

# Tollbrae Primary School



## Parent Council - Guide for New Members

For more information, please see the following  
websites

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/08/09153454/1>

[http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/InformationforParentCouncilMembers\\_tcm4-675297.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/InformationforParentCouncilMembers_tcm4-675297.pdf)

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone>

## Working together as Parent Council members

Your meetings will be most effective if everyone agrees what is expected of Parent Council members and how you are going to work together.

Teamwork is essential and can be summed up as  
**Together Everyone Achieves More.**



The purpose of Parent Council meetings are to:

- Decide what actions to take
- Come to decisions which everyone is happy with
- Benefit from the ideas, skills, knowledge, and opinions of all members
- Conduct business efficiently in accordance with the constitution.

### Ground rules

Setting ground rules that you can refer back to from time to time can help your meetings run smoothly. Your ground rules might include:

- Ensure meetings start on time - let the Chairperson know if you are going to be late or cannot attend.
- Stick to the agenda - if there is anything you would particularly like to discuss, speak to the Secretary or Clerk to ask for an item on the agenda.
- Record action points clearly in the minutes and make a note of who has agreed to undertake the action. Check progress on action points agreed at previous meetings
- Support the group and work as a team - everyone's contribution is important.
- Respect each other's point of view – even if you think they are wrong!
- Discourage domination by one or a few members and encourage quieter members to take part.
- Aim towards constructive discussion and decisions - try not to get 'personal'. If you disagree with someone make clear it is their point of view you disagree with rather than them as an individual.

## Welcoming New Members to a Parent Council

### Introductions

When members join the Parent Council, introductions will be important. One way of doing this might be to ask people to simply say:



- Their name
- Which class or classes their child or children are in
- One thing they really like about the school
- One thing they would like to find out more about
- One thing they hope the Parent Council might achieve.



### The agenda

To get the most out of your meetings it helps to have some structure and focus to your discussions. This makes sure that everything can be discussed and dealt with.

Any member should be able to put forward suggestions for agenda items to the Chairperson or Secretary for discussion at a meeting. However, it's important to remember that the

Parent Council cannot discuss matters relating to individual parents, children or staff members for reasons of confidentiality.

Agree the agenda in advance and stick to it. Include an opportunity for members to raise Any Other Competent Business (AOCB).

Identify 'standing items' for every meeting – e.g. approving previous minutes.

## Selecting Office bearers

When new members join the Parent Council, the first task is to agree office bearers. Until a chairperson is agreed, the headteacher of the school, may take the chair just to get things started. Once you have selected your office bearers, the new chairperson for the Parent Council, who must be a parent of a child at the school, can run the rest of the meeting.

### The Chairperson

The Parent Council should always be chaired by a member of the Parent Forum. The success of a meeting can depend upon how it is chaired but remember, the Chairperson is the person who makes sure things get done; not the person who does everything.

**There are two basic jobs the Chairperson should do:**

- a) Guide the Parent Council to achieve its aims
- b) Chair the meetings of the Parent Council

**Some of the duties of the Chairperson are as follows:**

- Liaise with the Secretary/Clerk on the agenda and meeting arrangements.
- Welcome members and introduce guests.
- Ensure fair discussion and that everyone gets a chance to have their say.
- Stop anyone taking over or dominating discussions.
- Get through the agenda on time.
- Sum up issues, points and decisions.
- Ensure decisions are carried out.
- Work with the Treasurer to ensure that proper financial accounts are prepared for meetings, including the Annual General Meeting.



## The Secretary

The Secretary plays an important role in supporting communication between Parent Council members themselves and between the Parent Forum and the Parent Council. It is important that the Parent Council agrees how members of the Parent Forum can get in touch with the Secretary and that these arrangements are well publicised so that all parents know how to make contact.

### **Some of the duties of the Secretary are to:**

- Make arrangements for meetings and prepare an agenda in consultation with the Chairperson.
- Send a notice of the meeting, venue and agenda to all Parent Council members so that they will receive them in good time for the meeting. Agendas should be sent out for all meetings even if they are held at the same time and place each month.
- Keep a record of everyone attending the meeting and any apologies for absence.
- Let Parent Council members know about all correspondence received and report any action taken since last meeting.
- Take a minute of meetings, recording decisions and actions to be taken and by whom. This can be a task that is shared amongst members of the Parent Council to allow the Secretary to participate in discussions.
- Provide minutes for all Parent Council members prior to or at meetings.
- Provide minutes for the Head Teacher, these will be displayed within school and forwarded to Local Elected Members.

