



## WHAT IS A PARENT COUNCIL?

One of the main aims of the Parental Involvement Act (which introduced Parent Councils) was to allow parents and carers in a school (the Parent Forum) to decide what sort of group(s) they would like to represent them.

### What is a Parent Council?

The Parent Council is the committee appointed by the Parent Forum to run matters on its behalf. A Parent Council is not run by the school or the local authority but by the parents/carers in the school. The local authority should support a Parent Council both financially and with advice/support. Parent Councils are statutory bodies ie their roles and responsibilities are set out in legislation.

### 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?

Although the majority of schools in Scotland do have a Parent Council, there are still a few that do not.

There are four main models of parent groups across the country, which include:

**Model 1** in very small schools with small numbers of parents/carers the Parent Forum **is** the Parent Council

**Model 2** the Parent Council does everything, including organising social & fundraising activities

**Model 3** the Parent Council and the PTA continues to work as completely separate organisations. Both organisations need their own constitutions and both should consider the insurance they need. PTAs are not statutory bodies ie their role is not set out in legislation.

**Model 4** the PTA has disbanded and becomes 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 the constitution and any other policies adopted by the PC – eg equality and fairness. Insurance cover held by the Parent Council will

include its sub-committees.

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

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

- To get news and information about the Parent Council 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 views listened to and represented in a fair and equal way
- To be involved in how the PC is organised and how it operates, for example, making changes to the constitution
- To be inclusive and recognise the diversity in Scottish schools by involving parents from the whole school community

## What do Parent Councils do?

The main aim of a Parent Council is to try to represent all parents/carers, help the school community be successful and support learning and school improvement.

The activities of a Parent Council are not specified 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
- Involvement in the school inspection process
- 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.

## 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 divorced/separated couples.
- 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 his/her 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 and should contain a description of the Parent Council and how it will carry out its aims and objectives.

### May other people be on a Parent Council?

It is a good idea to include other people from the school and local community ('co-opted members'), but this must be agreed by the Parent Forum and co-opted members must not dominate the Parent Council. 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 cannot vote; remember, parents must always be in the majority. In denominational schools, the local church/faith group has the right to nominate someone to be on 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 them!) for the pupils to send a permanent representative to your meetings, it is a good idea to keep up links with the pupils, eg by exchanging minutes with or by 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 Head 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 the agenda and 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/review of school policies.

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

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