

# PARENT COUNCIL RESOURCE

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## Section 3 – Setting up a Parent Council

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## 3. Setting up a Parent Council

### 3.1 The local authority's role in establishing Parent Councils

Within the Parental Involvement Act (2006), local authorities have a role and responsibility to encourage and support parents and schools to set up a Parent Council. Local authorities should do this in partnership with parents. The decision about what the Parent Council will look like – and indeed whether one is set up – is the decision of each parent forum. One of the most important issues to think about when setting up a Parent Council is that time will be needed to work through the process. The more time that is allowed to slowly work through the process, the better the quality of involvement will be.

#### 3.1.1 Involving parents in identifying options

There are a range of ways parents can get involved in identifying the type of Parent Council they would like to see in their setting or school. The best place to start is to identify what the issues are for parents about their setting or school and the type of parental involvement and parental engagement they would like. Starting from this point can then lead parents to thinking about whether they want a Parent Council and if so, what type of group they would like. Some ideas to generate discussion about issues and what is already working in settings or schools include:

- A one-day conference held for the school or for parents across the local authority to share good practice and think about ways they would like to get involved in their child's education. As part of the conference, parents could identify whether they are interested in setting up a Parent Council and what they would like it to do.
- Running an open space event – this can be an excellent way for staff and parents to work together and explore areas of good practice or identify issues. Open space events are best run with a minimum of 20 attendees and a maximum of 100. Where possible, themes for discussion should be identified in advance of the event and attendees should be allocated to groups. The leader opens the event by introducing the theme which is then discussed in groups of between 4 and 10 people. Attendees are not expected to 'represent' the views of their setting, school or Parent Council. Gathering the views and ideas of individuals is the intended aim of the event. An example of a key theme could be 'How do we work together to involve and engage parents in their children's learning?' The

issues for discussion could then be: What can schools do? What can parents do? What can others do?

- Holding an informal meeting for parents to look at what is working well and what parents would like to change.

Parents taking part in a conference, open space meeting or informal meeting could decide to set up a working group to develop and consider options to set up the Parent Council. The working group would be made up of a small group of parents from each year group in the school and the Headteacher to support and advise. It could also include representation from the Pupil Council. Once options are developed, parents could be brought back together to talk through the options.

### **3.1.2 Role of a working group**

The role of the working group could include:

- identifying issues that are important to parents;
- considering the options for setting up a Parent Council which would support working on these issues;
- developing a draft Constitution (see Section 3.3) based on the various options for the Parent Council;
- communicating regularly with the parent forum to gather the views and approval about the options which the working group have suggested for the Parent Council and the Constitution;
- communicating regularly with the setting or school and involving the Headteacher and other staff to help consider these options;
- reporting back to the local authority with suggested arrangements for the Parent Council and the Constitution. Using this feedback, the local authority could prepare a programme of action to establish a Parent Council before reporting back formally to the parent forum with options to set up a Parent Council. The parent forum would then reach agreement about its preferred option.

## **3.2 Selecting office bearers**

Parents may choose to have office bearers to help organise how the Parent Council works and carry out some of the tasks that need to be done in order for it to run smoothly. Some parent groups have joint office bearers who work together and share some of the tasks. Alternatively, it

is possible for the Parent Council to decide that these roles can be shared at times to build capacity or to help with the transition of parental representatives.

Typically, office bearers include:

- Chairperson - who should always be a parent of a child at the school
- Vice Chair - who can help the Chair and stand in when they are absent
- Secretary/Clerk - to take minutes and handle all communication
- Treasurer - to keep a good record of all money related matters

An initial first task is to identify which office bearers are needed in your Parent Council and agree these. The Constitution may already state this. Once the office bearers have been selected, the new Chairperson can run the rest of the meeting.

The majority of Parent Council members should be drawn from the parent forum e.g. parents of children at the setting or school, but others can be invited to join as co-opted members. These could include teachers, pupils, and community partners. It is up to the Parent Council to work out the structure that suits them. For denominational schools, the Constitution of the Parent Council must allow for at least one person nominated by the Church or denominational body to be co-opted.

Parents of children at the setting or school can be members of the Parent Council. However, the parent forum can agree that the Parent Council Constitution allows other people to be co-opted and agree the terms e.g. whether or not they have voting rights.

The local Church or denominational body can nominate someone to be co-opted onto the Parent Council of a denominational school.

A Headteacher or their representative has a right and a duty to attend Parent Council meetings, unless the parents and Headteacher decide otherwise.

With advice and support from the Headteacher, the Parent Council can also choose to set up a Combined Parent Council. This might cover more than one school or combine age/stage from early years through to senior phase. Below are some of the common roles and possible tasks.

