



PARENT COUNCIL ESSENTIALS

One of the main aims of the Parental Involvement legislation (which introduced Parent Councils) was 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?

The Parent Council is the committee appointed by the Parent Forum (see next section for more info) to run matters on its behalf. A Parent Council is not run by the school or the local authority but by the parents in the school. The local authority should support a Parent Council both financially and with advice/support.

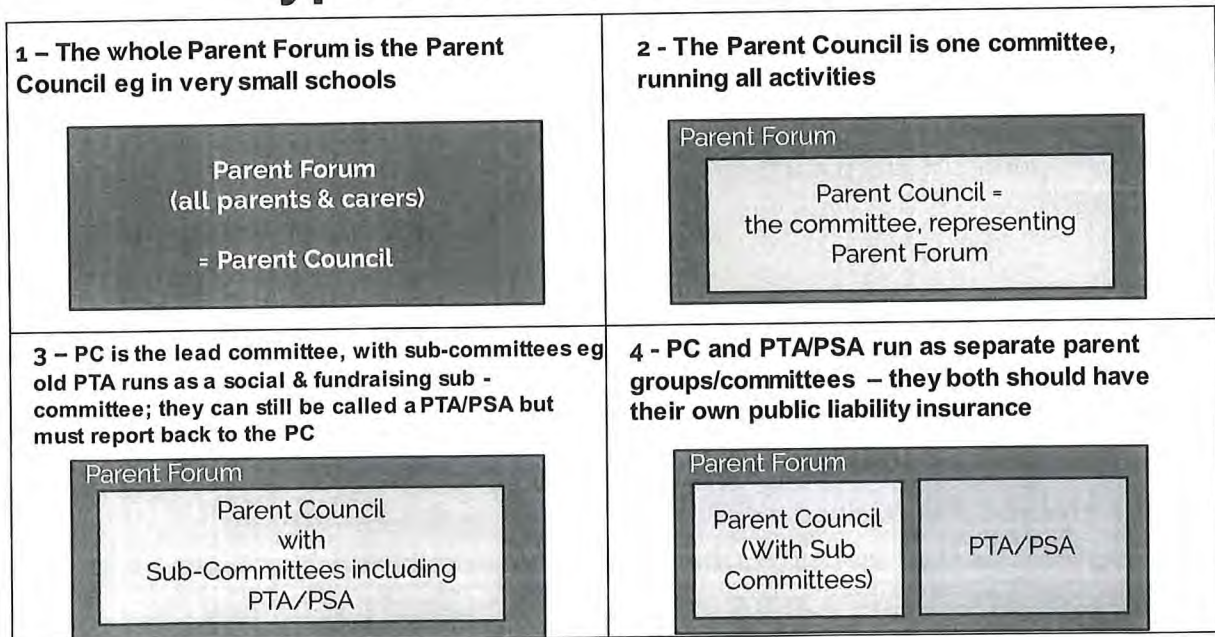
What is the Parent Forum?

The 2006 Parental Involvement Act states that every school in Scotland has a Parent Forum, which consists of all the parents/carers who have a child at the school. They are automatically members, whether they like it or not! 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 as it does not have to be called a Parent Council.

Does every school have a Parent Council? Is it the same as a Parent Teacher Association/Parent Staff Association?

Although the majority of schools in Scotland have a Parent Council, there are still a few that do not. Parent Councils were formed as part of the Parental Involvement (Scotland) Act and have certain roles and responsibilities. Parent Teacher Associations/Parent Staff Associations (PTAs/PSAs) are sometimes completely independent groups and tend to focus on fundraising. There are four main models of parent groups across the country, which include:

Types of Parent Councils



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Model 1

In very small schools, the Parent Forum is the Parent Council

Model 2

The Parent Council acts as one group and does everything, including organising social & fundraising activities

Model 3

The PTA/PSA works as an independent group - completely separate from the Parent Council. If this is the case then the PTA/PSA should consider having its own public liability insurance to protect committee members, who are personally liable if there is a claim against the PTA/PSA.

Model 4

The PTA/PSA has disbanded and become a sub-committee of the Parent Council. The sub-committee should submit reports on all their activities and finances to the Parent Council and should abide by any general policies decided by the PC – eg equality and fairness, data protection, child protection.

Useful resources

- Running Committees and Meetings <https://connect.scot/resources/running-committees-and-meetings-pack>
- Money Matters Pack <https://connect.scot/resources/money-matters-pack>
- Equality and Fairness <https://connect.scot/resources/equality-and-fairness-pack>
- Data Protection <https://connect.scot/resources/data-pro>
- Child Protection and PVG <https://connect.scot/resources/protection-vulnerable-groups-and-child-protection-pack>
- Parent Council Health Check – School Matters and Education <https://connect.scot/resources/parent-council-health-check-school-matters-and-education>

What are the main responsibilities of the Parent Council to the Parent Forum?

The Parent Forum (all parents/carers at the school) can expect the following from the Parent Council (PC):

- To get news and information about the PC and its activities
- To be invited to be involved in PC activities, such as sub-committees
- To be asked for their opinion by the PC on issues about the school community
- To have all views listened to and represented in an equal and fair way

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- To be involved in how the PC is organised and how it operates, for example, making changes to the constitution
- For the PC to be inclusive and recognise the diversity in Scottish schools by involving parents from the whole school community.

Useful resources

- [Social Media Resource Pack](#)
- [Communicating with the School Community Resource Pack](#)

What do Parent Councils do?

The main aim of a Parent Council is to try to represent the interests of all parents/carers to the school and the local authority, help the school community work together, supporting learning and school improvement.

The activities of a Parent Council are not set out in legislation so it is up to each Parent Forum to decide what they want their PC to do. It does have some rights (eg involvement in recruiting senior staff).