## The Clerk

Your Parent Council may appoint a Clerk, who will undertake all or some of the tasks of the Secretary. If the Clerk is not a member of the Parent Council they can be paid by the local authority.



## The Treasurer

Every Parent Council that intends to raise money should make sure a Treasurer is appointed to handle the money coming in and going out of the group. The Treasurer is responsible for the proper handling of the finances of the Parent Council, but not the actual raising of money.

### The tasks of the Treasurer include:

- Having a clear and accurate book-keeping system that records any money received and how the money is spent.
- Maintaining the bank account. It is good financial practice to require two out of three of the Officers' signatures on cheques to allow any money to be withdrawn or spent.
- Producing a report for each meeting stating money paid into, or out of, the account since the last meeting.
- Advise on the amount of money available for the group's work and warn of excess expenditure.



Prior to the Parent Council Annual General Meeting (AGM) the Treasurer should arrange for the year's accounts to be independently checked (audited) and agreed with the Chair. The Treasurer should present the audited financial statement at the AGM and answer any questions on the accounts.

## Getting the most from your Parent Council

Everyone on the Parent Council will bring something different and something useful to help you be successful. There may also be others; parents, grandparents, relatives, community members and local authority staff who can help you with your work. Identifying the particular skills that you need and finding out who has these will be important and help you to make the most of everyone's contribution.

Working with others on the Parent Council can also be a way of learning from other people and developing new skills.



### What do parents bring?

#### Parents:

- Are experts on their own children and bring this information and knowledge about their children's needs
- Have unique and varied skills, interests, knowledge and experience
- Are members of their local community and have links (e.g. with businesses, shops and services) that the school may not have
- Are in touch with other parents (members of the Parent Forum) and can represent a wider range of views.

### What does the headteacher bring?

The headteacher, or sometimes someone standing in for the headteacher, will always attend Parent Council meetings and be there to give encouragement and guidance.

#### The headteacher:

- Will keep the Parent Council informed on what is happening in the school and what plans there are for development and improvement
- Can support the involvement of pupils in the activities of the Parent Council and make the links to learning and the curriculum
- Can provide opportunities for parents to join in school activities and plan with the Parent Council how this can happen
- Will work alongside the Parent Council to help you support the school
- Provides a link with other staff in the school and the authority.



### Not forgetting pupils!

After all they are what it's all about and by talking to them you can learn a lot about their interests and priorities that can help you in planning your events and get them on your side.

### **Pupils:**

- Have direct access to parents and can be a good channel of communication
- Have strong views, from first-hand experience, of what they feel needs to change to make their school better
- Can be encouraged, with the support of staff, to take part in activities with the Parent Council as part of the curriculum and may be able to help with devising and carrying out surveys of parents' views or using communication skills learnt in class
- Can be a 'magnet' for encouraging parents to join in school activities
- Who are on the Pupil Council can help with communicating with all pupils.

### Beyond the Parent Council

One of the main purposes of the Parent Council is to support the involvement of parents in ways that suit them best. This may be through events, subgroups, responding to surveys, helping their children at home or getting involved in the school. Be on the look out for parents with particular expertise that can support the school from web design to woodwork!

There may be lots of other people - grandparents, older brothers or sisters, other relatives - who also have a lot to offer the school and can support learning. Grandparents in particular have a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge to offer - and most importantly, many of them also have time to volunteer and get involved (subject to the usual disclosure checks if necessary).



## Helping more Parents get involved

This is one of the main challenges for all Parent Councils. Helping parents to get involved in their children's learning is one of the most important ways of making a difference for children and young people. It's important to remember that involvement can take many different forms and parents need opportunities to get involved in ways that suit them best. You will only know what these are by asking them and by trying new ways.

### Getting involved can be difficult

Every parent wants the best for their child but they may have difficulty in taking part in some activities run by the school or the Parent Council. This does not mean that they are not interested or don't care - it's just that there may be other pressures that get in the way or that they don't know how best to get involved. The reasons will be different for every parent so you will need to ask them to find out what would help them get involved.

