

Connect's Response to the Scottish Government Consultation on the Parental Involvement Act - Statutory Guidance

Introduction

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' organisation, third sector intermediary and the only Scottish charity which is dedicated to parental engagement in education. We provide membership services to Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents about any aspect of the education of their child or the wider education system or matters that impact on children's ability to learn. We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community.

Connect welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to updating and refreshing the statutory guidance to the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. As the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, Connect was heavily involved with the original development and drafting of the 2006 Act.

Coronavirus

We also appreciate the acceptance of this late response, as we did not want to survey parents on the Guidance at a time they were facing so many other significant pressures as COVID-19 took hold. Instead we focused on gathering information on how families were coping with the school closures and learning at home. Our first survey ran in April, with 1578 responses across 29 local authorities, and can be found [here](#). Our second ran in June, with a staggering 7858 responses across all 32 local authorities. The statistical findings from this survey can be found [here](#). We did survey parents on the proposed Guidance during July and include findings from this below. The majority of respondents supported the proposals.

The coronavirus lock down has demonstrated just how vital good parental engagement and involvement, and strong, trusting relationships are to supporting children's learning. Our surveys show good work going on in many school communities and how it has helped in the crisis, but also the challenges that remain across the country. Supporting parental engagement and involvement must continue to be a priority for the future.

Communication is of utmost importance. 49% of respondents to our June lock down survey reported that communication from their child's school/nursery was going well, however 40% thought it was going okay but could be better and 9% thought it was not going well. There is also a discrepancy in communication between primary and secondary schools, with 51% of primary school age parents and 44% of secondary school age saying it is going well. This highlights that work still needs to be done.

Updated Statutory Guidance

We support the ideas and key principles as set out in the updated guidance, and our survey respondents also broadly agree, though also show mixed levels of awareness of their current rights under the Act (see Appendix for full results). As we continue to live with COVID-19 and its impact on our nurseries and schools, we believe it is imperative to prioritise parental engagement as its improvement is a critical component in supporting strong communication and trust between home and school.

The best way to do is to update the wording of the Act itself, as without the force of law and no matter how well considered the guidance, we fear the focus of the original Act and Guidance (while laudable at the time) no longer has currency in our current situation. This goes beyond the impact of COVID-19, which is significant – the Act needs to better reflect the nature of families and societal mores as well as the significant changes within education itself.

Connect

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Our Recommendations

In conclusion, we ask that:

- The Scottish Government and Local Authorities continue to commit to support parental involvement and engagement in children's learning proactively;
- The Scottish Government and Local Authorities engage in awareness raising programmes to inform parents of their rights under the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 and the new Guidance;
- And that the Scottish Government gives serious consideration to updating the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 in law, to give the principles set out in this guidance the power to meet the challenges that exist now.

Eileen Prior

Executive Director

20 August 2020

Appendix

Parental Involvement Act Guidance Survey Results

Connect ran four surveys based on the subsections of the guidance from March to July 2020, to gather views on the proposed changes to the guidance but to also gauge and promote awareness on the rights and responsibilities set out in the Act. These gathered a total of 177 responses from across 26 (out of 32) Local Authorities.

1. Key principles which underpin good practice in parental involvement and engagement and Introduction

Along with our surveys, in March we also ran Facebook polls asking parents if they agreed with the key principles as defined by the Guidance.

- Empowerment: **80% agree, 20% disagree (60 votes)**
- Partnership: **96% agree, 4% disagree (23 votes)**
- Openness and Accessibility: **89% agree, 11% disagree (19 votes)**
- Flexibility: **86% agree, 14% disagree (35 votes)**

2. Section B: Involving and Engaging Parents: what does it mean and why is it important?

The draft guidance describes Parental Involvement as the ways in which parents can get involved in the life and work of the school or the ways that parents can get involved in 'schooling'. This includes parental representation (eg the Parent Council) and involvement in the development of policies, improvement plans and key decisions as well as the opportunity for parents/carers to attend school events and parental consultations / parents' evenings. Does that make sense to you?

- **Yes 99% (94)**
- **No 1% (1)**

The draft guidance describes Parental Engagement as Parents' and families' interaction with their child's learning. It can take place in the home, at school or in the community. Where it takes place is not important. The important thing is the quality of the parent's engagement with their child's learning, the positive impact that it can have on children's learning and outcomes as well as on whole-family learning. Does that make sense to you?

- **Yes 96% (90)**
- **No 4% (4)**

Comments

'Some engage more than others and this is difficult to measure.'

'I think it's important but there are many barriers to overcome, due to various factors including parents working long hours, distance from school, English not parents' first language etc. I also don't understand what's meant by 'schooling'.'

'The language regularly used by educational establishments is often only understood by those who work in (or with) education. While I understood the text, I'm not convinced that I would have 3 years ago (prior to becoming a teacher). If we are serious about parental engagement we need to ensure that the language we use is inclusive and accessible to ALL parents. This is especially important for engaging parents of non-attending pupils or those with reading ages which prevent them from accessing the curriculum. Additionally, which I welcome this survey - is this the really the best time to be carrying it out? Many parents (and teachers) are in a state of flux, or even burn out, due to home learning and I feel that engagement outwith teachers themselves will be a poor representation of the answers you need.'

