funding. There may be discussions about what the priorities are and these can then be checked out with other parents.

Once targets have been set, it may be effective to form a fundraising sub-committee. Some parents will have particular talents in this area and it may be a way of involving a wider group of parents to help with specific activities.

What it looks like when things go well

- Parents, teachers and pupils are involved in identifying priorities for fundraising and in generating ideas to achieve these
- Different fundraising approaches are used for different purposes
- Local businesses and shops are involved through donations of prizes or sponsorship of appropriate items or activities
- Events and activities appeal to a range of interests and personal budgets – there's something for everyone
- Fundraising events are an opportunity for parents and teachers to work together on a common task and develop positive relationships
- Items are identified that meet the criteria of local trusts and 'community chests' and approaches for funding are made to these
- There are fundraising events organised by pupils linked to educational activities within the school – e.g. enterprise in education
- Activities follow the 3 'Fs' (Fun, Food and Families) formula. Events that provide fun activities for all family members – adults and children – and also provide food are usually the most successful and that people want to come back to again and again
- Parents are able to contribute any particular skills or talents that they have
- The school 'piggy backs' on any wider community fundraising events
- As well as a few 'big' events in the year there are some smaller scale ongoing fundraising initiatives
- Everyone's contribution of effort or money is appreciated – however small
- Success is celebrated and people are thanked.



checklist

Fundraising events

(*See note opposite)

- Is there someone who will make sure that everyone knows what they need to do for the preparation of an event?
- Do you need a licence for your event?
- Do you need insurance, or to notify your existing insurer?
- If you are planning something that is weather dependent, do you have a contingency plan?
- Have you covered any health and safety issues?
- If you are hiring premises or equipment – have you time within the hire period to set up and tidy up?
- Have you got enough helpers?
- Do they all know what they are going to be doing?
- Who is going to set up and tidy up?
- Have you organised enough for people to do at the event? Do you want or need to have a raffle or tombola or a quiz or something else to keep them happy – and contribute to the fundraising effort!
- Have you got enough food/drinks/jumble?
- Have you got any equipment you need: plates/glasses/napkins/PA system/tables for jumble?
- Have you publicised the event early enough?
- If numbers are limited – have you made this clear so that people are not disappointed if they cannot get a place?
- Do you have a plan for collecting acceptances?
- Do you have a plan for making sure that people accepting after you've filled your quota are told in good time that they don't have a place?
- Have you got enough money to complete the organisation of the event before the money for ticket sales comes in?
- If you need a certain number of people to come along to break even, do you have a plan for how you are going to encourage more to come if numbers are looking low?
- If there are likely to be left overs of any kind – jumble, food – how are you going to dispose of them?



***Note:** It is important that the need to obtain appropriate public liability insurance is carefully considered. This is particularly important in the case of anyone thinking of setting up an interim Parent Council ahead of August 2007 when Parent Councils come into being. Parent Councils should investigate buying into a possible group policy, or local authority arrangements for insurance. See page 3 of the Guidance on the Parental Involvement Act.

example 3 – using local business to sponsor an activity

A primary school in Orkney has developed its website with funds from a trust set up by a local company. In return the company gets a mention on the website and some free publicity. This school has also developed a partnership with another firm that has helped the school purchase additional computer and IT equipment.

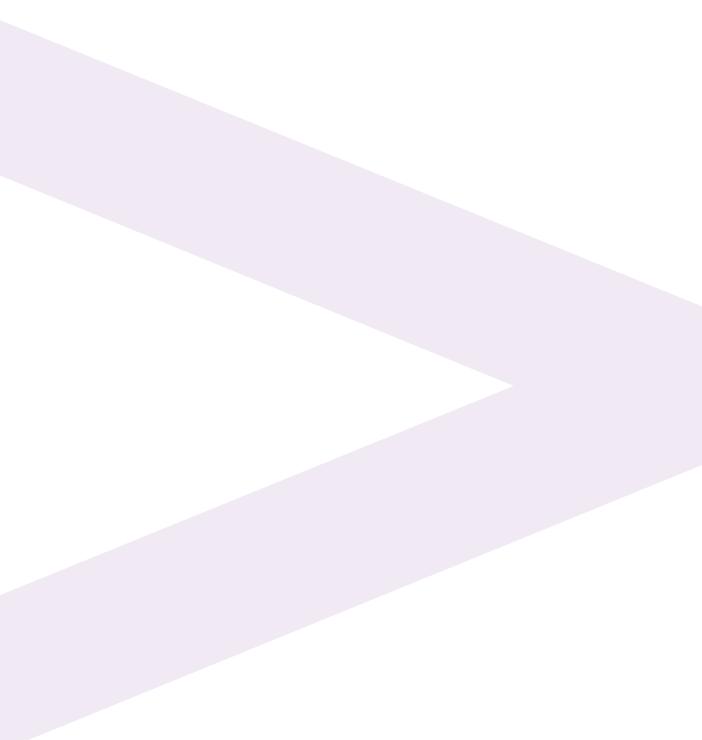




Section 6

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Developing a strategy for parental involvement

Section 2(1) of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 requires every education authority to prepare a strategy for parental involvement.

The strategy should describe how the education authority will fulfil its duty to:

- Promote the involvement of parents in the education provided by the school to their child and to pupils generally at their child's school
- Give advice and information to parents
- Promote the establishment of Parent Councils
- Give advice and information to Parent Councils and support their operation
- Take account of the needs of looked after children
- Consider how the strategy will promote equal opportunities
- Establish a complaints procedure in respect of the authority's functions under the Act.

The complaints procedure must be included in the strategy document.

Checklist

The following checklist takes account of the requirements in the Act and is based around two key issues: the education authority duty to promote parental involvement in school education; and parents' capacity to support children's education and engage effectively with schools.

Effective parental involvement is the joint responsibility of professionals and parents. The questions are designed to help education authorities develop an appropriate strategy for parental involvement in their area and to support parents' involvement in the development and review of that strategy.

In this section reference is made to parents' representatives – this means the Parent Council.

checklist

questions to help develop a strategy

Developing a strategy

- Do you have arrangements in place to develop or review a strategy for parental involvement?
- Do you involve parents in the process of developing or reviewing your strategy?
- Do you consult and involve pupils about the strategy? For example, school/authority Pupil Councils, Dialogue Youth.
- Do you include other parties in developing or reviewing your strategy?

Promoting parental involvement

- Does your strategy cover the three levels of engagement with parents:
 - Learning at home?
 - Home/School Partnership?
 - Parental representation?
- Does your strategy provide a clear statement of how barriers are being removed to promote more parental involvement?
- Does your strategy outline how your authority and schools work with parents who find it difficult to support their children's education due to family circumstances?
- Does your strategy take account of the needs of looked after children?
- How does the strategy promote equal opportunities and take account of the needs of particular minority groups in your local area?
- Does your strategy make links with the authority's duties under other relevant legislation, for example Additional Support for Learning Act?
- Does your strategy make appropriate links with other relevant policy areas? For example curriculum, support to pupils, pre-school, additional support needs, customer care, and other relevant agencies.
- Does your strategy take account of the training and development needs of staff and others working with children and their families?



checklist

questions to help develop a strategy

Establishing and supporting Parent Councils

- Does your authority make parents aware of their membership of the Parent Forum and what this means?
- Does your authority promote and establish Parent Councils in your area?
- Do parents' representatives have a general knowledge of the education authority duties to promote parental involvement?
- Are parents' representatives able to identify what they need, to carry out their functions and access appropriate resources?
- Does your authority assist parents' representatives to ascertain the views of the wider Parent Forum?
- Does your authority offer training and information for parents' representatives, in particular, those involved in the appointments process for senior staff as well as other duties?

