

PARENT COUNCIL RESOURCE

Updated August 2025



Section 1 - Background

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1. Background

Parents make a real difference and they have an important role to play in helping their child's learning and development at home but also in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings, schools and the wider community.

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 gives parents the right to receive information about their children's learning, to be represented, have their views heard and expressed.

Providing opportunities, supporting and building capacity amongst Scotland's parents to capitalise on children's learning experiences is key in raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Research evidence shows that when 'parents, carers and other family members are effectively involved in their children's education, the outcome for their children is better¹.

Reference is made throughout this Parent Council resource to the application of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 in settings and schools. This includes early learning and childcare settings, primary, secondary and special schools, and the community. It should be noted that the application of the Parental Involvement Act covers parents of children attending early learning and childcare provided in public primary schools. They are members of the school's parent forum and may join the Parent Council.

The Act does not apply to parents of children in 'free-standing' local authority nurseries or those attending early learning and childcare provided by a 'partner provider'. Nonetheless, we would encourage early learning and childcare settings who are currently not subject to the legislative requirements, to ensure there are effective arrangements in place for parental involvement and engagement and that the key principles highlighted throughout this resource are adhered to.

1.1 Who is this Parent Council resource for?

There are lots of ways in which settings, schools, parents, families and the community can work together to give children and young people the best possible education. Settings and schools are

¹ Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006, pi - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-scottish-schools-parental-involvement-act-2006/documents/>

most effective when they develop positive relationships with parents and the learning community which they serve. This resource is designed to help support parents to work in partnership with early learning and childcare settings, schools and the wider community to welcome all parents, gather their views and report back to parents for the benefit of all pupils. It replaces the previous version which was published in 2006 and complements existing Education Scotland and Scottish Government information and advice about Parent Councils. It aims to:

- help parents understand the role and function of a Parent Council;
- answer some of the questions parents may have about Parent Councils;
- signpost parents to further sources of information and support;
- represent the views of the parent forum (all parents) at their early learning and childcare setting, school and in the wider community; and
- ensure the views of parents are listened to and taken into account.

Reflective questions are included throughout the resource to help foster better working relationships for the benefit of all children and families.

1.2 Terms and definitions

‘Parent’ - The term ‘parent’ in this document refers to people with parental responsibilities (within the meaning of Section 1(3) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) and others who care for or look after children or young people. A person with ‘parental responsibilities’ refers to someone with the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child. It is however, important to acknowledge that individual family units will comprise a wider range of people who might also contribute to and support a child’s learning at home, in the community and in settings or schools.

‘Child’ - For the purposes of support for children and families, ‘child’ means a person under the age of 18 years.

‘Family’, in relation to a child, includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom the child has been living².

² Children (Scotland) Regulations, 1995 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/36/contents>

‘Family engagement’ - the term ‘Family Engagement’ is sometimes used as an umbrella term for early learning and childcare settings and schools to capture the breadth of active and meaningful engagement with parents and families. Effective ‘Family Engagement’ extends across sectors and reinforces learning in multiple settings where children and families learn including at home, in settings, schools and the community. While the role of parents will change as children grow and develop into adulthood, ‘Family Engagement’ is continuous throughout their life. As with Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home, Family Engagement is a shared responsibility for settings, schools and communities.

‘Parent forum’ is the collective term for every parent or carer with a child at a school. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 gives each school’s parent forum the right to set up a Parent Council.

‘Parent Council’ is a group of parents selected by members of the parent forum to represent all the parents of children at a school. Parent Councils were established under the Parental Involvement Act (2006) in recognition of the important role that parents can play, both in their own children’s learning, and in the wider life of a setting or school.

‘Parental Involvement’ is about supporting pupils and their learning. It is about parents and teachers working together in partnership to help children become more confident learners³.

‘Parental Engagement’ most often refers to parents actively and meaningfully engaging in their children’s learning. Such learning can take place in a variety of settings including early learning and childcare settings (ELC), schools, the community, through family learning and at home⁴.

‘Family Learning’ encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children’s learning. ‘Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage’⁵.

³ Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act, 2006 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/contents>