### Communication

As a Parent Council, you will want to tell parents about what you are discussing and what you intend to do. You might want to consider:

- A newsletter for parents - or if the school already has one, a specific Parent Council Update section in the school's newsletter.
- Eye-catching posters with key information about events displayed in prominent positions in the community - the post office, doctors and dentists waiting rooms and supermarkets.
- Talk to the school about how you can communicate with and involve parents for whom English is not their first language or how you can reach others who may have difficulty with usual communication methods.
- Try using new technology to reach parents; if the school has a website, include a Parent Council area featuring news and information; mobile phones and email are now the preferred method of communication for many parents; think about setting up a Parent Council website blog as a way of keeping parents informed and getting their comments back.
- Don't forget to let parents know when and where your meetings are being held and that these are open for them to attend.
- The Annual Report that the Parent Council makes to parents does not necessarily have to be a formal report but could include photos or video clips of events sponsored by the Council and be presented in a more visual way.

## Legal Issues

### Child Protection

It is not a requirement that all members of Parent Councils be CRBS/Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) checked before joining the Parent Council. However, there may be occasions where a check is necessary or desirable. Details of the criteria and arrangements for

Disclosure can be found online: [www.crbs.org.uk/PVG](http://www.crbs.org.uk/PVG). The Headteacher or Local Authority should also be well placed to provide advice if there is any uncertainty. Most Authorities will run Child Protection training for members of Parent Councils.

### Insurance

There will be some circumstances where Parent Council activities must be covered by Public Liability Insurance, e.g. social events and school fairs if being organised by the Parent Council.

It is important that Parent Councils take the advice of their Headteacher or Local Authority who can advise them of insurance arrangements in their area. Useful advice and information on insurance can be found on the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) website:

[www.sptc.info](http://www.sptc.info).

### Finance

Most Local Authorities provide a small budget for Parent Councils to cover administrative and running costs. During the course of the year the Parent Council may also raise funds and have its own expenditure. This money must be accounted for and the Parent Council must make an annual report to the Parent Forum on income and expenditure. It is up to the Parent Council, taking advice from the Headteacher and the Local Authority, to consider how to best keep its accounts. Proper records and controls are important.

Accounts don't need to be formally audited but must be presented for approval at the Parent Council Annual General Meeting. It is however good practice to have your accounts independently assessed. This can be done by a suitably qualified parent or a community volunteer who is not on the Parent Council. Some Local Authorities may require accounts to be submitted to them.

## Working together

### What happens if things go wrong?

- No matter how well your Parent Council is running there may be occasions when differences of opinion occur. These may be between individual members of the Parent Council or between the Parent Council and the headteacher. In either case it will be important to listen to the different views being expressed and to try to find areas of agreement. Focus on the issue and trying to find a way forward.
- If there is disagreement about what the Parent Council should be doing, you could put the issue to the wider Parent Forum to gain their views.
- Sometimes the Parent Council and the headteacher may have different opinions on an issue. It is important that discussion focuses on reaching agreement in the interests of the well being of all children and the school, for whom the headteacher is ultimately responsible.

If you cannot reach agreement with the headteacher you can make your case to the education authority who may ask one of their staff to help resolve the issue. Exceptionally, if after involving the education authority you still have concerns, it may be possible to refer the issue to HMIE (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education).

### **The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS)**

The NPFS was set up in 2009 following research findings that Parent Councils felt that they wanted a new national organisation to represent their views. The NPFS is drawn from Parent Councils in each local authority area across Scotland and contributes to national working groups in a number of key policy areas. The NPFS works in partnership with the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to ensure that parents' views are heard and considered.

The NPFS communicates with Parent Councils through its network of local representatives. In some areas this may be an email update, in others at local area forum meetings and events.

The NPFS also issues a Quarterly Parent Council Newsletter and provides updates to Parent Councils as necessary. In addition, it runs an annual conference for parents and Parent Councils ensuring that it provides up to date information on the key issues affecting children's education.

You can find out how to contact your local area representative on the NPFS website: [www.parentforumscotland.org](http://www.parentforumscotland.org).