Advice, information and handling complaints

- Does the strategy set out the arrangements your authority and schools have for giving advice and information to parents?
- Do these arrangements apply in the case of parents who do not live with their children?
- Does your authority and schools have arrangements in place for dealing with concerns/complaints from parents or anyone acting on their behalf?
- Does your authority involve Parent Councils and others in the establishment and review of its complaints procedure?
- Are parents in general made aware of your authority's complaints procedure?



checklist

questions to help develop a strategy

Communicating the strategy

- Do local authority staff and parents who want to get more involved have a general knowledge of the parental involvement legislation and the authority's duties to promote this?
- Do appropriate local authority, school staff and support staff have sound knowledge of the provisions of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 and Scottish Executive guidance and toolkit supporting the Act?
- Is the strategy document included in your authority's Statement of Improvement Objectives?
- Do all school improvement plans include parental involvement?
- Are parents made aware of the strategy and how they can access it?
- Are parents in the pre-school sector made aware of the benefits of parental involvement in children's education?

Monitoring and reviewing strategy

- Does your strategy link to HMIE's self-evaluation guidance on parent partnership?
- Does the strategy include arrangements to monitor and evaluate the impact of your authority's policies on parental involvement?
- Do you consider and respond to parents' expectations and views on how they are involved in school education?



Time frame for developing and reviewing the strategy

This table outlines a general framework for the education authority, parents and schools to develop or review a strategy. The timings are only suggestions and can be changed to match local circumstances.

Aims	Tasks	Time frame (suggestions)
<p>Identifying issues</p>	<p>Invite contributions – tell parents and schools what is happening and how they can contribute.</p> <p>Hold open discussions to gather views on what the main issues and priorities are for your area. (See examples on pages 67-70.)</p> <p>Arrange support for parents who may need this to contribute effectively – for example, because of disabilities, where English is not their first language.</p> <p>Involve relevant staff and keep them updated.</p> <p>Think about how to involve pupils, e.g. involve the school's Pupil Council.</p> <p>Tell other people in your local community who have an interest.</p>	<p>6-10 weeks</p>
<p>Writing the draft strategy</p>	<p>Set up a working group to develop a draft strategy for consultation.</p> <p>Working group can comprise school staff and parents, as well as local authority staff. Continue to offer practical support for parents taking part.</p> <p>Build in examples of parents being involved that have worked well in your authority.</p> <p>Involve appropriate parent or community groups to ensure a broad range of experiences and ideas contribute to the strategy.</p> <p>Involve key staff such as headteachers, Quality Improvement Officers, Home School Link Workers, Integrated Children's Services Staff, Educational Psychologists Social Workers, etc.</p>	<p>4-8 weeks</p>



Aims	Tasks	Time frame (suggestions)
Consulting on the draft	<p>Share the revised draft strategy with Parent Councils and finalise it.</p> <p>Obtain approval from the education committee for the strategy.</p>	6-8 weeks
Communicating the strategy	<p>Hold events for people to hear about it. Get publicity for it.</p> <p>Get copies into places that are easily accessible for parents; have summary versions available in different formats and languages.</p> <p>Organise publicity in local newspapers and radio.</p>	Launch event and (ongoing)
Implementing the strategy	<p>Help the schools to think about how they can implement the strategy. Hold a session for staff and parents to look at how the strategy can help promote good partnerships in your school.</p> <p>Encourage the Parent Council to think about how the strategy can be useful to them and promote a good partnership with the school.</p>	Ongoing with specific targets included in planning
Reviewing the strategy	<p>Feed in points and work in partnership with parents and the authority as issues/points arise.</p> <p>Make the links with the on-going involvement of all parents on a day-to-day basis and the ongoing review.</p> <p>Invite schools and parents to take part in a regular review.</p> <p>Involve Parent Councils, staff and pupils in what you are updating.</p>	Suggest every 2-3 years?



example 1 – developing a strategy – the Angus Council Model

“It was great the Director of Education allowed the parents to lead the policy on Parental Involvement.” **Parent, Angus**

“Working together with parents in this way has made me realise how much knowledge, skills and experience parents bring. Where I used to contact a colleague to ask for advice, I would contact a parent now too.” **Member of staff, Angus Council**

Parents and staff from Angus Council worked through together to develop a Policy on Parental Involvement. There were a number of steps to the process.

Getting started – identifying the issues

A representative focus group of 15 parents took place with a community learning and development worker, as facilitator. This took the form of a brainstorming session based on:

- What does parental involvement mean?
- Sharing good practice and ideas
- The barriers to parental involvement

Working party to develop the policy

A working party was set up consisting of equal numbers of parents and staff which included a primary and a secondary headteacher, a community learning and development worker, the advice and conciliation officer and the Director of Education. It was set up to take forward ideas from the focus group, to consider what the solutions were to the problems identified, and to continue the process of working together to develop the Policy Document.

Involving more parents

Parents and education staff facilitated focus groups for each local area across Angus to share the policy in its early draft form and gain views on it from more parents. Two parents were invited to attend from each school, one who was on a representative group for parents and one who was not. Parents from the working party and the first brainstorming session lead the focus groups supported by a member of staff. Views were collated and fed into the working party developing the policy.

Staff involvement

A staff focus group took place to ensure their views were included. Staff from each school were invited including staff representing the teaching unions.

Reaching more parents

Further focus group meetings took place in each local area across Angus to provide an update on the draft policy and gather further comments/feedback.

Parents present to staff

Parents presented at the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland conference, headteachers' meetings, and parent representative meetings with elected members. At the parent representative's meeting, 80 parents turned out to comment on the final draft of the policy.

"We couldn't believe what we had said in the focus group was actually written into the policy."

Parent

Final checks

The draft policy was sent out to all schools, support services, parents who had been involved in its development and all parent representative groups. Further changes were made at working party meetings. Parents and the Director of Education attended a 'Partnership with Parents' conference which provided further ideas for the policy. The final policy was then agreed and a date set for review.

Launch of policy and spreading the word

An Action Group was formed to plan for the policy launch conference and to support the ongoing work with the policy. Some parents who had not been previously involved and staff from other areas of work e.g. the early years worker from the child care partnership were included.

Parents' conference

A conference was held in Angus College to launch the policy. Workshops were led by parents, supported by staff, and covered many areas highlighting where parents are involved in their children's education. Professional actors demonstrated barriers to parental involvement through short sketches.

Roll out to schools

Local Action Teams were established within each local area to support schools and parents to work together to develop their own policies and organise a local events which had a team of actors involved.