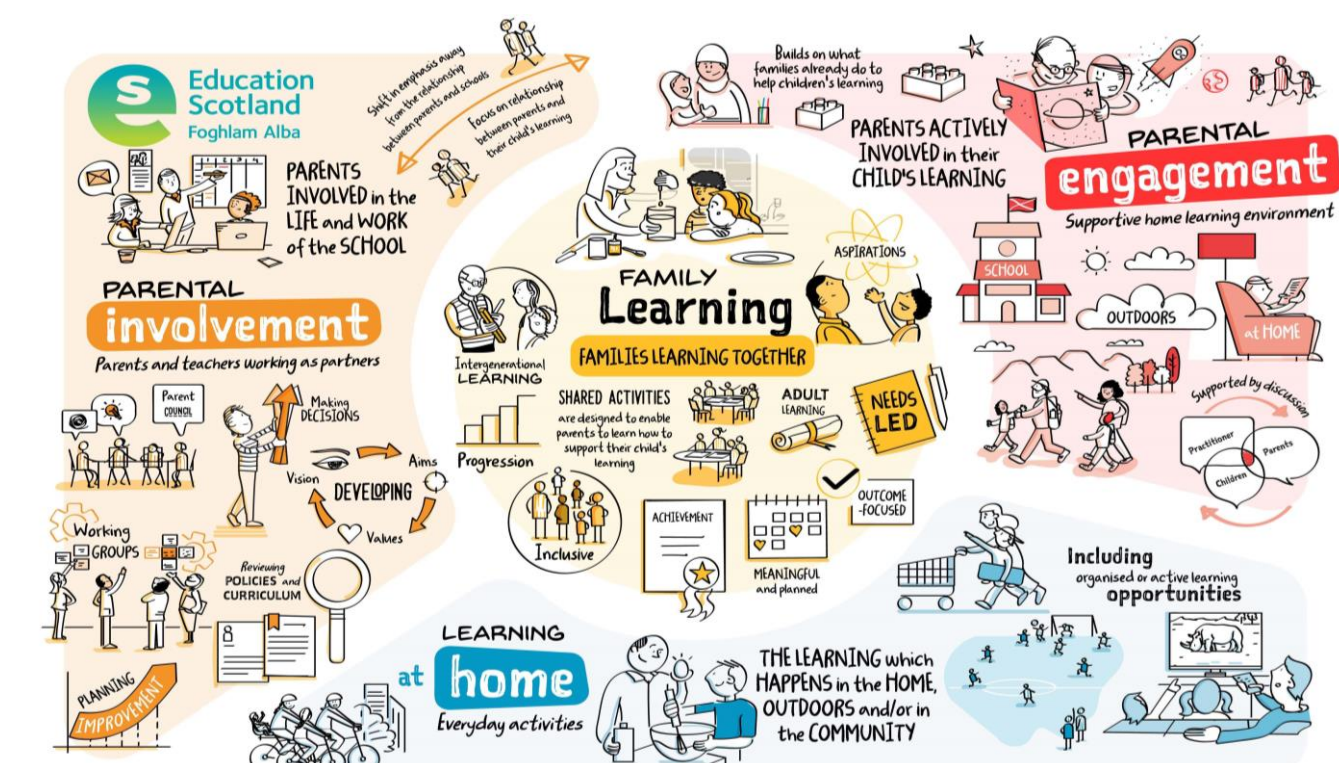
⁴ Harris and Goodall, 2007; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014

⁵ Family Learning Network, 2016

‘Learning at home’ is the learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. It takes place through everyday activities that families already do and can overlap with aspects of organised or active learning activities (Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network, 2018).

A **‘Stakeholder’** is an individual, a group or an organisation who has an interest in a project or a particular area of work.

Diagram 1 - Sketchnote



This sketchnote aims to provide a visual representation of Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home. It is taken from the 'Engaging families in learning – a thematic inspection of Family Learning'.

1.3 Legislation and Policy

There are a number of key legislation and policy documents in Scotland that parents should be aware of. Some of these are provided below.

1.3.1 Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006

In 2006, the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act⁶ came into force. Within the Act, Scottish Ministers and local authorities have a duty to promote the involvement and engagement of parents in their child's early learning and childcare (ELC) setting or school and their learning. The Parental Involvement Act (2006) recognises the benefits of involving parents in the wider life of the school and the vital role they play in supporting their children's learning. Providing and strengthening the framework to support parental involvement and engagement is therefore a key focus of the Act.

Parent Councils have an important role to play in supporting parental involvement. Within the Parental Involvement Act (2006), there are three main areas where parents can engage in their children's learning and get involved in the wider life of the school. These are:



Learning at home

Parents are entitled under the Parental Involvement Act (2006) to receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home and in the community. Learning at home should also be included in the local authority's Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy which should be developed in partnership with parents.

Home/school partnership

Early learning and childcare settings and schools must be open to and encourage the involvement of parents in the work they do. They should consider ways of providing information that helps parents engage with them and their child's learning. This should also include community partnerships with local businesses, organisations and relevant stakeholders. Parent Councils can help with this.

⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/contents>

Parental representation

The Parental Involvement Act (2006) provides a framework for ensuring that parents have the opportunity to express their views and have these taken into account on policy matters affecting the education of their children.

The Act also makes provision for parents to be a member of the parent forum at a school and have their views represented to the school, local authority and others through the Parent Council. Some settings or schools may have parent committees or associations who will represent the wider parental view.

Additionally, parents are encouraged to express their views on the setting or school's arrangements for promoting parental involvement and engagement, as well as other matters or issues of interest or concern to them. These could include: supporting improvement across the school; reviewing school policies; changes to the school catchment area; a new school building.

