

Parents as Partners

Information for Parent Council Members



Thank you for your interest in the Parent Council. Parent Councils provide an opportunity to become involved in the life and work of your child's school. Your time and contribution is much appreciated.

This leaflet is to help Parent Council members to understand their role and signpost them to sources of information and support.

The Basics

Parent Council Constitutions

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 you comply with legislation.

Sample constitutions and further information on Parent Councils is available on [Connect's website](#).

There is considerable flexibility in how the Parent Forum chooses to organise their Parent Council but there are some important areas below that you may want to consider.

Office bearers

The Parent Council may choose to have office bearers to help to organise how it works and to carry out some of the tasks that need to be done. Typically office bearers include:

- Chairperson - who should always be a parent or carer
- 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

The majority of Parent Council members should be drawn from the Parent Forum e.g. parents of children at the school, but others can be invited to join as co-opted members. These could include teachers, pupils, 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.

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 it



has a clear remit with someone responsible for its organisation and for reporting back to the full Parent Council.



Setting Ground Rules and Working Together

Meetings will be more effective if everyone understands what is expected and agrees to work together. In considering ground rules you might want to:

- Set meeting dates well in advance and allocate a specific amount of time to them. Encourage the Headteacher to share the school session diary with the Parent Council and all parents at the start of the session.
- Agree the agenda in advance and keep 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.
- 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.
- Everyone's contribution is important – support the group and work as a team.
- Respect each other's point of view – even if you think they are wrong!
- Encourage quieter members to take part. Ensure everyone can participate fairly.
- Aim towards constructive discussion and decisions – try not to let it 'get personal'.
- Consider how you want to handle parents who turn up at meetings but are not members – e.g. should they be able to raise issues and comment or just observe?
- There will be disagreements. Try and resolve these in the interests of the school and the pupils but seek help if you need it, either from the Headteacher or the Local Authority. At times, you may need to get a wider parent view if there is an issue that is dividing opinion.

Local Authorities will often run courses on managing meetings.

Communication

Communicating with the parent forum is a key aspect of the Parent Council's role. It is crucial that the Parent Council seeks and represents parental views and in turn keeps them informed and involved in what it is doing.

Consultation about the preferred methods of communication which will work best for the parent forum is good practice. It is for the Parent Council, in consultation with parents, to consider what range of communication methods will work best for their school.

Methods of communication may include:

- Face-to-face – use school events as an opportunity to meet the parent forum and gather their views.
- Written communication – newsletters, posters, noticeboards, flyers, letters, questionnaires
- Making best use of technology – email, website, social media, text messaging.

Parent Councils should also think about how to contact parents of children who are about to join the school, or how best to communicate with parents who require translation or alternative communication methods.

School Improvement

The Parent Council has a key role to support improvement by discussing the 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 improvement plan and consider how to best involve other parents in the process.

The Parent Council is a key group during the school inspection process and members will be invited to meet with a member of the inspection team. Further information can be found [here](#).

Agreeing priorities

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 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 school.



Working with others

The Headteacher's Role

The Headteacher should provide advice, guidance and support for the Parent Council. He/she has a *right and a duty* to attend Parent Council meetings and should provide information on issues affecting the school, and is a link with other school staff and the local authority.

The Headteacher should provide regular updates to the Parent Council on developments in the school and also an annual update to the parent forum.

Some Parent Councils find it helpful for the Headteacher to have an allocated time slot at the beginning or the end of the meeting.

It is good practice to ask the Headteacher in advance if he/she has any issues that should be on the agenda, but it is for the Parent Council to develop/agree the agenda.

Getting more parents on board

Not all parents in the school will feel comfortable or be able to formally join the Parent Council, or attend meetings. Some may be willing to help out on a more ad-hoc basis while others may never consider volunteering themselves but if personally approached by a Parent Council member whom they know, they would be willing to help out on a specific task or for a short period of time.

The Parent Council may find it useful to keep a list of parents' contact details or a register of interests and skills that can be drawn upon when necessary. It is important to note that any information kept by the Parent Council must be kept safe and used only for the purpose for which it was given. More information on data protection can be found on [Connect's website](#).



Family and the wider community

Families (grandparents/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 school can tap into.

Local businesses and shops may also be interested in supporting the Parent Council by donating raffle prizes or sponsoring

activities in return for some publicity. Parents may have contacts in the workplace that can help children's learning by providing work experience, arranging visits or by linking their expertise directly into collaboration with teachers.

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 your area may also be a valuable source of information and advice. Your Headteacher will be able to advise you on any specific requirements or procedures you may need to follow.

