

## Reporting to Parents and Involving / Engaging Parent Councils during COVID-19 Examples from Early Learning and Childcare Settings, Schools and Local Authorities November 2020

### Background

This document should be used when considering: reporting to parents; communicating with parents; and supporting and engaging with Parent Councils during COVID-19. It aims to support local authorities, ELC settings and schools by providing practice examples adopted during COVID-19. The document has been developed in consultation with a wide range of partner and stakeholder groups.

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 better' (Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act Guidance, 2006, pi). 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.

[Curriculum for excellence building the curriculum 5 a framework for assessment](#), provides a national framework for reporting. This is further strengthened by [guidance on using reporting when taking account of the National Improvement Framework \(NIF\) driver on Parental Engagement](#). Schools, local authorities and other settings have flexibility within clear [national expectations](#) to determine the ways in which reporting highlights children's progress, achievements and needs.

Providing the right support, conditions and opportunities is crucial to help parents feel empowered to further engage in their child's learning. Ensuring there is a wide range of creative, meaningful and effective approaches to support parents and families, which are reflective of their needs, is key to improving outcomes. Reporting is a tool to allow for the exchange of information between parents and educators. The dialogue between parents and educators supports the practitioner's understanding of the child's progress and achievement at home and in the community as well as assisting parents to be fully engaged in their child's learning. ELC settings and schools should consider the effectiveness of approaches taken to report to parents during COVID-19 through existing methods and channels.

Reporting to and communicating with parents, families, Parent Councils and other parent groups during COVID-19 may look different to previous approaches and will be dependent on local contexts and individual needs. COVID-19 measures currently in place prevent parents, in most cases, from physically accessing school buildings and educational settings to allow face-to-face conversations with staff.

However, ongoing supportive communication between parents and staff is arguably more important than ever.

Collegiate discussions in local authorities, ELC settings and schools will be fundamental to agreeing the approaches which work best for families, staff and in local contexts. The following reflective questions aim to help frame these conversations:

- Does the ELC setting, school and local authority have a communications plan which has been agreed and shaped by parents, staff and professional associations? Does this cover agreed arrangements if the school is required to close? Does the plan consider ways for the ELC setting or school and parents to have two-way communications in such events?
- Is your ELC setting, school and local authority ready and able to receive and act on information communicated from parents?
- Has a contingency plan been developed with staff / professional associations / parents and communicated to the wider parent forum to be implemented in the event of lockdown?



- What is the rationale behind the planned approaches for (i) reporting to and engaging with parents, and (ii) working with the Parent Council, parent group or committee, and has this been effectively communicated?
- Would shorter, more frequent reporting (written or oral) be the best approach for all or some families? If so, how will information be distributed to parents e.g. by post, electronically, social media, school app? Should additional time be incorporated into Working Time Agreements to facilitate this approach?
- Are face-to-face meetings or telephone calls required with some families to meet their individual needs as outlined in the Child's Plans, Individual Education Plans or Co-ordinated Support Plans?
- How are families of children with additional support needs and/or whose first language is not English, kept up-to-date? Have updates been made to the Child's Plans, Individual Education Plans or Co-ordinated Support Plans to reflect this?
- Do staff have the necessary technology, internet access, software and skills to report to parents through the agreed approach? If not, how is this being addressed? Has sufficient time been allocated in the Working Time Agreements to accommodate the agreed approach(es) for reporting?
- Do parents / families have the necessary technology, internet access, software and skills needed to communicate with ELC settings / schools? If not, how is this being addressed?

## Principles

A number of key principles underpin this document and should be considered when agreeing approaches which work best for families, staff and in local contexts.

**Empowerment** - In an empowered system, parents:

- are recognised as the first and ongoing educators of their children and have access to the right support at the right time to enable them to engage with their child's learning in ways which are suitable for them;
- receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home;
- are engaged in ongoing and effective dialogue regarding their child's learning and progress;
- work in partnership with practitioners to create effective and meaningful relationships to help support their child;



- are supported to have access to relevant provision and services which meet their needs and support them to become fully engaged in their child's learning;
- have access to and are supported to engage in relevant family learning opportunities which meet their needs, reflect their circumstances and include shared approaches and tools to support continued learning at home and in the community as appropriate;
- are supported to be involved from the outset on: education matters and key decisions which affect their child's learning; the development and review of key policies and procedures; and improvement planning;
- are supported to be involved in the wider life of their child's early learning and childcare setting / school;

- are recognised as a parent forum who have a statutory right to be involved in school decision-making;
- have opportunities to be involved as a part of the parent forum and/or Parent Council, committee or group - while also acknowledging that formal meetings and structures may not suit everyone.



