



# PARENT COUNCIL ESSENTIALS

## Introduction

One of the main aims of the Parental Involvement legislation (which introduced Parent Councils) is to allow parents to decide what sort of group(s) they would like to represent them. This resource will also help Parent Councils to understand and work through the key areas they need to focus on.

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## What is a Parent Council?

Parent Councils are statutory bodies, as set out in the [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#). This means that Parent Councils have legal rights and responsibilities. In essence, the Parent Council is appointed by the Parent Forum (see next section) to act on its behalf. A Parent Council is run for, and by, parents at a school. The Parent Council must support the school. In law, the local authority should support a Parent Council both financially and with advice/support.

## What is the Parent Forum?

The Parental Involvement Act states that every school in Scotland has a Parent Forum, which is all the parents/carers who have a child at the school. The Parent Forum decides whether they want a Parent Council and how it is constituted and organised. They may also choose the name of the group - it does not have to be called a Parent Council.

## Does every school have a Parent Council?

Although most schools in Scotland do have a Parent Council, there are still a few that do not. It is up to the Parent Forum to decide this. If the Parent Forum wants a Parent Council, the local authority and the school have to help with this. . Connect has information that can help too.

## What is the role of the Parent Council?

In legislation, Parent Councils (PC) are required to:

- Represent the interests of all parents/carers (the Parent Forum) to the school and the local authority
- Support learning and school improvement
- Be involved in the recruitment of senior staff, school inspections and the development of the School Improvement Planning.

How Parent Councils do this is not set out in legislation - it is up to each Parent Forum to decide what they want their PC to do.

## Are there different kinds of Parent Council?

Yes, because the Parent Forum can decide how it wants its Parent Council to operate and what it wants the Parent Council to do. This is usually set out in a constitution. Some Parent Councils in small schools are made up of all parents in the school ie the Parent Council is the Parent Forum; some have sub-committees; some organise social and fundraising events; some campaign.

## What can Parent Councils get involved in?

Parent Councils can do all sorts of things, as long as they are representing and acting on behalf of the Parent Forum. This might include:

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- Supporting parents to be involved in the life of the school
- Supporting parents to be involved in children's learning
- Working with the school on policies (positive behaviour, inclusion, health and wellbeing, anti-bullying, anti-racism and many more)
- Working with the school on improvement planning
- Communicating effectively with the Parent Forum and making sure the school communicates in ways that work for parents
- Gathering parents' views
- Building positive relationships across the school community
- Organising clubs, events, activities.

### What is the difference between a Parent Council and a Parent Staff or Teacher Association?

Parent Councils have specific rights and responsibilities, as set out in legislation. PTAs are not part of the Parental Involvement Act. They tend to be more involved in social and fundraising events although many Parent Councils are now taking on this role instead. However, organising social and fundraising events are not part of the legal duties of Parent Councils and Parent Councils must understand and undertake their responsibilities under the Act.

### Who should be on the Parent Council and who can attend meetings?

- The majority of Parent Council members *must* be parents with children at the school
- The definition of "parent" is very wide and includes everyone with a parenting role for a pupil; this could include foster parents, family members who have care of a child and those who share parenting. The Parent Council also has a responsibility to be mindful of any looked-after children.
- A parent can be on more than one Parent Council, provided they have a child at each school.
- A teacher or member of school staff can be a parent member on a Parent Council, so long as they have a child at the school. However, it is important they remember that they are there as a parent and not as a teacher or staff member
- The Chairperson *must* be a parent with a child at the school.
- The Parent Council should promote equality and fairness in their activities and recognise the diversity in the school community.
- The Headteacher (or their representative) has a right and a duty to attend all Parent Council meetings as an advisor.
- Local political representatives can attend as invited guests. Be sure to invite all your representatives and keep them informed about your work

- Parent Councils can have co-opted community members or others who can help the Parent Council with its work. In denominational schools, the local church/fairth organisation can nominate a representative.

#### What is the role of the Headteacher on a Parent Council?

- The Headteacher has 'a right and a duty' to attend meetings of the Parent Council as an advisor or they can send a representative. Of course, it might not always be necessary for the Head to be at a meeting, for example, if you are discussing arrangements for an event.
- The Parent Council may ask the Headteacher to provide a report at their meetings – this is up to the Parent Council as parents decide the agenda. The HT's report should not dominate proceedings.
- The Headteacher should involve the Parent Council in School Improvement Planning and encourage the Parent Council to have an active role in the development and review of school policies.