Pupil Involvement

Don't forget the pupils! They are after all on the 'front line of learning' and the main aim of the Parent Council is to ensure that their school and learning is the best it can be.

Getting pupils' views, ideas and opinions about their learning experiences can be really enlightening. Pupils can be very helpful in developing priorities and activities. In secondary schools it may be appropriate to have input from pupil representatives at each meeting. At primary schools a member of the Parent Council may be able to meet with the Pupil Council at suitable times throughout the year.

Pupils can also help at events and are useful as a channel of communication to parents.

Other Parent Councils

Meeting or sharing information with other Parent Councils in your area can be helpful. Pooling resources and expertise on local issues or challenges such as the need for better road safety or improving the quality of school meals can produce excellent results. You may also have a shared interest in local events or work with the same community members.

Your Local Authority

Each Local Authority has a member of staff whose remit includes responsibility for parental involvement and engagement. Local Authorities must provide support to help Parent Councils carry out their role. This may include: support with administration, training, recruitment of senior staff and reasonable financial support to cover travel expenses for members who attend training and meetings. Parents should not incur any personal financial costs.

All local authorities should consult Parent Councils on their strategy to promote parental involvement. They will also have mechanisms in place to consult Parent Councils on other issues such as school closures, school holidays, changes to catchment areas, etc.

Most Local Authorities support Parent Councils to come together to share experiences, ideas and issues. It is worth finding out what happens in your area as this can be a good source of sharing and support for your Parent Council.

Practical Issues

Confidentiality

All Parent Council meetings are open to others unless they are discussing a matter that requires confidentiality. These are likely to occur in exceptional circumstances.

Useful contacts

The Parent Council may find it useful to establish a range of local authority or school contacts to whom they can refer parents on to for expert assistance and support.



Protecting Vulnerable Groups

It is not a requirement that all members of a Parent Council be PVG checked (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) before joining the Parent Council. However, there may be occasions where a check is necessary or desirable. Further details can be found on the Parentzone Scotland [website](#). The Headteacher or Local Authority should also be well placed to provide advice if there is any uncertainty.

Public Liability Insurance

There will be some circumstances where Parent Council activities must be covered by Public Liability Insurance e.g. social events and school fayres 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 Connect's [website](#).

Money matters

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. Parent Councils must keep a record of all income and expenditure. It is good practice to have a treasurer's report at every meeting. Someone independent of the Parent Council must check the accounts before the Annual General Meeting and a signed copy should be presented at that meeting by the treasurer. 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.

It is up to the Parent Council, taking advice from the Headteacher and the Local Authority, to consider how best to keep its accounts. Proper records and controls are important.

Parent Councils should discuss how to spend any fundraising money with the Headteacher and others in the school community including parents and pupils.

Annual General Meeting

Parent Councils are required to have an Annual General Meeting each year to feed back to the parent forum on the activities which were carried out on their behalf. It is a requirement to report to all parents once per year, so a written report for the Annual General Meeting is a good idea as this can be shared more widely thereafter. An example of a primary and secondary written report is available in Appendix 1.

Other important areas to consider

Parent Councils have a key role to play in other aspects of the life and work of the school. These include:

- Annual update of the school handbook
- School inspections
- Decision making on Pupil Equity Funding priorities
- Self-evaluation and school improvement planning
- Recruitment of Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher appointments
- School consultations



Appendix 1

Example of a primary school Annual General Meeting written report

Name of Parent Council Annual General Meeting (AGM) Date

The Parent Council is a group of parents who represent parent views and work in partnership with school staff and the local authority to achieve the best for all pupils. Having a Parent Council allows the collective view of parents to be represented on matters such as the quality and standards of education at the school and other matters of interest. During Year X, the Parent Council was grateful for the support of 2 co-opted members from the local community and 2 staff members who attended on a rotational basis. Local councillors attended our meetings on a fairly regular basis which provided a useful link to local authority priorities. The Parent Council meets approximately 6 times per year with all meeting dates agreed at the AGM. In his first year as head,Name.... identified a clear role for the Parent Council in his plans to improve the school experience for all of our children. The Parent Council was used as a sounding board for several new policies and initiatives in the school and members were pleased with this consultative approach. The appointment of a new depute head will continue to bring change and an opportunity to strengthen the wider school community.

Summary of issues that the Parent Council was consulted on, informed of and participated in during Year X.