The Scottish Schools (Parental involvement) Act 2006 Guidance states that:

- The Parent Council should have arrangements in place for establishing the views of members of the parent forum on the standards and quality of education provided by the school, or on other matters that appear to the Parent Council to be of interest or concern to members of the forum (p30).
- The Parent Council may also be involved in engaging with the parent forum about the full range of school policies, e.g. in relation to uniform, health and wellbeing, school ethos, etc. It can collate the views of parents and report them back to the Headteacher of the school and to the local authority as appropriate. The Parent Council can also make representations on such matters to other persons, including HMIE (p30)⁷.

Under the Parental Involvement Act, parents have the right to raise their concerns and/or make a complaint.

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-scottish-schools-parental-involvement-act-2006/documents/>

1.3.2 Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004⁸, as amended, provides a framework for local authorities and other agencies to support all children with their learning. It created the term ‘additional support needs’, gave parents and pupils a number of rights, including the right to access mediation, dispute resolution and refer decisions to the Additional Support Needs Tribunal. The Act also placed duties on local authorities to identify, meet and keep under review the needs of pupils for whom they are responsible. Further information is available on Parentzone Scotland⁹ and Enquire’s websites. Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning¹⁰. Parent Councils can help schools share information with parents about helpful websites and organisations such as these.

1.3.3 Empowered System – Parents and Carers



The Empowering Parents and Carers Guidance considers the contribution of parents and carers in an empowered system.

Empowering parents means improving and strengthening the ways in which education staff engage with parents and families; and, ensuring they are at the centre of decision-making processes about their children’s learning. Parent Councils have an important role to play in improving parental empowerment.

Further information can be found on the Education Scotland website¹¹ and National Parent Forum of Scotland’s nutshell guide to Scotland’s Empowered System¹².

1.3.4 Learning Together: Scotland’s national action plan on parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home

This national action plan¹³ and subsequent update¹⁴ followed on from the ‘Review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006’ carried out by the National Parent

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/4/contents>

⁹ <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/additional-support/the-additional-support-for-learning-act/>

¹⁰ <https://enquire.org.uk/links/education-2004-amended/>

¹¹ <https://education.gov.scot/resources/an-empowered-system/>

¹² https://www.npfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/edd/2019/12/NPFS_empowering_parents_carers_E1.pdf

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-together-scotlands-national-action-plan-parental-involvement-parental-engagement/>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/learning-together-update-on-the-national-action-plan/>

Forum of Scotland (2017)¹⁵. It sets out the Scottish vision for parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home from pre-birth to age 18 and beyond. Although the plan sets out the national vision, it also allows for local and community innovation and flexibility. At the heart of this plan is communications and relationships based on trust, mutual respect and collaboration. Parent Councils are key to developing positive and constructive home-school relationships and good communications.

The aim of the plan is to:

- ensure that parents are supported to be fully involved in the life and work of their child's early learning and childcare setting or school;
- provide the right support, conditions and opportunities to help parents feel empowered to engage in their child's and their own learning;
- ensure there is a wide range of creative, meaningful and effective approaches to engaging parents and families appropriate to their needs;
- acknowledge and support parents in their key role as the primary educators of their children and in influencing the life and work of settings and schools;
- help settings, schools, local authorities, partners and stakeholders to engage meaningfully and collaboratively with parents in their children's learning and education related matters;
- expand access to family learning opportunities which meet participants needs;
- improve the quality of communication between practitioners, staff, parents and families;
- improve the skills of practitioners who work with parents and families across sectors including early years, initial teacher education, probation, post-probation, existing staff, leaders, front-line practitioners and support staff.

1.3.5 Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act¹⁶ sets out the requirements placed on local authorities, who are responsible for school provision in their area. It covers the following three provisions:

- consultation procedures for school closures and other proposals affecting schools which local authorities must follow;

¹⁵ <https://www.npfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/edd/2017/07/Final-E-versionpdf.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/2/contents>

- a local authority duty to take into account certain prescribed factors before deciding to consult on a proposal to close a rural school;
- replacement of the system of referring certain local authority decisions to the Scottish Ministers for consent with a power to call in decisions, but only in decisions relating to closures.

Parent Councils are required to be part of the consultation process where there are proposed changes to the above three provisions.

1.3.6 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly recognises the central role played by parents, carers, and families in ensuring that children grow up healthy, happy and safe. It recognises that families need protection and assistance to support the rights and wellbeing of children. Rights within the UNCRC require governments to recognise parental responsibilities and provide resources and support to help them fulfil their responsibilities, including assisting parents and carers to ensure children are provided with an adequate standard of living.

Parental responsibilities are directly referenced in articles 5, 18 and 27 of the UNCRC and references to parenting and the role of families are made throughout a large proportion of the articles.

Further information can be found [here](#).

Reflective Questions

- How can the Parent Council support the relationships with the parent forum and the wider learning community that your setting or school serves?
- In what ways can the Parent Council work with the setting or school to achieve its objectives and make improvements where needed?

Parent Councils may want to consider their participation in the setting or school's improvement plan and think about how they can work in partnership to achieve these.