There are many things a Parent Council may get involved in, including:

- Discussing (and where needed acting on) issues of interest to parents, including school policies (eg behaviour, homework/home learning, health & safety)
- Helping parents to support their child's learning
- Making sure that parents get the information they need in an accessible way and the school gets feedback on parents' views
- Improving links between *all* parents and the school/local authority
- Organising and running extra-curricular clubs and activities.

The Parent Council **must** be involved in:

- The appointment of senior staff, eg the recruitment of a new Headteacher
- School inspections
- The development of the School Improvement Plan and Standards & Quality Reports that set out how the school plans to change and improve how it works.

Are there any rules about who should be on the Parent Council?

Although there are no rules about the number of members on a Parent Council, there are certain things to be aware of:

- 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

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divorced/separated couples. 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 can be a parent-member on a Parent Council, so long as they have a child at the school. However, it is important to remind them they are there as a parent and not as a teacher.
- 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.
- In denominational schools, the local church/faith organisation can nominate a representative.

Should a Parent Council have a constitution?

It is good practice to have a constitution, as this gives a framework to the group. It should contain a description of the Parent Council, and how it will carry out its aims & objectives. You will find more information about constitutions here: [Constitutions and Charitable Status Resource Pack](#)

Can other people be on a Parent Council?

It is a good idea to include other people from the school and local community, but this must be agreed by the Parent Forum. Think about local community groups, family members, friends of the school, local charities, business representatives, local and community councillors, church/faith representatives, colleges or employers. These people are invited and co-opted onto the committee and are therefore not voting members of the Parent Council; remember parents must always be in the majority. Remember, in denominational schools, the local church/faith group has the right to nominate someone to the Parent Council.

Your Parent Council may also find it useful to co-opt/ask other people to come along on a "needs" basis. For example, if you are going to discuss road safety then the community police officer may be helpful to you.

Although it might not always be appropriate (or very interesting) for the pupils to send a permanent representative to your meetings, it is a good idea to keep up links with the pupils, e.g. by exchanging minutes with or asking for ideas from the Pupil Council.

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 or they can send a representative. Of course, it might not always be necessary for the Headteacher to be at a meeting, for example if you are discussing arrangements for an event. The Headteacher is an advisor to the Parent Council and does not have a vote.
- The Parent Council may ask the Headteacher to report to their meetings but remember that parents decide on the agenda and the HT's report should not dominate proceedings.
- The Headteacher should involve the Parent Council in development of the School Improvement Plan and Standards & Quality Reports
- and encourage the Parent Council to have an active role in the development/review of school policies.

TOP TIPS FOR PARENT COUNCILS

Facing Challenges

1. The majority of parents want the best for their children. But some face challenges when trying to engage with the school and their child's learning; these could include:
 - Family/work issues
 - 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 get information to 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 to find out what the challenges are for families.
7. Set up a dedicated Parent Council email address. This makes it easier to keep up communication channels when someone steps down from the Parent Council.
8. Build relationships with family support workers and Community Learning and Development (CLD) workers as these people are often in contact with parents who don't always want to go into school; they may have useful tips for reaching out to them.
9. Make contact with community and faith groups and ask them for help to reach families that are not involved with school.

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

Effective Communication

10. A Parent Council should be the information provider for parents and act 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 on YouTube/social media; 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. Remember that 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.

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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 a smartphone app to help the Parent Council communicate, organise events and fundraise.
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

20. Parent Councils will need to be mindful of any changes in guidance around COVID-19 when planning their events and activities.
A focus on re-connecting and building relationships will provide opportunity to support parents and families.
21. Think about those families who are living with financial hardship. For example, how can a Parent Council help support families with financial worries? 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.
22. Use platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams to set up virtual get-togethers. What about a virtual coffee break? This would be a great opportunity to share experiences and get to know new parents. In person events and meetings don't work for everyone.
23. Work with the Pupil Council and other young people to discuss how you could offer activities/events online, again to create opportunities for online as well as in person events and activities.

24. Think about 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.
25. Work with local groups and services to develop online advice and workshops or webinars.
26. Online fundraising. You can find some ideas for online fundraising in Connect's Social and Fundraising Event Resource Pack.

Parent Council business

27. Many Parent Councils are now offering 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.
28. Prepare well for online meetings, set ground rules, and a time limit. Only include real priorities on the agenda.
29. If people want to discuss anything in more detail, eg organising an online event, arrange a separate meeting.
30. Ask the Headteacher and others to circulate reports before the meeting.
31. 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*.
32. Make your Parent Council more parent-friendly! Display photos of the committee 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 [Top Tips for Welcoming New Parents and Families](#).
33. Find out what financial and other support is available for Parent Councils from the local authority.

34. 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 our nursery on our Parent Council? Some Parent Councils in primary schools that have a nursery do include nursery parents, who can join in with events and contribute to discussions at meetings, when appropriate. One thing to remember is that if you include the nursery, that will then increase your school roll and may, in turn, increase your Connect membership fee. If you include parent representatives from the nursery, this should be in your constitution unless they are co-opted.

What is the difference between a Parent Council and a separate PTA/PSA? There are some overlaps between what a PC and a PTA/PSA do, although PTAs/PSAs tend to focus on social and fundraising activities. 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, they would each require Connect membership to benefit from membership-linked insurance cover.

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. If the concerns are not addressed in a satisfactory way, the next step might be to lodge a complaint in writing. Your Parent Council or PTA/PSA 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 and ask the Headteacher whether it has been updated recently and can it 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.

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 role as in primary schools.

Should we invite local politicians to get involved in our Parent Council/PTA/PSA?

Parent Councils and PTA/PSAs 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!

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

August 2022

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