Benefits included:

- Staff and parents working together
- Everyone having an equal say
- Bringing together ideas that lead to solutions
- Attention to language and jargon in the policy

"And we still have a long way to go."

Parents and staff



Activity 1

an open space event to identify key issues



Purpose

- To gather ideas and views on themes for the strategy framework
- People to be able to participate easily and express their views
- You want people to learn from each other
- You want a session that is lively and fun



Who will be involved?

- Parents who are not actively involved as well as parents who are part of representative bodies
- Teachers, support staff and senior managers
- Young people

> The 'Open Space' Event

An open space event can be an excellent way for a wide range of staff and parents working together to explore good practice or identify issues. Open space events are best run with a minimum number of around 20 with the maximum about 100. Allocate people to groups before the event if possible.

In advance of the event participants identify the theme/s for discussion. A speaker is needed to lead the event. The leader opens the event by introducing the theme. The theme is then discussed in groups of between 4 and 10 people and participants identify issues. Delegates are not expected to 'represent' the views of their school or council; their individual views and ideas are what will count.

> Example of a key theme

How do we work together to promote parental involvement to help children to do their best and be all they can be?

> Issues for discussion:

- What can schools do?
- What can parents do?
- What can others do?

> Running the meeting

Participants are asked to:

- Identify their 'issues and ideas' related to the theme
- Discuss their issue
- Identify causes and possible solutions to problems/issues identified
- Prioritise three key action points to resolve the issues.

> Outcomes: A report of the event is then prepared and shared with participants, the education authority, parents and the school. Actions agreed can then be used to advise development of the education authority strategy.

example 2 – a parents' conference – 'a gaithering o' fowk, tae hae their say'

Aberdeen City Council organised a conference with the aim of achieving effective involvement of parents in education. The conference was attended by parents, teachers, school staff, community staff and representatives from voluntary organisations. The work of local staff supporting and encouraging attendance was seen as crucial to ensuring the attendance of a range of parents. Some of the parents present indicated that this was the first time they had attended a conference. Childcare facilities, transport and entertainment for children all helped parents to attend the conference.

Brilliant day let's have some more.

Positive outlook for my own and others – children for the future.

Great venue – very positive feel to the day. Fulfilled the 3 F's (family, fun, food).

On the day

The day consisted of a presentation followed by workshops covering the wide range of ways parents are involved in their children's education. The workshops encouraged participation and give delegates an opportunity to discuss issues and share experiences.

The workshops were an opportunity for participants to voice their opinion on how they thought Aberdeen City Council should design its policy on involving parents and carers in their children's learning. Questions in the workshops were based around:

- Where does learning take place?
- Who is involved?
- What can parents contribute?
- What barriers exist to parental involvement?
- What reduces the barriers and how can we eliminate them?

After lunch, delegates were re-energized through the 'Family Learning Surprise'. This involved a 5-minute maths aerobics session which consisted of spins, steps and hops. At the end of the conference delegates were asked to give feedback. The high number of responses (93%) reflected the general 'buzz' generated by the conference.

Managing complaints

No matter how strong partnerships are, and how good strategies and policies are, things can still go wrong. It is important, therefore, to have clear arrangements in place so that staff and parents can resolve issues together, with support if necessary.

In order to maintain positive relationships, it is usually better for all parties, if parental complaints/concerns can be resolved at school level as quickly as possible. How you learn from complaints, and make improvements as a result of complaints, says a lot about your school and authority.

There are two things headteachers should do when they get a complaint: listen, and imagine what it would be like being in the parent's shoes.

A headteacher

Dealing with complaints:

Handling complaints properly is an important part of good customer care. It shows that you:

- listen to parents' views
- learn from your mistakes
- are continually trying to improve.

Top Ten Tips

1. Keep it simple – avoid long forms.
2. Use face to face contact and the phone – don't automatically send a letter, most parents like to talk.
3. Listen for positive comments made and feed them back.
4. Find out straight away what would help.
5. Be clear what solutions you can offer.
6. Where appropriate, a quick apology is better than a long letter.
7. Give personal and specific replies – a standard reply will only make things worse.
8. Use one point of contact.
9. Let parents know about improvements made as a result of their complaints.
10. And remember – more complaints can be good news! It shows that your parents trust you to take them seriously.



Checklist

an effective complaints procedure

- Do you make your complaints procedure available in a variety of formats? Are these easy to access, well publicised and easy to understand and follow?
- Are parents and staff aware of your complaints procedure? Are parents encouraged to make complaints or raise their concerns early?
- Are staff encouraged to have a positive attitude towards parental complaints/concerns?
- Does your procedure include reference to 'putting things right' and offering an apology when appropriate?
- Does your procedure reassure parents that their rights to confidentiality will be respected and next steps discussed?
- Does your procedure reassure parents that they, or their children will not suffer by way of repercussion or discrimination as a result of making a complaint?
- Do schools and the authority support parents, who face difficulties, to communicate their concerns or complaints?
- Can parents raise a concern with a member of the staff in the way that is easiest for them, either by talking, email, phone, or in writing?
- Are there arrangements in place to give feedback to parents who make complaints?
- Are clear timescales included in your procedure?
- Are there arrangements in place in schools for the headteacher, or another senior member of staff, to deal with unresolved issues?
- Do school staff have access to appropriate development opportunities for handling concerns or complaints?
- Is there a single point of contact at education authority level for matters that are not resolved at school level? Do schools know when and how to contact this person?
- Does the authority's complaints procedure under the Act fit with other formal or informal appeal routes e.g. placing request procedures?
- Does the authority have arrangements in place to offer mediation or independent resolution if required?
- Does the authority make parents aware of how to progress complaints or concerns if they are not satisfied at education authority level, e.g. where appropriate, the Care Commission, (in the case of pre-school provision), the local authority Chief Executive, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, etc?
- Do senior staff have arrangements in place to respond to complaints raised by the Parent Council?
- Does the authority have arrangements in place to respond to general concerns raised by Parent Councils which have not been resolved at school level?

Other resolution approaches

Many schools and education authorities are now using mediation and other resolution approaches to resolve parental concerns. Whilst it is accepted there will be times when some complaints will require an investigative approach, very often a more successful outcome can be achieved, to the satisfaction of both parties, by people coming together and talking about their concerns with the support of a third party.

Here are some comments from parents and headteachers who were involved in resolution approaches:-

What they liked:

Headteachers:

Having someone neutral that does not side with anyone.

It let me see it was better to be open with parents.