### **3.2.1 The Chairperson**

The Parent Council should always be chaired by a member of the school's parent forum for that school. The success of a meeting can depend upon how it is chaired but the Chairperson should ensure things get done but not be 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 Parent Council meetings.

Some of the duties of the Chairperson include:

- liaising with the Secretary/Clerk on the agenda and meeting arrangements;
- communicating with the Headteacher to ensure a good working relationship between the Parent Council and the setting or school;
- allocating a time slot for the Headteacher at the beginning or end of Parent Council meetings;
- ensuring that all statutory responsibilities are undertaken e.g. to share the Constitution, Annual General Meeting Minutes and Annual Accounts with the local authority;
- welcoming members and introducing guests;
- ensuring fair discussion and that everyone gets a chance to have their say;
- leading the Parent Council to consider inclusion and equality, so the voices of as many parents and carers are heard as possible;
- stopping anyone taking over or dominating discussions;
- getting through the agenda on time;
- summing up issues, points and decisions;
- ensuring decisions are carried out;
- working with the Treasurer to ensure that proper financial accounts are prepared for meetings, including the Annual General Meeting.

### **3.2.2 The Secretary**

The Secretary plays an important role in supporting communication amongst 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;
- it is recommended that the days and times of Parent Council meetings are varied to allow for participation of parents who may have different work patterns;
- you may wish to consider holding online meetings and/or in-person meetings, or a combination;
- 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 the last meeting;
- take a minute (or note) of meetings, record 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;
- keep a note of the terms of membership e.g. how long members have served;
- ensure the draft Minutes are shared with the wider parent forum as soon as possible after the meeting, or after they have been approved at the next meeting;
- provide minutes for all Parent Council members prior to or at meetings.

### **3.2.3 The Clerk**

Your Parent Council may have a Clerk appointed who will undertake all or some of the tasks of the Secretary. The Clerk is not a member of the Parent Council and has no voting rights. A Clerk can be paid either by the Parent Council, or through the local authority's arrangements with the Parent Council.

### 3.2.4 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, along with all members of the Parent Council, for the proper handling of the finances of the Parent Council.

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 office bearers' signatures on cheques to allow any money to be withdrawn or spent. A similar system should also be set up to sign off online payments and/or invoices;
- producing a report for each meeting stating money paid into, or out of, the account since the last meeting;
- advising on the amount of money available for the group's work and warning of excess expenditure.

Prior to the Parent Council Annual General Meeting (AGM), the Treasurer should arrange for the accounts to be independently checked (examined and signed off) and agreed with the Chair each year.

The Treasurer should present the independently checked financial statement at the AGM and answer any questions on the accounts. The person doing the independent checking does not have to be a qualified accountant. It could be someone known to and trusted by the Parent Council who has some financial knowledge. The Headteacher or the Parent Council Treasurer of a neighbouring school may be possible options.

## 3.3 What is a Constitution?

The Constitution is your Parent Council's set of rules. It contains information such as the number of members, length of membership and details about co-opted members. It is good practice to review and update the Constitution on a regular basis to ensure that it complies with legislation. Further information about Constitutions is available in Appendix 1 and on Connect's website<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

### 3.4 Agreeing your Constitution priorities

There is considerable flexibility in how the parent forum chooses to organise their Parent Council but there are some important areas below for consideration.

It is important to ensure that each year the whole parent forum has the opportunity to help shape the Parent Council's priorities. This can be done by carrying out a simple survey or at a parent event in the setting or school. The Parent Council Annual General Meeting is an ideal opportunity to consult with other parents. It is also important to work in partnership with the Headteacher on this task as well as considering the views of pupils, perhaps through consultation with the Pupil Council. This will help ensure that the work of the Parent Council supports that of the setting or school.

Once the Parent Council has the basic arrangements set out, the next step is to agree as a group, what you want to achieve and the different ways you want to work. If a survey of parents' views hasn't already been undertaken, the Parent Council may wish to consider this to discover what their priorities are. The Parent Council may also want to check if the setting or school's improvement plan identifies any issues that need further discussion with parents, or ideas for activities, fundraising and/or joint working. Consideration should be given to what the Parent Council can do to support activities already planned, the work and life of the setting or school and the staff.

Parent Councils should be realistic in what they can achieve and prioritise the issues that are to be taken forward. After the priorities have been agreed, the Parent Council may wish to consider dividing into sub-groups or gain the help and support of other parents and involve them in specific activities.