'Parents should be alerted to the positive role that their involvement can have on their child/s attainment and be positively welcomed into school/provided with information and/of opportunities to become engaged in learning opportunities. They should be enabled to have active lines of communication with the teachers in their child/s lives and for these lines of communication to be encouraged so that the parents/carers feel welcomed.'

'In practice broad parental involvement in the development of policies, improvement plans and key decisions does not happen. This may reflect a difference in aspiration between central government and local authorities.'

'This will only be as successful as the information given from the school'

3. Section C: Guidance for Education Authorities

In the Parental Involvement Act, did you know local authorities must:

Have a strategy for parental involvement? **Yes 68% (13), No 32% (6)**

Seek out/listen to the views of those with an interest in parental involvement as it puts together its strategy? **Yes 68% (13), No 32% (6)**

Support the formation and running of Parent Councils, including consulting the Parent Forum and allocating reasonable funds to support Parent Councils? **Yes 68% (13), No 32% (6)**

Involve Parent Councils in the permanent appointment of headteachers and deputy headteachers? **Yes 53% (10), No 47% (9)**

Respond to reasonable requests for advice and information from parents about the education provided to their child? **Yes 63% (12), No 37% (7)**

Respond to reasonable requests for advice and information from Parent Councils? **Yes 63% (12), No 37% (7)**

Take steps to make sure headteachers and school staff also respond to representations from Parent Councils made on behalf of the Parent Forum? **Yes 58% (11), No 42% (8)**

The new draft Guidance makes recommendations for local authorities. We list some of these below. Do you agree with them?

A range of communication methods is effective for two-way communication between home and school eg phone calls, letters, informal face to face discussions etc, and schools should recognise that different methods will work best for different parents: **Agree 95% (18), Disagree 1% (1)**

The local authority complaints procedure should be shared with parents and carers and the local authority should consult with Parent Councils when arranging this: **Agree 95% (18), Disagree 1% (1)**

Local authorities should engage with partner early learning and childcare centres (nurseries) when they are developing their Parental Involvement Strategy (this would apply to nurseries that are not attached to a school). **Agree 95% (18), Neither Agree nor Disagree 1% (1)**

When preparing their Parental Involvement Strategy, local authorities should consider how it will support families who may face barriers to parental involvement and engagement, for example families of children with additional support needs or English as an additional language, carers, families living in poverty, looked after children, children with parents at other households etc.: **Agree 95% (18), Neither Agree nor Disagree 1% (1)**

Local authorities should consider how their Parental Involvement Strategy links to their responsibilities under the National Improvement Framework (the Scottish Government's vision for education, focusing on

improving attainment particularly in literacy and numeracy, closing the attainment gap, improving young people's health and wellbeing, improving employability skills and increasing positive school leaver destinations for all): **Agree 95% (18), Neither Agree nor Disagree 1% (1)**

Comments

'Since lockdown, we have had no parent council meetings, and none are arranged, as our chair and head teacher still hope we will be face-to-face before we next meet. I feel parent views are not then being heard and two-way communication is lost (and will continue to be) until another (probably virtual) forum is reinstated.'

'I am aware due to my role as Chair of my Parent Council but this information should be shared actively with all members of the Parent Forum. Views should be actively sought from all and not just the Parent Council. This requires a fundamental cultural change by the Education Authority as there is still resistance from sections of my school's staff to sharing information on their own child. 5 minutes once a year face to face with a teacher at Parent/Teacher contact evenings is no longer going to satisfy a more informed Parent Forum on the progress their child/ren is making. A new approach is required to communication between parents and teachers to enable involvement and engagement.'

'Parent council should engage all parents, not just those on the pc committee.'

'As a parent council, we had a long fight to get council funding for an interpreter for a parent to attend a recent training run by us on behalf of the school. The parent hadn't been able to attend meetings as we have been told we'd have to find the interpreter ourselves. This should surely then be looked at as a barrier to parental involvement by the authority?'

4. Section D: Guidance for Parent Councils

In the Parental Involvement Act, did you know:

The Parent Forum (all the parents with a child at the school/nursery) decides whether to have a Parent Council? **Yes 62% (33), No 38% (20)**

The Parent Forum decides on the name of the Parent Council? **Yes 57% (30), No 43% (23)**

Local authorities must support the setting up of a Parent Council and must support the running of the Parent Council, including with an allocation of funding? **Yes 72% (38), No 28% (15)**

Parent Councils have the right to represent the views of parents on a wide range of educational matters? **Yes 96% (51), No 4% (2)**

Parent Councils have a right to be involved in the recruitment of a permanent headteacher or deputy headteacher? **Yes 87% (46), No 13% (7)**

The majority of members of the Parent Council must be members of the Parent Forum but it can co-opt members (who can't vote) with relevant experience? **Yes 75%, No 24% (13)**

Parent Councils have a responsibility to promote contact between all who have an interest in the work of the school? **Yes 87% (46), No 13% (7)**

Parent Councils can raise funds, but cannot borrow, buy or own land or buildings? **Yes 85% (45), No 15% (8)**

Parent Council members are not personally liable for anything done whilst volunteering as part of the Parent Council, if carried out in good faith? **Yes 89% (47), No 11% (6)**

The new draft Guidance makes some recommendations. We list some of these below. Do you agree with them?

