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Parent Councils

1. Introduction

The Scottish Schools (Parent Involvement) Act 2006 established a new model of parent representation which came into effect on 1 August 2007. The Act replaced School Boards with Parent Councils, designed to be less formal and friendlier to encourage more parents to get involved school issues. The legislation means that all parents and carers of children at a school are automatically members of the Parent Forum for that school.

Each Parent Forum may then establish a Parent Council to represent the views of parents. The constitution of the Parent Council is determined by the Parent Forum and should reflect what it feels is best for the parents, the pupils and the school.

The Act placed responsibility on local authorities to improve parental involvement in three ways:

- learning at home;
- partnerships between school and home and;
- parental representation¹

¹ The Scottish Executive: *Parents as partners in their children's learning toolkit*
Available at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/147410/0038822.pdf

2. Membership

Members of the Parent Council must be members of the school's Parent Forum: they must have a child attending the school. Only a member of the Parent Forum may chair a Parent Council for that school. Beyond this, the Act allows considerable flexibility for parents to decide the composition of the Parent Council for their school.

Parents are encouraged to develop Parent Councils that reflect local circumstances. It is for members of a school's Parent Forum to decide what kind of Parent Council they want for their school, how it works and what it is called. However, parents can call on the support of education authority staff and the head teacher to help them decide on arrangements that will ensure an effective partnership with the school.

Some schools have decided to amalgamate their Parent Teacher Association with their Parent Council and some have decided to keep them separate.

Education Scotland reports that approximately 95% of schools have a Parent Council. The numbers of parents involved in Parent Councils varies between schools. Parent Councils in primary schools tend to be larger; sometimes 30+ depending on the size of the school. Where there is a large Parent Council, there is a tendency to establish sub-groups to progress specific themes.²

3. Functions

Parent Council can expect to influence decisions, to be listened to and be taken seriously. For example, Parent Councils have a role to play in the recruitment process for appointing the head and deputy head teacher of the school. Parent Council representatives can be involved in the shortlisting process and may sit on appointment panels.³

The function of Parent Councils falls broadly within the following 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

3.1. Supporting the school

The Parent Council can support the work of the school in a variety of ways. It can:

- be involved in drawing up the school development plan and consider how parents might support its implementation;

² Information provided by Education Scotland

³ West Lothian Council Education Services (2013) *Appointment of Head and Deputy Head Teachers*

- consider ways parents can be involved in children's learning to improve achievement;
- build positive relationships between parents and school staff;
- support the school in consulting with the wider parent forum on school policy decisions and other matters;
- use its own formal and informal channels for communicating about school events and how parents can become involved;
- fundraise to provide additional equipment and resources for the school;
- work with the head teacher and staff to devise events which are enjoyable, encourage parental participation and that suit the needs of parents

3.2. Representing the Views of Parents

A Parent Council can make representations to a school's head teacher, and the education authority, about the arrangements the school has to involve parents in the work of the school. The Parent Council should have arrangements in place for ascertaining the views of members of the forum on the standards and quality of education provided by the school.

The Parent Council can work with the school to see whether standards are improving or if there are areas where development might be needed. Councils are encouraged to consider how parents can be involved in supporting improvement in standards across a school.⁴

The Parent Council may be involved in consulting the Parent Forum about the full range of school policies. It can collate the views of parents and report them to the head teacher of the school and to the education authority. It can also make representations on such matters to other bodies, including the HM Inspectorate.

3.3. Promoting Contact with the Community

The Parent Council can play a key role in supporting the work of the school within the wider community. This includes parents of pupils at the school, parents of prospective pupils, the pupils themselves, providers of nursery education and community representatives.

Promoting contact can involve a variety of approaches, which include:

- fostering links with others whose work relates directly to children's education and learning e.g. local early years groups, childcare, nurseries, adult education and libraries;

⁴ *The Scottish Government: Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*
Available at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/08094112/5

- drawing on the experience and expertise of local elected councillors and other community representatives and promoting their involvement in its work and that of the school

The Parent Council should be open to ways of engaging with children and young people at the school. This may involve inviting representatives from the school's Pupil Council, or other representative pupil bodies, to meet with the Parent Council or to forward pupils' views on matters of interest to them.⁵

4. Accountability

The Parent Council is accountable to members of the Parent Forum. It should operate in an open manner and seek to ensure that all parents know how to communicate with members of the council if they need to do so. Discussions at Parent Council meetings should be open to the public, unless the matters to be discussed relate to issues which may impact upon the confidentiality of individuals or that of the school.

4.1. Financial arrangements

The education authority must allocate reasonable funding to enable the Parent Council to meet the administrative costs incurred in carrying out its functions. This includes training costs and the cost of appointing a clerk. The Parent Council and the education authority should discuss what support the authority can provide to assist it with its financial arrangements. In particular, the authority should seek to agree arrangements whereby they can minimize, as far as possible, the administrative burden on the Parent Council of appointing a clerk.

The Parent Council can raise funds by any means, other than by borrowing, and can receive gifts. In addition, it can also enter into contracts and agreements

5. Combined Parent Council

The Act makes provision for the establishment of a Combined Parent Council, covering two or more schools, where this is the expressed wish of the majority of parents, in each school. It is the responsibility of the Combined Parent Council to agree a name by which it will be known and to let the head teachers of the represented schools, members of the Parent Forums and pupils know when it has been established.

6. Support and Resources

Education Scotland has worked on resources to support parents. This includes the development of a toolkit.⁶ This resource contains some practical tools, such as a sample letter to the parent forum, practical issues around the membership, frequency of meetings and a guide to finance.

⁵ *The Scottish Government: Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*
Available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/09/08094112/5

⁶ Education Scotland Toolkit: http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/Toolkit_tcm4-373859.pdf

Appendix 1: Sample Parent Council Constitution

Caldervale High School Constitution

1. This is the constitution for Caldervale High School Parent Council.
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 20
4. The Parent Council will be selected for a period of 3 years, after which they may put themselves forward for re-selection if they wish. 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 Ballot. 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.
5. The Parent Council may co-opt up to 10 people to assist it with carrying out its functions.

Co-opted members will serve for a period of one year after which time the Parent Council will review and consider requirements for co-opted membership.

The number of parent members on the Parent Council must always be greater than the number of co-opted members.
6. The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer of the Council will be agreed by the Parent Council members immediately following its formation.
7. The Parent Council is accountable to the Parent Forum for Caldervale High School and will make a report to it at least once each year on its activities on behalf of all the parents.

If 20 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 New Parent Council Members if required.
- 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 eight times in every School Session.

The quorum for meetings will be a minimum of three parents in attendance.

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 two 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 Caldervale High 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 two weeks 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.