In discussions with the Headteacher, at Parent Council meetings, ways of working together can be identified to help parents make the most out of learning opportunities in the home and community. For example, the Parent Council could work with the setting or school to develop information that explains new developments in the curriculum, how children are being taught and how parents can be involved. Or, the Parent Council could discuss the Homework or Behaviour Management Policy with staff and think about ways in which it can be made more relevant to parents. Online or in-person workshops could be run for parents to explain what they can do to help.



The Parent Council can support the setting or school in the events it holds for parents e.g. parents' meetings, concerts, seasonal events. Parents can also be encouraged to come along to these events. They should be held at times and in venues which are suitable for all parents and meet their needs.

Some parents may find it difficult to join in with activities in settings or schools for a variety of reasons. Consideration should be given to ways of helping more parents get involved. Parents who do not attend Parent Council meetings may be just as committed to the setting or school and supporting their children's learning.

One very practical way to support the setting or school, and which can involve a larger number of parents is through social and/or fundraising activities. These can help families to feel welcome and part of the school community.

If the setting or school has a separate Parent Teacher Association (PTA), there may be an opportunity to work together to support each other's activities.

### **3.4.1 Sub-groups**

Sometimes it may be useful to organise a short or longer-term sub-group to carry out a specific task. A sub-group may also provide an opportunity to involve parents who are unable to commit to being full members of the Parent Council. If a sub-group is set up, it is important to ensure that it has a clear remit with someone responsible for its organisation and for reporting back to the full Parent Council regularly. Any sub-group work should be directed back through the Chair of the Parent Council and recorded in the Parent Council minutes. Decisions about spending funds raised by sub-groups, should be made by members of the Parent Council.

Some of the tasks to be allocated to a sub-group(s) could include:

- welcoming new families;
- inclusion and equality;
- organising fundraising;
- planning social events for parents, children and staff;
- supporting learning opportunities for parents with teachers and children in the setting or school;

- communicating with parents through a variety of platforms including newsletters, social media;
- working with staff on new approaches to learning and teaching and how parents can be involved;
- links with the community.

### **Reflective questions / activities**

- What does your Parent Council want to achieve? This is likely to take up most of the meeting. Parents may want to think about doing this as a fun exercise in small groups. Drawing on information from the setting, school or personal experiences, identify a range of topics. If the meeting is in person, these could be put up around the room. Or if the meeting is online, facilitators of the breakout rooms could feedback and present them via their screen.
- How does the Parent Council want to work? If there is a long list of priorities and a range of issues to be tackled, consideration could be given to setting up a sub-group(s) as a way of getting things done. These groups can also allow different members of the Parent Council to work on the things that interest them most or that they feel they can contribute to most usefully. Other parents can also be invited to join sub-groups to support the work of the Parent Council.
- Do any members of the Parent Council need practical support e.g. childcare, transport or digital devices to attend or join meetings? Parents may want to think about these issues when discussing the budget needs for the Parent Council with the local authority.
- How frequently do you think the Parent Council will need to meet? Consideration should be given to identifying and setting dates for future meetings for the academic year, which are suitable for everyone, as well as whether the meetings will be online and/or in person or a combination of these.

## **3.5 Getting the most from your Parent Council**

Everyone on the Parent Council will bring something different and useful to help the Parent Council be successful. There may also be other parents in the parent forum and/or grandparents, relatives, community members and local authority staff who can help with the work.

Identifying the particular skills that the Parent Council needs, and finding out who has these, will be important to help make the most of everyone's contribution. Working with Parent Council members can also be a way of learning from other people and developing or sharing new skills.

### **3.5.1 What do parents bring?**

Parents:

- are experts on their own child(ren) 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 setting or school may not have;
- are in touch with other parents (members of the parent forum) and can represent a wider range of views.

### **3.5.2 What does the Headteacher bring?**

The Headteacher, or sometimes someone standing in for the Headteacher, has a right and a duty to attend Parent Council meetings but can send a deputy and will do so to give encouragement and guidance.

### **3.5.3 Co-opted members**

The Constitution for your Parent Council may include a certain number of co-optees.

Co-opted members:

- can contribute wider experience and knowledge relevant to the local community;
- can provide a link with parents of children who are about to join the setting or school;
- may have specialist skills or knowledge they can bring to the Parent Council.

For specific topics, the Parent Council can invite people with particular expertise e.g. the school nurse, or an architect for a new setting or school. Co-opted members are usually nominated at an Annual General Meeting (AGM) or an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM). Notification of any co-optees should be made known to the wider parent forum where possible in advance of any meeting.