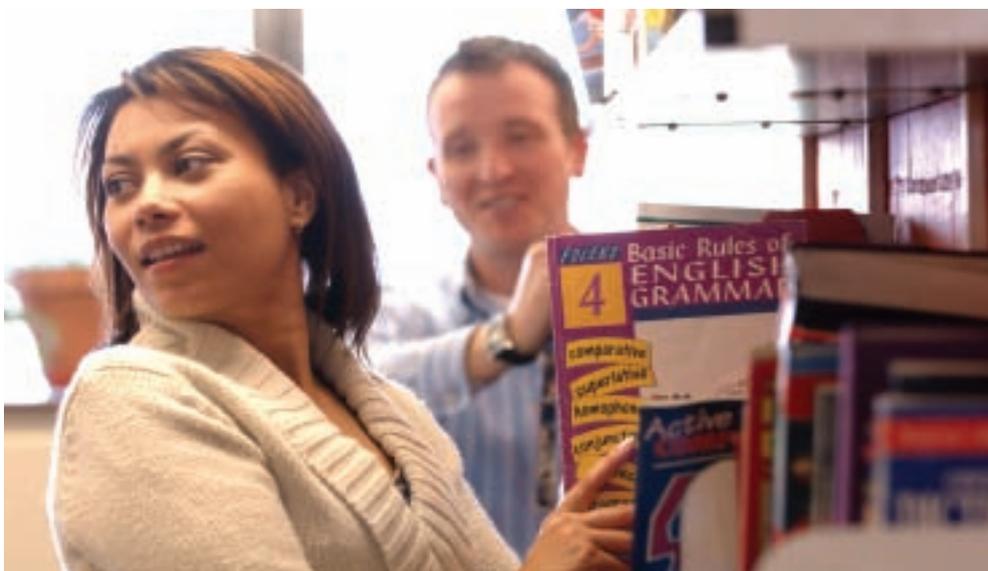
If I listen to their point of view, they are more likely to listen to mine.

Parents:

Being taken seriously.

It helped the headteacher listen to my point of view.

It helped my child be happier.



Section 7

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What is the Parent Forum?

The membership of a Parent Forum is made up of parents who have a child at an education authority school. Parents are automatically members of the Parent Forum for their school. One of the ways parents in the Parent Forum will be able to express their views will be through the Parent Council. As a member of the Parent Forum, each parent can expect to:

- Receive information about the school and its activities
- Hear more in future about what partnership with parents means in their school
- Be invited to be involved in ways and times that suit them
- Participate in deciding how the parent representative body, the Parent Council, is organised and how it operates
- Identify issues they want the Parent Council to work on with the school
- Be asked their opinion by the Parent Council on issues relating to the school and the education it provides
- Work in partnership with staff
- Enjoy taking part in the life of the school in whatever way they can.

It is important that all parents know about their membership of the Parent Forum.

What is the Parent Council?

The Parent Council is a group of parents selected by members of the Parent Forum to represent all the parents of children at a school. Parent Councils are very flexible groups and the Parent Forum can decide on the type of group it wants to represent their views. Parents might decide they want a representative from each year group in the school. They might want to include pupils, other teachers at the school or parents from a feeder primary or secondary school. This flexibility allows parents to choose a Parent Council which reflects their school and will encourage parents to get involved.

The type of things a Parent Council could get involved in include:

- Supporting the work of the school
- Gathering and representing parents' views to the headteacher, education authority and HMIE
- Promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils, providers of nursery education and the local community
- Fundraising
- Organising events
- Being involved in the appointment of senior staff.



Main features of Parent councils

- The Parent Forum decides on the type of Parent Council and constitution that is right for the school
- Only parents of children at that school can be members of the Parent Council
- The Parent Forum can agree that the Parent Council constitution allows other people to be co-opted
- The local church or denominational body can nominate someone to be co-opted onto the Parent Council of a denominational school
- The Parent Council chair must be a parent of a child at that school
- The headteacher or their representative has a right and a duty to attend Parent Council meetings, unless the parents and headteacher decide otherwise
- Schools can choose to set up a Combined Parent Council which would cover more than one school.



Sample letter telling parents about the Parent Forum and Parent Council

Dear (name of parent,)

I am writing to tell you about some of the ways you can get involved in the school and your children's education.

We are keen to work with you to help us give your child the best education we can provide. We value and welcome parents' involvement in the school. As a parent of a child in attendance at the school, you are automatically part of what is called the Parent Forum for the school. As a member of the Parent Forum:

- You can ask the school for advice and information on your child's education and how you can support this
- You will have the opportunity to come along to meetings and to feed in your ideas in other ways
- You can also help choose the Parent Council for your child's school – this is a group of parents who represent the views of all parents in the school.

There are lots of different ways of getting involved in education and in your child's learning. Just enjoying being in the school, is important. What you do matters, and can make a real difference to your child's education and achievement. You can find more information about the school and its policies for parental involvement in our school handbook, by talking to a member of staff, on the school website or by asking a member of the Parent Council (add your own information).

You can also get information about how to support your child's learning and education from the same contacts mentioned above as well as the local authority [education authority to insert contact details]; the Parentzone website [www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk] and from the Making the Difference leaflets available from the school or on Parentzone.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with [contact].

We are looking forward to you being a member of our Parent Forum and to getting to know you over the years to come.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher of school and/or Chair of Parent Council



Supporting Parents to set up a Parent council

Many parents and schools will need support to work through the process of setting up a Parent Council. Before education authorities contact parents and schools to begin the process, they should think about how parents can be supported.

Who can help parents?

- Home school link workers who are good at engaging with parents who do not usually get involved
- Community learning and development workers who have skills in facilitating and supporting people to set up constitutions and groups
- Parents who can support other parents using their own skills
- Teachers and other school staff skilled at listening and supporting parents to make their own decisions
- Quality improvement officers who support headteachers to develop new areas of their work and ensure the quality of partnership with parents is taken into consideration
- Senior staff in the education authority who, as part of their job, work with parents
- Administrative staff can support communication with the Parent Forum and administration of a working group.

The following checklist highlights some of the issues that the education authority and schools will need to think about when identifying how to support parents through the process.

checklist

Supporting parents

Considering parents information and support needs

Do parents:

- Know about the Parental Involvement Act and the opportunities it offers them?
- Have sufficient knowledge about the school population and local community?
- Have information about all the ways parents are already involved with the school?
- Have information about the ways parents can be involved in their child's learning and in the school?
- Have information about the ways pupils get involved at the school and how this could support their parents' involvement?
- Have access to materials that encourage parents to get involved in their children's education, such as the Making the Difference leaflets or materials provided by the school?



Setting up a Parent council

It is the role of the education authority to prepare a scheme to encourage parents and schools to set up Parent Councils. Education authorities should do this in partnership with parents. The decision about what the Parent Council will look like – and indeed whether one is set up – is the decision of each Parent Forum.

One of the most important issues to think about when setting up a Parent Council is that parents will need time to work their way through the process. The more time that is allowed to work through the process slowly, the better the quality of involvement will be.

Involving parents in identifying options

There are a range of ways parents could get involved in identifying the type of Parent Council they would like to see in their school. The best place to start is to identify what the issues are for parents about their school and the type of parental involvement they would like to see. Starting from this point can then lead to parents thinking about whether they want a Parent Council and if so, what type of group they would like for their school. Some ideas to generate discussion about issues and what is already working in schools include:

- A one-day conference held for the school or for parents across the education authority to share good practice and think about ways they would like to get involved in their child's education. As part of the conference, parents could identify whether they are interested in setting up a Parent Council and what they would like it to do. (See example of a parents conference at Section 6.)
- Run an open space event (see Section 6). This could help parents to explore good practice and identify issues for parents.
- Hold an informal meeting for parents and use some of the issue identification exercises in the toolkit to look at what is working and what parents would like to change. (See Sections 2 and 3.)
- Parents taking part in a conference, open space meeting or informal meeting could decide to set up a school working party to develop and consider options to set up the Parent Council. The working party would be made up of a small group of parents and could include representation from each year group in the school, the headteacher or representation from the Pupil Council. Once options are developed, the working party could bring parents together to talk the options through.