Parent Councils should plan how they will represent the views of all parents and engage with the diverse range of parents and carers whose children attend the school. **Agree 89% (47), Neither agree nor disagree 11% (6)**

Parent Councils should be involved in short listing, the job specification etc of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, as well as other senior posts. **Agree 72% (38), Neither agree nor disagree 19% (10), Disagree 9% (5)**

Parent Councils could foster links with the wider community eg local services, other community groups, businesses etc with the support of the local authority. **Agree 87% (46), Neither agree nor disagree 11% (6), Disagree 2% (1)**

Parent Councils should engage with the pupils of the school eg listening to pupils' views and engaging with the Pupil Council. **Agree 91% (48), Neither agree nor disagree 2% (1), Disagree 8% (4)**

Parent Councils can help support the school to consult the Parent Forum about school policies, for instance uniforms, the school ethos, and other similar matters. **Agree 94% (50), Neither agree nor disagree 6% (3)**

Parent Councils can seek advice from the local authority or headteacher on how to support and promote parental engagement with the transitions and the wider learning and development of children and young people, for instance with early learning and childcare settings, primary or secondary schools, employers or community learning providers. **Agree 87% (46), Neither agree nor disagree 11% (6), Disagree 2% (1)**

Parent Councils should operate in an open and transparent manner, for example discussions at meetings should be open to the Parent Forum and should be reported to the Parent Forum regularly (unless there are confidential matters). **Agree 96% (51), Neither agree nor disagree 4% (2)**

Comments

'We have an active parent council at primary level. Engagement of the wider parent forum is difficult. We find the wider body only want to be involved if there is an "issue" ongoing. The wider body are difficult to engage when dealing with day to day business and when trying to encourage attendance to meetings/open forum sessions (day or night).'

'Only the word "should" these are volunteers who are often working parents, more support and advice from councils rather than dictating should.'

'I would say that we are modelling many of your recommendations already, but that we don't receive local authority support to do this.'

'As Parent Council members are volunteers, I don't think it is fair to put a great deal of responsibility on their shoulders to ensure they represent the views of "all the Parent Forum" as this is simply not possible. At my school we have a PC email address, a Twitter account, a Facebook page and a separate section on our Academy's internet site. We also include a request in end of term news updates to get in touch, attend all Parent Contact evenings, attend all P7 Transition events and have devised a flyer to represent our aims and contact details. We cannot do anymore!'

5. Section E: Guidance for School Leaders and HM Inspectors of Education

In the Parental Involvement Act, did you know the Headteacher:

Must inform the Parent Council of the school's arrangements for consultations/parents' evenings with parents? **Yes 30% (3), No 70% (7)**

Must respond to representations from the Parent Council in a timely, clear and efficient manner? **Yes 80% (8), No 20% (2)**

Has a right and a duty to attend, or be represented, at Parent Council meetings and to provide advice and information, if requested to do so? **Yes 90% (9), No 10% (1)**

Must report to the Parent Council, or Parent Forum if there is no Parent Council, at least once a year on the performance, objectives, and ambitions of the school? **Yes 80% (8), No 20% (2)**

In the Parental Involvement Act, did you know School Leaders:

Must make sure the school takes account of the local authority's Parental Involvement Strategy? **Yes 40% (4), No 60% (6)**

Must make sure school priorities and improvement plans support and encourage the involvement of parents in the life of the school and engagement in their child's learning? **Yes 40% (4), No 60% (6)**

In the Parental Involvement Act, did you know HMIE:

Parent Councils can 'make representations to HMIE on matters of interest or concern to the Parent Forum, after making these representations to the headteacher and local authority'. The local authority complaints procedure must be followed and completed before HMIE is contacted? **Yes 40% (4), No 60% (6)**

The new draft Guidance makes some recommendations. We list some of these below. Do you agree with them?

Headteachers and school staff should engage in effective two-way dialogue with all parents in ways that work best for parents. **9 out of 10 respondents agreed with this statement**

Schools should consider ways they can encourage parents to be part of the life and work of the school, building relationships that go beyond a minimum twice-yearly update. **9 out of 10 respondents agreed with this statement**

Comments

'I feel schools should be obliged to promote these clearly on their internet pages so that it is clear how parental involvement and engagement is reflected in each school's policies and that parents/carers are welcomed and examples of what this would look like in their school's setting.'

'I'd suggest that these "recommendations" should be "requirements" as they will bring benefits to all.'