#### Should a Parent Council have a constitution?

It helps to have a constitution as a framework for the Parent Council's work. See the [Constitutions Resource Pack](#)

#### Useful resources

- [Running Committees and Meetings Resource Pack](#)
- [Money Matters Resource Pack](#)
- [Equality and Fairness Resource Pack](#)
- [Data Protection and Online Security Resource Pack](#)
- [PVG and Child Protection Resource Pack](#)
- [Parent Council Health Check - School Matters and Education](#)
- [Social Media Resource Pack](#)
- [Communicating with the School Community Resource Pack](#)

# TOP TIPS FOR PARENT COUNCILS

## Including Everyone – What your Parent Council Can Do

1. The majority of parents and carers want the best for their children. But some parents face challenges when trying to engage with the school and their child's learning; these could include:
  - Family/work issues
  - A lack of time
  - Literacy/language
  - Their own experience of school
  - Lack of confidence
  - Don't know *how* to get involved
  - Money issues
  - Learning disabilities
  - Health issues
  - Childcare
  - Perceptions/assumptions about school or school staff.
2. Help everyone in the school community recognise and understand these challenges and be involved in finding solutions where possible.
3. Find out about the different families with children at the school; for example, how many families have English as an additional language?
4. Ask family members/pupils to act as interpreters for those with English as an additional language.
5. Discuss how to make sure information reaches those parents who can't attend meetings or school events, for example, by using social media, videos or apps.
6. Send out a survey/questionnaire or have an informal chat or coffee session to find out what would help families access information in ways that work for them.
7. Set up a dedicated Parent Council email address. This makes it easy to maintain and hand over communication channels.

8. Build relationships with family support workers and Community Learning and Development (CLD) workers as they may be in contact with parents who may not feel confident or comfortable about going into school; they may be able to help you reach out effectively.
9. Make contact with community and faith groups and ask them to help you reach out to families to build relationships.

Find useful guidelines and templates in our [Equality and Equity Toolkit](#)

## Effective Communication

10. A Parent Council should be part of the communication network for parents and the school, sharing information and acting as a link between school, local authority and families.
11. Ask different parents to write an article or post for a newsletter or social media. This could be about such things as their own experience of school, fun or unusual activities they do with their children, their career path.
12. Make films and post these on YouTube/social media to share with your school community; these could cover topics such things as the work of the Parent Council, transitions and how parents can help support their child's learning.
13. Not all families have access to the internet so think about using a mix of communication methods.
14. Carry out an audit of skills amongst parents by asking them if they are good at such things as DIY, cookery, ICT, crafts, etc. Ask them if they would be able to use these skills at events, with the school or PC activities; the personal approach often works best.
15. Make sure that information sent from the school, Parent Council and local authority is in parent-friendly language. The Parent Council could act as a focus group to sense-check school communication and to cut down on education jargon and acronyms. Find our guide here [Connect Guide to Acronyms in Scottish Education](#).
16. Develop online resources (films, factsheets, etc.) to explain about the school, what and how children learn, etc.

17. Collect email addresses from parents to help with communication. You can find useful data protection guidelines and templates in our [Data Protection Resource Pack](#)
18. Use an app to help Parent Council members communicate, organise events and fundraise eg WhatsApp (as long as everyone is able to share their mobile phone numbers).
19. Develop a social media policy to make sure everyone understands how to use your platforms safely and with respect. Find useful guidance and templates here [Social Media Resource Pack](#).

## Events and activities

A focus on events which build positive relationships between parents and between families and school will create a strong sense of school community, in which everyone feels welcome.

20. Think about those families who are living with financial hardship. For example, how can a Parent Council include and help support these families? Parent groups could work with the school and local services and projects to provide information on financial support, housing, accessing benefits, and emergency food parcels, etc.

Informal face to face or online get-togethers such as coffee and chat are a great opportunity to share experiences and get to know new parents.

21. Work with the Pupil Council and other young people to discuss how you could offer activities/events to bring people together. You can consider in-person and online events and activities.
22. Think about arranging information events with school staff or specialists which will offer the sort of information parents of children and young people need, for example:
  - how to cope with behavioural issues
  - how to support positive mental health and wellbeing
  - online safety
  - help with revision and study
  - how to recognise/tackle substance abuse.
23. Work with local groups and services to develop in-person and/or online advice and workshops or webinars.