- Continued programme of improvements to the school building
- The school's delivery of the curriculum
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
- The School Improvement Plan
- Content of the school handbook
- Updates from the Pupil Council
- School trips and social events
- Parking and road safety
- School uniform
- Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy
- Appointment of a new Depute Head (2 members of the Parent Council involved in the appointment)

Fundraising

All funds raised by the Parent Council are used to support the work of the school and extra-curricular activities. In the past year we have supported the following:

- Primary 7 residential trip
- Refreshments at Christmas parties
- Refreshments at sports day
- Medals for sports day
- Dictionary for each P7 pupil
- Classroom supplies

Membership

The Parent Council needs new members to keep it vibrant, particularly parents whose children are at the start of their school experience and have a long association ahead of them. Everyone on the Parent Council brings something different and something useful to make it work, so please don't think you have nothing to offer. If you are interested in becoming a member please join us at the AGM or get in touch:

E-mail:.....

Telephone:.....

All parents and carers are welcome to attend Parent Council meetings. Updates from the Parent Council and minutes of all meetings are available on the school website

We will continue to use the school newsletter to keep you informed. Parents who have provided us with their email address will receive communications by this method. Please let us know if you would like to be added to the email distribution list.

Dates for all meetings in Year X will be confirmed at the AGM.

School Parent Council Accounts Year X

BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD £.....

INCOME

Funding from local authority £.....
Halloween Disco £.....
Christmas Fayre £.....
Valentine's Disco £.....
Summer Fayre £.....

Total Income £.....

EXPENDITURE

Clerk's fees £.....
Primary 7 residential trip £.....
Bookbag for P1 pupils £.....
Refreshments at Christmas parties £.....
Visit from Hopscotch Theatre Company £.....
Refreshments at sports day £.....
Medals for sports day £.....
Dictionary for each P7 pupil £.....
Classroom supplies £.....
Purchase of items to sell at discos £.....
Purchase of items to sell at fayres £.....

Total Expenditure £.....

Bank Balance as at: Date/Year £.....

Name: ...X...

Treasurer

Audited by:Name.....

Example of a secondary school AGM written report

Name of Parent Council **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** **Date**

The Parent Council is a group of parents who represent parent views and work in partnership with school staff and the local authority to achieve the best for all pupils. Having a Parent Council allows the collective view of parents to be represented on matters such as the quality and standards of education at the school and other matters of interest. During Year X, the Parent Council was grateful for the support of 2 co-opted pupil members and 2 staff members who attended on a rotational basis. Local councillors attended our meetings on a fairly regular basis which provided a useful link to local authority priorities. The Parent Council meets approximately 6 times per year with all meeting dates agreed at the AGM. In her first year as head, identified a clear role for the Parent Council in her plans to improve the school experience for our children. The Parent Council was used as a sounding board for several new policies and initiatives in the school and members were pleased with this consultative approach. The appointment of 2 new depute heads will continue to bring change and an opportunity to strengthen the wider school community.

Summary of issues that the Parent Council was consulted on, informed of and participated in during Year X.

- Detailed discussion of Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) results and school performance
- Continued programme of improvements to the school building
- The school's delivery of Curriculum for Excellence
- Arrangements for study leave
- The School Improvement Plan
- Content of the school handbook
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)
- Regular updates from the Pupil Council
- School trips and social events
- Issues with school buses and school travel
- School uniform
- Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy
- Appointment of 2 new Depute Heads (2 members of the Parent Council involved in each appointment)

Fundraising

All funds raised by the Parent Council are used to support extra-curricular activities. In the past year we have supported the following clubs/events:

- Netball
- Football
- Hockey
- Science club
- Drama
- Baking club

Membership

The Parent Council needs new members to keep it vibrant, particularly parents whose children are at the start of their secondary schooling and have a long association ahead of them. Everyone on the Parent Council brings something different and something useful to make it work, so please don't think you have nothing to offer. If you are interested in becoming a member please join us at the AGM or get in touch:

E-mail:.....

Telephone:.....

All parents and carers are welcome to attend Parent Council meetings. Updates from the Parent Council and minutes of all meetings are available on the school website

We will continue to use the school newsletter to keep you informed. Parents who have provided us with their email address will receive communications by this method. Please let us know if you would like to be added to the email distribution list.

Dates for all meetings in Year X will be confirmed at the AGM.

School Parent Council Accounts for Financial Year X

BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD £.....

INCOME

Funding from local authority £.....
Raffle at Christmas Concert £.....
Raffle at Parents Meeting Year X £.....
Cultural Evening Raffle Year X £.....

Total Income £.....

EXPENDITURE

Clerk's fees £.....
Netball Club £.....
Football Team Strips £.....
Baking Club £.....
Hockey Sticks £.....
Drama Club stage make-up £.....
Science Club £.....

Total Expenditure £.....

Bank Balance as at: Date/Year £.....

Name: ...X...

Treasurer

Audited by:Name.....