In an empowered system, practitioners will be given sufficient time and resources to engage effectively in the

agreed approach for reporting to and engagement with parents.

Partnership - Effective home-school partnerships are essential to ensure that children get the most out of their learning. Working together allows ELC settings and schools to identify potential opportunities and challenges at an early stage. Partnerships recognise the contribution of all. They rest on strong and transparent relationships between parents and staff. This requires trust, honesty, collaboration, expertise, good two-way conversations and clearly understood roles.

Openness and Accessibility - Where appropriate, information between local authorities, ELC settings, schools and parents should be shared in an open, honest, transparent and accessible way for all children and families whilst taking account of GDPR, safeguarding and other statutory duties and legislative requirements in

place. Decisions should be taken with meaningful input from parents and if this is not possible the reasons why should be explained to parents and families.

Flexibility - To work together in the best interests of children and families, ELC settings, schools, local authorities, parents and families may be required to be flexible and adapt to different approaches to take account of family circumstances and COVID-19 public health measures.

Entitlements - In Scotland, there is a range of legislation, approaches, frameworks and guidance relating to parental involvement, engagement and family learning. Collectively these provide the overarching framework within which local authorities, ELC settings, schools and practitioners should work.

For further information see [Engaging parents and families: A toolkit for practitioners](#).

## Reporting to parents

The purpose of reporting is to support and improve learning and ensure parents have the information necessary to support their children. It should be an on-going dialogue which provides clear information on a learner's strengths, areas for development and specifically what needs to be done to ensure continued progress and achievement and agreement of strategies which include parents' input. As much as possible learners should be involved in the reporting

process through on-going reflection and dialogue about their learning. It is also important that reporting fully involves and values the role of parents.

It is important to recognise the impact that COVID-19 and the measures to control the virus is having on the health and wellbeing of learners, parents and staff. Strong, ongoing, two-way communication and dialogue between home/school can help identify issues at an early stage.

ELC settings, schools and local authorities will give consideration on whether meetings or telephone calls with parents are necessary to support children and/or whether an alternative means of communication and reporting to parents needs to be put in place. Arrangements for reporting to parents must take account of the the [latest Scottish Government guidance and regulations on COVID-19](#) and the 'Guidance on Preparing for the [New School Term in August 2020](#)'.





Keeping families of children with additional support needs up-to-date and having regular scheduled review meetings which offer an opportunity to discuss and share information continues to be important during COVID-19 and the recovery phase. See Enquire's [website](#) for further information.

Additionally, families with children in the senior phase (S4-S6) need up-to-date

information relating to their children's qualifications. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is committed to working with parents.

This includes carrying out surveys, taking part in virtual meetings and ensuring that accessible, relevant information is available on their website and social media channels.

Consideration should be given to families who have English as an additional language, families affected by imprisonment, separated parents and other factors which impact children and families.

Below are examples of practice from ELC settings, primary

schools, secondary schools and local authorities across Scotland.

These illustrate a range of ways that settings have supported parental engagement and reported to parents, families and Parent Councils during COVID-19.

They demonstrate approaches which have worked effectively in those individual settings.

This is not a list of required approaches and individual ELC settings, schools and local authorities are best placed to design and implement approaches suited to their community, building on work already in place or underway.