Role of a School Working Party

The role of the working party could include:

- Identifying issues that are important to parents
- Consider the options for setting up a Parent Council which would support working on these issues
- Develop a draft constitution based on the various options for the Parent Council
- Communicate regularly with the Parent Forum to gather the views and approval about the options the working party suggest for the Parent Council and the constitution
- Communicate regularly with the school and involve the headteacher and other school staff to help consider the options
- Report back to the education authority with suggested arrangements for the Parent Council and the constitution
- The education authority could then use this feedback to prepare the scheme to establish a Parent Council
- The education authority could formally report back to the Parent Forum on the scheme which would contain the options to set up a Parent Council. The Parent Forum would then reach agreement about its preferred option.



Checklist

main steps in using a school working party to set up a Parent Council

Step 1. Identifying and considering the options

Have you considered:

- How parents can be involved in identifying and considering options for setting up a Parents Council?
- What will help to make parent partnership better in this school?
- What are the main issues or barriers to parents and staff working together?
- Whether the Parent Forum wishes to have a Parent Council to represent them?
- What are the areas and issues of interest to parents in this school? Has there been a parents' event or meeting to identify issues for parents?
- What works in the current arrangements? What do parents want to build on? What do parents want to change?
- What type of constitution do parents want for the Parent Council?
- What arrangements for setting up the Parent Council would be best for this school?
- How parents, the school and the education authority can ensure that proposals to set up a Parent Council reflect the needs of all parents?

Step 2. Parent Forum decides

The school Working Party reports back to the education authority with suggested arrangements for the Parent Council and draft constitution. Education authority sends a copy of the proposed arrangements for the Parent Council and draft constitution to all members of the Parent Forum in writing.

Have you considered:

- How parents will be asked about their views on the proposed arrangements?
- What ways can be used to publicise proposed arrangements?
- Do parents have reasonable time to reply?
- How can it be made easy for parents to respond?



Step 3. Selecting the membership of the Parent Council

The final step in setting up the Parent Council is for the education authority and working party to implement the agreed arrangements for setting up the Parent Council.

Have you considered:

- Are selection methods in line with what parents have chosen for their Parent Council constitution?
- Are there fair and transparent arrangements in place to run a selection process?
- If there is voting, who are the best people to count the votes?
- What financial, administrative and ongoing support will the authority provide to members of the Parent Council? Does the Parent Forum want to have a Clerk appointed to support the Parent Council?
- When set up, who on the Parent Council will inform the headteacher, education authority, members of the Parent Forum, pupils, that the Parent Council has been set up, who the members are, and how to get in touch with them.
- Does the headteacher have a copy of the constitution?

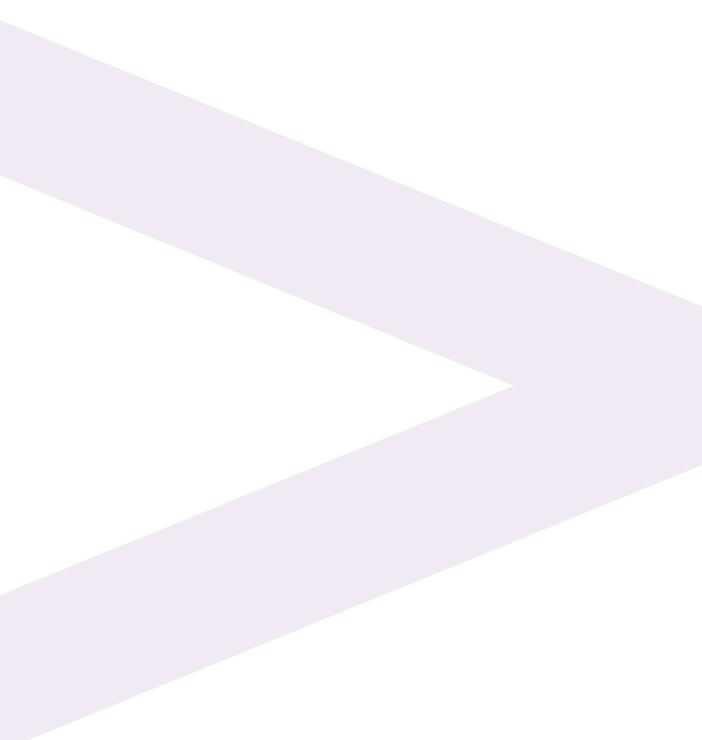




Section 8

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Developing a Parent council

Section 7 sets out the detail about what Parent Forums and Parent Councils are all about. The Parent Forum, which is made up of all parents, carers and/or guardians of pupils at the school, will decide on the type of Parent Council parents think will suit the school. This section sets out questions and suggested wording for the Parent Council constitution.

By working through the questions, the answers will give you suggestions for the type of Parent Council which will suit your school. A model of what a completed constitution might look like is provided at the end of the section. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 sets out arrangements for the membership and functions of Parent Councils. Whilst there is no need to repeat them in the constitution, they will remain legal requirements. The same point applies to any other piece of relevant legislation. This section should be studied closely alongside the guidance on the Act.

Parent Councils can be very informal groups – this informality should make it easier for more parents to take part.

Points to think about

How your Parent Council works is determined by what is set down in its constitution. The main function of a constitution is to describe the Parent Council, what its objectives are and how it will carry these out. Some of the things to think about include:

- **Name:** what do we call ourselves?
- **Aims/Objectives:** what is the Parent Council here for?
- **Members:** how many people will the Parent Council need to help carry out these tasks?
- **Appointment system:** how do we want members of the Parent Council to be chosen/selected?
- How can we ensure that the Parent Council represents the full range of parents at the school?
- Would it be useful to co-opt additional members to the Parent Council?
- How will members of the Parent Council hear the views of all parents and give them feedback?
- How should the Parent Council carry out its work?
- Do we want to have sub groups?



Combined Parent Council

If parents decide they would like to set up a Parent Council which includes more than one school they can set up a Combined Parent Council. This might cover, for example, two neighbouring schools, two schools who share the same headteacher or perhaps a secondary school and its feeder primary school(s). The questions set out here are generally based on setting up a single Parent Council, but can be adapted to setting up a Combined Parent Council for which similar issues will arise.

Considering options for a constitution

Topic 1: NAME what do we call ourselves?

The Parent Forum decides the name for the Parent Council. It is not necessary to call it a Parent Council; you could call it Friends of the School. The name you choose tells people what the Council stands for and what it is trying to achieve.

What your constitution might say

This is the constitution for Anytown School Parent Council (or alternative name).

Topic 2: Aims-purposes. What is the Parent Council for?

What a Parent Council does falls broadly into four areas:

- Supporting the school in its work with pupils
- Representing the views of parents
- Promoting contact between the school, parents, pupils, providers of nursery education and the community
- Reporting to the Parent Forum.