### **3.5.4 What can pupils bring?**

Helping all pupils is what the work of the Parent Council is all about. By talking to them, the Parent Council can learn a lot about their interests and priorities that can help in the planning of events. The Parent Council may wish to consider having a pupil representative as a co-opted member or offer a regular slot on the agenda for them to update e.g. on the Pupil Council's work or on any concerns or issues.

Pupils:

- have direct access to their 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 setting or 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 learned in class;
- can be a 'magnet' for encouraging parents to join activities in the setting or school;
- who are on the Pupil Council can help communicate with other pupils in the setting or school about the work of the Parent Council.

### **3.5.5 Beyond the Parent Council**

One of the main purposes of the Parent Council is to support the involvement and engagement of parents in ways that suit them best. This may be through events, sub-groups, responding to surveys, helping their children at home or getting involved in the setting or school. This may be online or in person. Be on the lookout for parents with particular skills that can support the setting or school and children's learning, from web design and careers advice to woodwork and gardening! Ask them if they would like to offer their knowledge and expertise. Many people can be shy to volunteer but will respond positively to an invitation.

There may be lots of other people e.g. grandparents, older brothers or sisters, other relatives who also have a lot to offer the school community. Grandparents in particular have a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge to offer. Most importantly, many of them also have time to volunteer and get involved.

## 3.6 Setting ground rules and working together

Setting ground rules that can be referred back to from time-to-time can help meetings run more smoothly. In considering ground rules the Parent Council might want to:

- set meeting dates well in advance and allocate a specific amount of time to them. Encourage the Headteacher to share the important dates for families in the setting or school calendar with the Parent Council and all parents at the start of the academic year. Include the dates of the Parent Council meetings;
- agree the agenda in advance and keep to it. Parents and Parent Council members can ask to put an item on the agenda. Include an opportunity for members to raise Any Other Competent Business (AOCB);
- identify topics to be discussed at every meeting e.g. welcome, apologies, approving previous minutes;
- share the agenda with the Headteacher as a courtesy so that the Headteacher can prepare;
- record action points clearly in the minutes and make a note of who has agreed to undertake the action and by when. Check progress on action points agreed at previous meetings;
- support the Parent Council and work as a team - everyone's contribution is important;
- listen to and respect each other's point of view;
- Encourage quieter members to take part and ensure everyone can participate fairly in ways that work for them;
- aim towards constructive discussions and decisions;
- consider what the Parent Council's approach will be when parents attend meetings - how they can raise issues via the Chair and comment. Depending on the issue, this could be discussed under Any Other Competent Business. Alternatively, it could be carried over as an agenda item for the next meeting to enable the Parent Council to be fully informed about it. While Parent Councils cannot get involved in individual issues, they can look at wider school policies and approaches;
- Consider having: a Complaints Policy; a Code of Conduct; and a Social Media Policy as helpful ways of handling issues or disagreements. At times, there may be a need to get wider parental views if there is an issue that is dividing opinion;
- ensure meetings start on time – Parent Council members should let the Chairperson know if they are going to be late or cannot attend.

### 3.7 Setting up a bank account

If the Parent Council has already been set up, there may already be an existing bank account. Should members of the Parent Council change, new signatories will need to be agreed in good time. Changing bank signatories can take time. If the Parent Council has not previously been set up, this is something that the Treasurer could be asked to do once they have been selected. Further information is available on Connect's website<sup>24</sup>.

### 3.8 Improvement planning

Settings and schools must develop their Improvement Plan in consultation with the Parent Council (or combined Parent Council), teachers, pupils, parents, people employed or working in the setting or school on an unpaid basis, and representative local bodies<sup>25</sup>. Parent Councils have a key role to support improvement planning by discussing the setting or school's strengths and areas for development from a parental perspective. To achieve this, the Parent Council should work closely with the Headteacher on the setting or school's Improvement Plan and consider how best to involve other parents in the process.

Improvement planning focuses on the quality of education, learning and teaching, assessment as well as the quality of the partnerships that are in place to improve outcomes for children. It should be part of the setting or school's regular on-going cycle of self-evaluation and improvement.

As part of the Improvement Plan discussions, Parent Councils could encourage the setting or school to have a Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy. This should align with the local authority's overarching Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy or Framework.