## Ongoing communication with parents and sharing information on the life and work of the setting or school community\*

- Websites and social media platforms which are easy to navigate and kept up-to-date.
- Texts, letters, emails, newsletters, social media and the school app are used for ongoing reporting to parents. This could include videos and messages from staff to the children.
- A school app is used to report whole school and class activities e.g. photos to/from school/home on children's learning.
- A termly overview detailing learning that has taken place during the session in each class was provided to parents. Photos and descriptions were added to the school app each week to further demonstrate the learning taking place.
- Homework is provided on relevant platform(s) for parents / children to access. Additional information may be added to a parent app to make parents aware of the learning at home tasks which have been set.
- 'Open afternoons' have been replaced with a class video showcasing the work completed.
- A school video was produced showing a day in the 'new normal'.
- Using videos to report to parents and help them engage in their child's learning.
- Social media platforms are used to share successes and achievements.
- E-portfolios outlining children's targets are jointly agreed and shared via existing platforms.
- Current practice and approaches are reviewed to ensure reporting to parents is quick, simple and responsive to parent's needs.
- Headteacher clinics – using an online booking platform, a headteacher set aside time to speak directly with parents who wished to discuss matters relating to the school which were of importance to them.
- School and setting handbooks are updated and refreshed each year outlining local context information. These are normally published online.



- Some ELC settings and schools have used 360 virtual tours to show parents round the setting or school environment. In some instances, these have been recorded from a child's eye view to support transition into and within settings and schools or to show them their classroom and/or from staff members introducing themselves.
- Keeping all parents informed through the parent group / committee or the Parent Council.
- Arranging regular contact with identified vulnerable families.
- Phone calls with families to give an update on children's learning, progress and have a dialogue about supporting educational recovery at home.

\*ELC settings and schools should ensure that data protection issues with school apps and any other platforms used are compliant with GDPR.

For further information see: Reporting to: [Parents and Children](#) and [Parents and Carers](#) guidance.



## Reporting to Parents and Parents Meetings/Evenings

Due to the Scottish Government's current COVID-19 guidance which in most circumstances prevents parents from physically accessing school buildings face-to-face parents' evenings are not currently possible.

Some ELC settings and schools have been able to offer virtual alternatives but this may not be possible or appropriate in all settings and a one size, digital model of holding virtual conversations with parents is not a national expectation.

It is important that ELC settings, schools and local authorities work together to find the best solution for their families and local contexts.

Some ELC setting and schools have achieved this in the following ways:



- short, frequent reports which provide information about progress in literacy, numeracy and wellbeing were produced. Reports were followed up by a telephone call to discuss these in more detail and identify any concerns;
- staff contacted parents where they felt a conversation was needed to support a child's learning and/or to discuss any matters hindering their progress;
- meetings with parents were scheduled at key points in the academic year;
- online Parents Meetings were arranged using an online booking system; and
- information provided to all parents about how they can continue to contact the school and their child's teacher if they have matters to discuss.



## Examples of Local Authority Approaches

Local authorities have taken different approaches during lockdown to engage with Parent Councils and their wider parent body. Examples of these have included:

- providing additional funding for a [city wide parents group](#) to allow them to hold meetings online and develop digital content;
- developing a specific [communication and engagement strategy](#) with parents and Parent Councils which focused on issues arising from COVID-19 and the closure of schools; and
- using an easily accessible online booking service for parents to arrange a meeting

with their child's teacher. This has also made the booking system more manageable for staff.



## Working with Parent Councils and Committees

Parent Councils and committees are an important part of the setting or school community, and many have risen to the challenges presented by COVID-19.

While some Parent Councils have operated in a reduced capacity during COVID-19, others for a variety of reasons, may have been unable to operate.

It is important to recognise that some Parent Councils or committees may struggle to fulfil their role in such a different and challenging setting or school environment.

However, where possible, it is important to acknowledge the challenges faced and consider ways in which they can continue not only to fulfil their important role but to find solutions to working in new and creative ways.

One of the biggest challenges that Parent Councils and committees have faced is their inability to meet physically due to COVID-19 restrictions. Additionally, they may have had to deal with an increased amount of

communications about learning at their child's setting or school.

While most children in Scotland returned to funded ELC or school in August 2020, settings and schools are not operating in the same way as they did previously.



Enhanced hygiene measures, cleaning routines along with other COVID-19 guidelines have prevented many activities from taking place.

Parent Councils and committees are therefore unable to fulfil their usual role in helping to

organise or participate in decision making processes and events.

Some Parent Councils, committees and members of the parent forum may be frustrated that ELC settings and schools are not operating as normal even though children have returned.

It can also be difficult to understand why ELC settings and schools are unable to return to normal or why certain events cannot take place

with normal procedures being replaced by others or not replaced at all.