In writing the aims/objectives for your Parent Council, you should keep them similarly broad, not focused on particular issues and ideas, so that they do not limit the Council's ability to act in the future if a different issue comes up.

The formal functions of the Parent Council are described in the Act and the guidance which accompanies this toolkit. You do not have to include these in your constitution but parents might decide to reflect them in the constitution, provided they are consistent with the Act itself.



When drawing up the aims and objectives, you should think about the range of issues that are currently important for your school, what you might want the Parent Council to do and whether such activities would be possible under this set of aims.

For example:

- Do your objectives allow the Parent Council to run fundraising activities?
- Do your objectives allow the Parent Council to campaign against plans to close the school?

What your constitution might say

The **OBJECTIVES** of the Parent Council are:

1. To work in partnership with the school to create a welcoming school which is inclusive for all parents
2. To promote partnership between the school, its pupils and all its parents
3. To develop and engage in activities which support the education and welfare of the pupils
4. To identify and represent the views of parents on the education provided by the school and other matters affecting the education and welfare of the pupils.

Topic 3: The number of members

The size of the Parent Council is not prescribed and it can be as large/small as parents think it needs to be in order to fulfil the Parent Council's role. The size might also vary according to the size, nature and diversity of parents of pupils at the school. It is for the Parent Forum to decide the number of members on the Parent Council.

It is a good idea to allow for a range rather than a fixed number i.e. to set a minimum and maximum number of say 5 and 20 members, rather deciding on a fixed membership of 12.

If you have a small Parent Council, there may not be enough people to do all the work; if you have a large Parent Council, it may be difficult to run the meetings. However, it is worth remembering that it is unlikely that Parent Council members will be able to attend every meeting, so whatever size the Council is, most meetings will have fewer people than this attending. If you only have a small number of parents involved at any time, use this as a platform to build on.

What your constitution might say

The membership will be a minimum of three parents of children attending the school. The maximum size is *[insert a figure according to the size of the school and as agreed by members of the Parent Forum]*.



Topic 4: Who should/could be the members and how should they be selected?

Parents

The starting point is that members of the Parent Council should be drawn from the parents, carers and guardians of pupils at the school.

The headteacher

The headteacher of the school has a right and a duty to attend meetings of the Parent Council, or to be represented. The headteacher can play an important role in advising the Parent Council on all issues relating to the work of the school and what it does to involve parents, as well as general education matters of interest to the Parent Council.

Church representatives

If your school is a denominational school, then you must invite the church or denominational body to nominate a representative to be co-opted onto the Parent Council. This will need to be provided for in the constitution.

Some questions to think about in selecting parents:

- How do you identify parents who want to join the Parent Council? For example, they could volunteer or be nominated by another parent.
- Who are the parents of the school and what are their particular needs? How can they be included in the Parent Council?
- Do you want to have a representative of each year group at the school?
- Do you want to have more than one representative per year group?
- Do you want to appoint substitutes, to ensure each year group is always represented at Parent Council meetings even if one member is unable to attend?
- If there is a nursery in the school, should there be a parent from this group?

Once you have made decisions about these questions, you then have to decide how the members should be selected.

The process of selecting the Parent Council members:

- What methods for selecting the Parent Council would make it easy for all parents to take part in the selection process?
- Once the volunteers for the Parent Council have been identified, what happens if you get more volunteers than there are places available?



Some questions to think about:

- How do you make a decision about which parents join the Parent Council?
- Do you want to run an election?
- Do you want to put all the names in a hat and have a draw for the successful candidates?
- Can you still involve those people who volunteered but were not chosen for the Parent Council – for example on sub groups?
- How long should someone be a member for?
- Will you have methods for parents becoming members of the Parent Council at any point during the year if numbers fall away or if parents express an interest in getting involved?

What your constitution might say

The Parent Council will be selected for a period of *[insert one/two/three year(s)]*, after which they may put themselves forward for re-selection if they wish.

All the parents of children at the school can take part in the selection by post, text or email. Parents will have *[insert figure agreed by Parent Forum]* weeks to select their representatives.

or

Any parents of a child at the school can volunteer to be a member of the Parent Council. In the event that the number of volunteers exceeds the number of places set out in the constitution, members will be selected by *[insert chosen method of selection]*. Anyone not selected to be a member of the Parent Council may be offered the opportunity to be part of any sub-groups set up by the Council.

or

The Parent Council will be made up of two representatives from each year group who will be chosen by the parents of children in those year groups.

Topic 5: Are there other people you would like to include in your Parent Council?

In addition to parent members, the Parent Forum can decide to co-opt other members onto the Parent Council.

School staff – teaching and support staff

If the Parent Forum wishes, and the school staff are willing, it can invite school staff (both teaching and support staff) to join the Parent Council. This picks up on the 'whole school partnership' idea. However, you will want to ensure that parents remain in overall majority on the Parent Council. A Parent Forum could decide, for example, that they want their Parent Council to be made up of two thirds parent members and one third co-opted teacher members to strengthen partnership within the school.

If school staff agree to participate in the Parent Council, they may decide they simply want to nominate representatives. Alternatively, there could be an agreed rotation among staff.



Pupils

Parent Forums, in taking account of pupils' views, may wish to do so in the following ways:

- There could be liaison, formally and informally, between the Parent Council and the Pupil Council
- There could be pupil members on the Parent Council
- The Pupil Council and the Parent Council might have the chance to send representatives to each others' meetings as and when it is appropriate.

Further ideas for involving pupils are provided in Section 4.

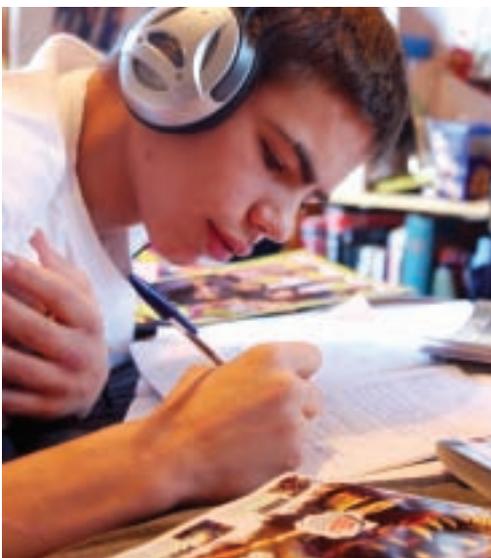
Other co-optees

The Parents' Forum can decide to co-opt others in addition to teachers, pupils and support staff onto the Parent Council. There might be people who could bring a particular area of expertise and skills or someone might help develop strong links with the local community. Under School Board arrangements, co-optees were invited to join by the board. The Parent Forum can decide if this is still the best system.

You don't always have to co-opt someone onto the Parent Council to benefit from their experience. The Parent Forum or Parent Council can decide to invite people with particular expertise to attend meetings as and when it is necessary.

If the Parent Forum decides to invite co-opted members to join the Parent Council, the arrangements for their involvement should be set out in the Parent Council constitution.

The Parent Forum will also need to think about how many co-opted places they want to provide and for how long co-optees will serve. Once again it will be important to consider the impact co-optees will have on the overall size of the Parent Council and on the balance of membership.