The Parent Council is a key group during the setting or school inspection process and members will be invited to meet with a member of the HMIE Inspection Team. Further information can be found on Parentzone Scotland<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://connect.scot/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/6/section/6>

<sup>26</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/my-school/inspection-and-review/understanding-inspection-and-review>

## Reflective questions

- Does the Parent Council have arrangements in place to develop or review a strategy or framework for Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement?
- Are pupils, the parent forum, wider community, partner organisations involved in the process of developing or reviewing the Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement strategy?
- Does the strategy cover the three levels of engagement with parents e.g. Learning at Home, Home/school partnership, and Parental representation?
- Does the strategy outline how barriers are being removed to promote parental involvement and engagement e.g. through a Family Learning approach, or a Home/school link Officer?
- Does the strategy outline how the setting or school will work with parents and families who find it difficult to support their children's learning due to family circumstances?
- How does the strategy promote equal opportunities and take account of the needs of particular minority groups in your setting or school?
- Does the strategy make appropriate links with duties under other relevant pieces of legislation e.g. Additional Support needs?
- Does the strategy take account of the training and development of staff and others working with children and their families?
- Does the strategy set out the arrangements for giving advice and information to parents who live apart but share the care and responsibilities for their child(ren)?
- Does the setting or school have arrangements in place to deal with concerns/complaints? Are parents aware of how to raise a concern/complaint with the setting or school?
- Does the strategy link to the 'How good is our School? (Fourth Edition)' self-evaluation framework?<sup>27</sup>
- Are there procedures in place to monitor, evaluate and review the strategy e.g. every 2 years?

## 3.9 Getting help and support

Now that you are on the Parent Council you may feel that you have taken on a big task.

Remember that you are not on your own. The Headteacher will be a key contact and it will be important to work together and support each other. You and/or other members of the Parent

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<sup>27</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/inspection-and-review/inspection-frameworks/how-good-is-our-school-fourth-edition-hgios-4/>

Council may previously have been members of a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and this experience will be useful.

The Parent Council may be new or have changed membership but new ideas should be welcomed as members work out together what they want to do and how the Parent Council is going to work. In addition, the setting or school, local authority, other people and organisations may be able to help support the Parent Council.

## 3.10 Community resources

### 3.10.1 Resources in the community

Every community contains a range of services and resources that the Parent Council may be able to draw on. For example, consideration could be given to using community venues for some of the Parent Council meetings as they may be more accessible and parents may feel more comfortable there. This may be a useful approach too for secondary school Parent Councils or settings with a catchment area covering a number of communities or neighbourhoods.

There may also be opportunities for firms or businesses to offer practical help or donations to support activities e.g. donations of raffle prizes; sponsoring activities in return for some publicity; or tools and plants from a garden centre to support the creation of an eco-area in the setting or school grounds. Parents are often employed by local businesses and they can share information and encourage their employers to get involved. In addition, the links that parents have with their workplace can often be useful in developing contacts that can help children's learning by providing work experience, arranging visits or by linking their expertise directly into collaboration with teachers.

### 3.10.2 Family and the wider community

Families (grandparents or other relatives) and members of the wider community can be a great source of expertise with a wealth of experience and knowledge that the Parent Council and setting or school can tap into.

Most people are very pleased to be asked and can be very creative in their ideas for how they can help.



Local faith groups are often in touch with parents and may be able to support the Parent Council by involving a wider group of people. The local Community Council or other community / charitable / voluntary groups in the area may be a valuable source of information and advice. The Headteacher in your setting or school will be able to advise on any specific requirements or procedures that need to be followed.

### **What it looks like when things go well**

- Parents feel that they are welcome in the school.
- There are lots of opportunities for parents to get involved in different activities and there is evidence that they do get involved.
- The setting or school understands the needs of all parents and develops ways of working which are supportive and inclusive.
- People are asked about what is important to them, and what they would like to see happening.
- Pupils are contributing their ideas about what is important to them and how they want parents and others to be involved. These ideas are used to increase the involvement and engagement of parents.
- Parents are motivated to continue their own learning.
- Everyone recognises that parents have other commitments and responsibilities in their lives.
- Parents are able to take part when and how they can. It is easy to step back and then pick things up later if circumstances change.
- Parents have the confidence to take part and the skills that parents have are used appropriately within the school.
- Teachers engage with parents in a variety of ways on a day-to-day basis in order to build a positive relationship.
- Settings and schools recognise the diversity of parents in their learning community and are inclusive of everyone. Information about the ways in which parents can get involved in the life of the setting or school should be made available in different formats and languages through existing communication channels and methods. Interpreters and signers are provided when necessary to ensure that all parents have access to important information.

- The school and Parent Council recognises the reluctance of some parents resulting from their own bad experiences at school and provides positive ways for parents to be involved in their own child's school at a level they are comfortable with.
- Where appropriate, support and training opportunities should be offered by schools and/or the local authority to anyone taking on a new role such as membership of the Parent Council or volunteering to help teachers with school activities.
- The Improvement Plan clearly indicates the different ways in which parents can be involved in the setting or school and their children's learning.