## Parent Council business

24. Many Parent Councils are able to offer a hybrid approach to their meetings, with a flexible approach, allowing parents to attend without having to worry about childcare, transport, etc. However, some find online meetings difficult, and some families can't take part online. Finding a blend that works for your Parent Council will offer a balanced approach.
25. Prepare well for in person and online meetings, set ground rules, and a time limit. Only include real priorities on the agenda.
26. If people want to discuss anything in more detail, eg organising an event, arrange a separate meeting.
27. Ask the Headteacher and others to circulate reports before the meeting.
28. Remember, you don't have to call your group a *Parent Council* as the word *council* may be off-putting to some parents. Why not choose a name that reflects the school community, eg *Families & School Partnership*.
29. Make your Parent Council more parent-friendly! Display photos of the PC members (with their agreement) on the Facebook Page/website and task a couple of people with welcoming any new faces at meetings or events. Have a look at our resource [Welcoming New Families](#).
30. Find out what financial and other support is available for Parent Councils from the local authority.
31. Use information from this pack to let parents know the role of the Parent Council and how they could get involved.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Can we include parent representatives from our nursery on our Parent Council?

Yes - Parent Councils in primary schools with an early learning and childcare setting on site often do include nursery parents. If you include parent representatives from the nursery, this should be in your constitution unless they are co-opted. If your Parent Council wishes to include parent representatives from feeder nurseries, this would also involve co-opting them.

## What is the difference between a Parent Council and a separate PTA/PSA?

Parent Councils were introduced in the Parental Involvement Act and are statutory bodies with specific roles and responsibilities. PTA/PSAs tend to focus on social and fundraising activities. In schools where there is both a Parent Council and a PTA, it is for the PTA/PSA and the Parent Council to agree how they will work together. One of the main differences is that a Headteacher has a right and a duty to attend PC meetings; this is not the case with a PTA/PSA. If the PC and PTA/PSA are separate entities with separate constitutions, they would each require Connect membership to benefit from membership-linked insurance cover. If the PTA is a sub-committee of the Parent Council, it must abide by the Parent Council's constitution, it is accountable to the Parent Council and must report back to the Parent Council regularly.

## If a parent is not happy with how the Parent Council is run, what should they do?

Parents/carers can contact the Chairperson with their query informally in the first instance. If the concerns are not addressed in a satisfactory way, the next step might be to lodge a formal complaint in writing. Your Parent Council might wish to adopt a Complaints Procedure to set out clearly what should happen for all parties. Connect has a [Complaints Policy and Procedure Template for Parent Groups](#). The steps in this can be used as a guide, even if your parent group has not yet adopted the template formally.

## A parent approaches the PC Chair and says her child is being bullied; what should the Parent Council do?

It is not the role of a Parent Council to deal with individual issues and the Chair should advise the parent to go to the Headteacher and/or local authority. However, this might be an opportunity for the PC to look at the whole school anti-bullying or positive behaviour policy. The PC can ask the Headteacher whether it has been updated recently and whether it can be reviewed as a whole-school community activity. This will help everyone to get involved and to understand how to challenge bullying behaviour. The Parent Council has the right to be involved in writing and updating school policies.

Check out our resource <https://connect.scot/resources/anti-bullying-pack>

## How can Parent Councils help parents with a child with Additional Support Needs?

Although the Parent Council cannot discuss individual issues, it can raise awareness of Additional Support for Learning (ASL) by:

- Helping the school to organise information sessions for parents to get advice and information.
- ASL could be a regular item on the agenda at PC meetings
- Have an ASL rep on the Parent Council
- Set up a sub-committee or an informal family support group to discuss issues of interest on ASL, share information or more widely on equality and equity.

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## A group of parents are very concerned about the traffic and parking around a school. Is this something the Parent Council address?

Absolutely! The Parent Council is there to represent parents' views. The Parent Council could ask the local police officer to come and talk at a meeting; or lobby the local council to make improvements to signage or other changes to local roads around the school; or involve the children and/or the council's road safety officer.

## Do Parent Councils in secondary schools run in different ways to primary schools?

Parental involvement and family engagement can look different in secondary school, but the Parent Council in secondary schools still has the same legal role and responsibilities as in primary schools.

## Should we invite local politicians to get involved in our Parent Council?

Parent Councils can decide whether they wish to keep local politicians informed about their activities or if they would like them to attend meetings or both. There can be advantages to developing relationships with local representatives if you ever have to campaign on anything. They can be invited on a one-off basis for a specific meeting or have an open invitation. Remember they are not members and so do not have a vote.

However, you should

- Invite all (or none!) of your elected representatives and keep all of them informed, whether or not they get more actively involved - it is important for your parent group to be apolitical
- decide whether you want to invite them to some or all your meetings, your AGM or none of these
- be clear that they are there as a guest and in an advisory capacity, not to hold the floor, or lobby for votes, or argue with one another or dominate your meeting!
- create a space for them on your agenda to update on local education issues (if you wish to) or seek their input on particular points of information
- thank them for attending - they may come in useful!

You are welcome to use information from this resource. However, if you do, please acknowledge Connect. We welcome your comments and feedback.

March 2024

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