What your constitution might say

The Parent Council may co-opt up to *[insert figure as agreed by members of the Parent Forum*]* to assist it with carrying out its functions.

*If your school is a denominational school add: *"of which at least one must be a member of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school is conducted"*.

or

Two-thirds of the Parent Council will be made up of Parent Forum members and one-third of the membership will be reserved for other co-opted members including teaching and support staff in the school.

The number of parent members on the Parent Council must always be greater than co-opted members.

Co-opted members will be invited to serve for a period of *[insert one/two/three year(s)]*, after which time the Parent Council will review and consider requirements for co-opted membership.

Running the parent council

Topic 6: Do we need to have office bearers?

There is no requirement for Parent Councils to have office bearers although there are clear tasks that have to be done. For example meetings have to be chaired, agendas set, minutes taken and the finances managed so you might find it helpful to have some clear roles within the Parent Council. It is good practice to have office bearers in a group.

The Parent Forum can decide to have a Chair and the person who chairs any meeting must be a parent of a child at the school. There is scope for flexibility about how the role of the chair operates. The Parent Forum could decide to share the role of the Chair with each parent member taking a turn at chairing meetings of the Parent Council.

The Parent Council can decide to appoint a Clerk to provide administrative support and look after the Parent Council's financial accounts.

Questions for parents to think about

- Do we need office bearers?
- If so, which office bearers do we need?
- Do we want to have one chair of the Parent Council or do we want to share chairing meetings around parent members?
- Do we want the office bearers to be agreed by the Parent Council, or by the Parent Forum?



Depending on the way you choose to select your Parent Council members, the office bearers can be agreed at the same time. Alternatively, the members selected to the Parent Council could choose from among themselves who should be the office bearers until the next selection takes place. If the office bearers are to be chosen by the Parent Council members, you may wish to ask the headteacher, or an independent person, to chair that part of the meeting at which this is done to make sure it is fair.

You will want to think about what you would do if the child of a parent who chairs meetings no longer attends the school. If you have a vice-chair, he or she could act as chair for the time being, provided they were a member of the Parent Forum. Alternatively you could share the role of the chair amongst the parent members of the Parent Council until the annual general meeting.

What your constitution might say

If the Parent Forum decides to have office bearers:

The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of the Parent Council will be appointed by the Parent Council members immediately following its formation.

or

Office bearers will be re-selected by the Parent Council on an annual basis (at the annual meeting of the Parent Forum).

If the Parent Forum decides to have a Chair:

The Parent Council will be chaired by a parent of a child attending Anytown School. If the child ceases to be a pupil, a new chair will be agreed at the next meeting.

or

If the child ceases to be a pupil, the role of the chair will be rotated around the parent members of the Parent Council until a new chair is appointed at the annual meeting.

Topic 7: General Meetings and Annual General Meetings

The Parent Council acts as the collective voice of all parents within the wider Parent Forum. It is important that the Council has flexible arrangements in place for hearing the views of parents, representing these to the school, or the local authority, or other body, and providing feedback to the Parent Forum.

The Parent Council has to report back at least once a year to the Parent Forum but it will also be important to have good ongoing communication between both the Forum and Parent Council members. These arrangements do not need to be set out in the constitution. However, the constitution should set out how a special general meeting can be called.



What your constitution might say

The Parent Council is accountable to the Parent Forum for Anytown School and will make a report to it at least once each year on its activities on behalf of all the parents.

If [x] number [or %] of members of the Parent Forum request a special general meeting to discuss issues falling within the Parent Council's remit, the Parent Council shall arrange this. The Parent Council shall give all members of the Forum at least [2 weeks] notice of the meeting and, at the same time, circulate notice of the matter, or matters, to be discussed at the meeting.

Topic 8: Annual meeting

It is good practice for the Parent Council to hold an annual meeting – the Parent Forum would decide this at the time it agrees the constitution. The annual meeting would be when the parents selected new members for the Parent Council and when the Parent Council reported back formally to the Parent Forum. If the Parent Forum decides it wants to have an annual meeting, a new Parent Council will need to hold its first Annual Meeting within 12 months of starting up. After the first annual meeting, there should be 12 months between future annual meetings. It is important that people know in good time about the meeting, and feel that they are truly welcome.

What your constitution might say

The Annual Meeting will be held in April of each year. A notice of the meeting including date, time, and place will be sent to all members of the Parent Forum at least two weeks in advance. The meeting will include:

- A report on the work of the Parent Council and its committee(s)
- Selection of the new Parent Council
- Discussion of issues that members of the Parent Forum may wish to raise
- Approval of the accounts and appointment of the auditor.

Topic 9: How should the Parent council carry out its work?

Clear arrangements about how the Parent Council organises and runs meetings can help the Council to operate effectively. Some key areas to cover are suggested in the draft wording for your constitution.



Questions for parents to think about

- How often the Parent Council is going to meet, and how often any working groups are going to meet, and how decisions are going to be made.
- What happens if an important matter needs to be discussed and the next planned meeting is not for some weeks?
- What would the group do if a parent member of the Parent Council acted in a way that is not in keeping with the aims and objectives of the Council? Inviting a member to leave the Parent Council should be used as a very last resort and would happen in situations where, for example, a member was using the Council in order to promote an individual issue to do with their child or if the member's behaviour at meetings was disruptive or abusive.

What your constitution might say

The Parent Council will meet at least once in every school term.

Should a vote be necessary to make a decision, each parent member at the meeting will have one vote, with the Chair having a casting vote in the event of a tie.

Any two parent members of the Parent Council can request that an additional meeting be held, and all members of the Parent Council will be given at least one week's notice of date, time and place of the meeting.

If a Parent Council member acts in a way that is considered by other members to undermine the objectives of the Parent Council, their membership of the Parent Council shall be terminated if the majority of parent members agree. Termination of membership would be confirmed in writing to the member.

Topic 10: Notes of meetings

You can help to keep all members of the Parent Forum informed by making copies of Parent Council meetings available.

What your constitution might say

Copies of the minutes of all meetings will be available to all parents of children at Anytown School and to all teachers at the school. Copies will be available from the Secretary of the Parent Council/Clerk to the Parent Council and from the school office.



Topic 11: Confidentiality

Your Parent Council will wish to work in a way which is open and transparent. In general, all meetings of the Parent Council are open to the public.

However, the Parent Council, (including the Headteacher) also has the right to meet in private during discussion of any matter which the Council considers should be dealt with on a confidential basis. These would normally be matters that were confidential to a named individual.

Individual cases relating to pupils, teachers or parents at the school are not matters for direct Parent Council involvement. For example, if there is a case of bullying at the school the Parent Council may discuss the general bullying policy but will wish to leave any individual case of bullying to be addressed by the school and others as appropriate. There might be other situations where the Parent Council wants to support a pupil who is suffering from serious illness. In this case the Parent Council should not discuss the individual case, or act on behalf of the pupil, but could write to the parents of the child asking for permission to provide support, for example, through fundraising.

What your constitution might say

Meetings of the Parent Council shall be open to the public, unless the Parent Council is discussing an issue which it considers should be dealt with on a confidential basis. In such circumstances, only members of the Parent Council and the headteacher, or his or her representative, can attend.