Parent Councils and committees have an important role to play in helping members of the parent forum to understand the reasons why changes have been put in place and to work with parents to find local solutions while keeping children, families and staff safe.

Headteachers / managers continue to play a vital role in engaging with their setting or school's Parent Council or committee.

ELC settings and schools across Scotland are developing alternative solutions to ensure that engagement and communication with Parent Councils and groups on school related matters and improvement planning continues.



Parents and Parent Councils continue to be involved in matters relating to the school such as improvement planning. Partnership working between the Parent Council or committee and the headteacher / manager is crucial to help find solutions to any challenges that arise.

Assisting in the communications between the setting or school and its parent forum is also extremely important to ensure all parents feel valued, involved and are kept informed.

Headteachers / managers will be working to ensure their settings and schools are able to continue to provide safe learning environments for all children.

Strong communications and collaboration between home and school is key to ensure that parents are kept informed and updated.

## Opportunities

COVID-19 has presented some Parent Councils and committees with opportunities to continue to engage and support their schools, settings and the wider parent community in new ways.

During the period of school closures, some examples of how they have maintained and expanded their activities included:

- holding regular meetings online to keep parents up to date on recent developments;
- holding regular meetings with the Parent Council Forum and Youth Council using a platform of their choice;
- providing regular e-mail updates and information about relevant topics;
- providing headteachers / managers and staff the opportunity to communicate directly with parents and answer questions;
- producing learning and welfare packs which were delivered to families;
- contacting members of the parent forum to ensure families had the information and support they needed and passing on relevant requests (where permission was granted to do so);
- co-ordinating online events and celebrations such as end of term parties and catch-up mornings / evenings to support children and families; and
- organising Q&A sessions with local authority staff to address parental concerns.

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## Digital engagement and online meetings

Many Parent Councils and committees have enjoyed higher levels of engagement with their parent forum through online platforms during lockdown than previously. While this style of engagement may not work for all parents, digital engagement and online meetings may provide an opportunity for Parent Councils to reach more of their parent forum members. Parent Councils and committees may wish to consider:

- producing regular email newsletter updates for members of the parent forum;
- holding Parent Council and committee meetings online using easily accessible telephone / video platforms; and
- arranging digital events and online informal gatherings such as end of term or themed events for children and families.

It is important to note that some local authorities may have restrictions in place which prevent

staff from using certain online platforms and that these exist to protect staff, the public and to ensure compliance with their statutory duties.

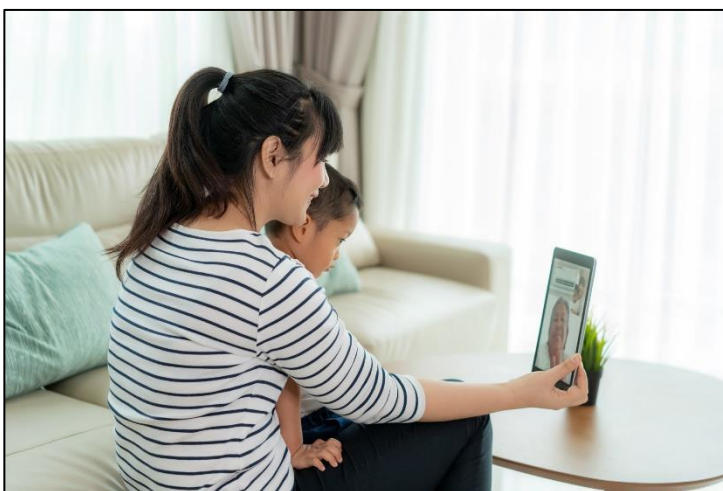
However, Parent Councils are not bound by the same rules regarding online platforms as local authority and school staff and may be able to access other interfaces.

Parent Council members should work with their child's school and local authority staff to find pragmatic ways to fulfil their statutory duties and hold formal Parent Council meetings with representatives and the headteacher.



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## Physically distanced Parent Council meetings



Depending on current restrictions in place and guidance from the Scottish Government on physical distancing and other measures parent groups or committees or Parent Council may wish to consider holding socially distanced meetings, if this is deemed to be the most appropriate approach for all of those involved.

Headteachers / managers should refer to the latest Scottish Government guidance, agree any approaches with staff, professional teaching associations and parents and ensure appropriate measures are put in place to minimise risks.