Topic 12: How do we look after the finances of the Parent Council?

If you do not have a Clerk for your Parent Council, you will need to ensure that someone in the Parent Council has the job of looking after the accounts. Even if you do have a Clerk, reports about the accounts should be provided at each meeting and an annual report provided at the Annual Meeting.

A further option is for the Parent Council funds to be managed by the education authority. This would mean that the Parent Council would not need to open a bank account. However, an account would be needed if the Parent Council did any fundraising.

The accounts should be audited and presented to the Annual Meeting. The auditor does not need to be an accountant – simply someone who is used to working with figures, who is known to and trusted by the Parent Council, and who is independent of the Parent Council.



What your constitution might say

The Treasurer will open a bank or building society account in the name of the Parent Council for all Parent Council funds. Withdrawals will require the signature of the Treasurer and one other Parent Council member.

The Treasurer will keep an accurate record of all income and expenditure, and will provide a summary of this for each Parent Council meeting and a full account for the Annual Meeting. The Parent Council accounts will be audited by the auditor appointed at the previous Annual Meeting.

The Parent Council shall be responsible for ensuring that all monies are used in accordance with the objectives of the Parent Council.

Topic 13: Changing the Constitution

A majority of the Parent Forum can change the constitution of the Parent Council at any time. The constitution should be reviewed from time to time and the Parent Council can ask the Parent Forum to make changes. Changes can only be made by a majority of the Parent Forum – voting would be a good method of identifying the majority view. In practice, it is a good idea for such changes to take place at the Annual Meeting.

What your constitution might say

The Parent Council may change its constitution after obtaining consent from members of the Parent Forum. Members of the Parent Forum will be sent a copy of any proposed amendment and given reasonable time to respond to the proposal.

Topic 14: Dissolution of the Parent Council

If your Parent Council ceases to exist, the Act requires that any funds unused at the time the Parent Council ends be used for the benefit of the school.

What your constitution might say

Should the Parent Council cease to exist, any remaining funds will be passed to the education authority to be used for the benefit of the school (or schools), where this continues.



An example of a constitution

This is an example of a constitution based on the topics covered in this section.

1. This is the constitution for Anytown School Parent Council (or alternative name).
2. The objectives of the Parent Council are:
 - To work in partnership with the school to create a welcoming school which is inclusive for all parents
 - To promote partnership between the school, its pupils and all its parents
 - To develop and engage in activities which support the education and welfare of the pupils
 - To identify and represent the views of parents on the education provided by the school and other matters affecting the education and welfare of the pupils.
3. The membership will be a minimum of three parents of children attending the school. The maximum size is *[insert a figure according to size of school and as agreed by members of the Parent Forum]*.
4. The Parent Council will be selected for a period of *[insert one/two/three year(s)]*, after which they may put themselves forward for re-selection if they wish. All the parents of children at the school can take part in the selection by post, text or email. Parents will have *[insert figure agreed by Parent Forum]* weeks to select their representatives.

or

Any parents of a child at the school can volunteer to be a member of the Parent Council. In the event that the number of volunteers exceeds the number of places set out in the constitution, members will be selected by *[insert chosen method of selection]*. Anyone not selected to be a member of the Parent Council may be offered the opportunity to be part of any sub-groups set up by the Council.

or

The Parent Council will be made up of two representatives from each year group who will be chosen by the parents of children in those year groups.

5. The Parent Council may co-opt up to *[insert figure as agreed by members of the Parent Forum*]* to assist it with carrying out its functions.

*Add in respect of a denominational school, "of which at least one must be a member of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school is conducted."

or

Two-thirds of the Parent Council will be made up of Parent Forum members and one-third of the membership will be reserved for other co-opted members including teaching and support staff in the school.

The number of parent members on the Parent Council must always be greater than co-opted members.

Co-opted members will be invited to serve for a period of *[insert one/two/three year(s)]*, after which time the Parent Council will review and consider requirements for co-opted membership.



6. The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of the Council will be agreed by the Parent Council members immediately following its formation.

Office bearers will be re-selected by the Parent Council on an annual basis (at the annual meeting of the Parent Forum).

or

If the Parent Forum decides to have a Chair:

The Parent Council will be chaired by a parent of a child attending Anytown School. If the child ceases to be a pupil, a new Chair will be agreed at the next meeting.

or

If the child ceases to be a pupil, the role of the Chair will be rotated around the parent members of the Parent Council until a new Chair is appointed at the annual meeting.

7. The Parent Council is accountable to the Parent Forum for Anytown School and will make a report to it at least once each year on its activities on behalf of all the parents.

If [x] number [or %] of members of the Parent Forum request a special general meeting to discuss issues falling within the Council's remit, the Parent Council shall arrange this. The Parent Council shall give all members of the Forum at least [2 weeks'] notice of the meeting and, at the same time, circulate notice of the matter, or matters, to be discussed at the meeting.

8. The Annual Meeting will be held in April of each year. A notice of the meeting including date, time, and place will be sent to all members of the Parent Forum at least 2 weeks in advance. The meeting will include:

- a report on the work of the Parent Council and its committee(s)
- selection of the new Parent Council
- discussion of issues that members of the Parent Forum may wish to raise
- approval of the accounts and appointment of the auditor.

9. The Parent Council will meet at least once in every school term.

Should a vote be necessary to make a decision, each parent member at the meeting will have one vote, with the Chair having a casting vote in the event of a tie.

Any two members of the Parent Council can request that an additional meeting be held, and all members of the Parent Council will be given at least one week's notice of date, time and place of the meeting.

If a Parent Council member acts in a way that is considered by other members to undermine the objectives of the Parent Council, their membership of the Parent Council shall be terminated if the majority of parent members agree. Termination of membership would be confirmed in writing to the member.



10. Copies of the minutes of all meetings will be available to all parents of children at Anytown School and to all teachers at the school. Copies will be available from the Secretary of the Parent Council/Clerk to the Parent Council and from the school office.
11. Meetings of the Parent Council shall be open to the public, unless the Parent Council is discussing an issue which it considers should be dealt with on a confidential basis. In such circumstances, only members of the Parent Council and the headteacher, or his or her representative, can attend.
12. The Treasurer will open a bank or building society account in the name of the Parent Council for all Parent Council funds. Withdrawals will require the signature of the Treasurer and one other Parent Council member.

The Treasurer will keep an accurate record of all income and expenditure, and will provide a summary of this for each Parent Council meeting and a full account for the Annual Meeting. The Parent Council accounts will be audited by the auditor appointed at the previous Annual Meeting.

The Parent Council shall be responsible for ensuring that all monies are used in accordance with the objectives of the Parent Council.
13. The Parent Council may change its constitution after obtaining consent from members of the Parent Forum. Members of the Parent Forum will be sent a copy of any proposed amendment and given reasonable time to respond to the proposal.
14. Should the Parent Council cease to exist, any remaining funds will be passed to the education authority to be used for the benefit of the school (or schools), where this continues.



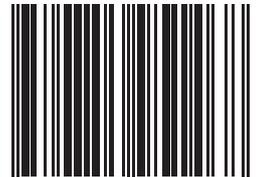
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