

SG and ADES Conference on Parental Involvement
Scotland's Parents: From Involvement to Impact

18 January 2011
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David Cameron, Chair, set an introduction to the day, outlining the key challenges for parental involvement in Scotland in the context of mounting pressures on public resources, high ambitions for our education system with CfE implemented in all our schools and the current debate on school governance. It was crucial that we remain focused on raising standards and increasing achievements of all our young people to ensure that they succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy and it was recognised we cannot do this without involving parents effectively in this process.

We heard three perspectives on the impact of the parental involvement legislation – from **Iain Ellis** representing the National Parent Forum of Scotland, **Kathryn Farrow** representing the Scottish Parental Involvement Officers Network and **Kate Cunningham** representing the Scottish Parent Teacher Council. There were some common themes shared between all three speakers:

- the quality of Leadership at all levels was key to effective parental involvement;
- need for genuine partnership between LAs, schools and parents – encouraging parents and Parent Councils to play an active role in school improvement
- difficulty in reaching all parents in terms of communication and representation
- different models of parental involvement – narrow individual parental interests vs parental involvement for the benefit of all children

This was followed by group discussions which acknowledged the progress made since the Parental Involvement Act was passed in 2006 across all local authorities but also recognised that there remained considerable challenges and areas for improvement. Key issues discussed included:

- pressure on budgets resulting in reduced support for parental involvement and Parent Councils and negative impact on parents' trust and confidence
- importance of quality CPD for teachers and HTs
- more needed on making links with early years and community learning
- raising expectations e.g. Parent Councils can do more than solely fundraising
- challenge of being fully inclusive and involving all parents – difficult for PC to reach out to all Parent Forum – representation and communication issues

Mike Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, provided the keynote speech, reflecting on the respective roles and responsibilities of different players involved in promoting parental involvement. He raised questions about the models of delivery and the role of parents in the context of the devolved school management review. He also highlighted the current school handbook consultation which provided a unique opportunity for all parents to talk openly and radically about what information they want to receive about their school. He pointed to the strengths in the Scottish education system and highlighted two factors which were key to success: consensus on the purpose and vision for the education system – this was achieved through Curriculum for Excellence; and significant investment in the highest quality of teaching reflected, as now highlighted in the recent Donaldson Review.

The speech was followed by Q&A session, key themes emerging from this session centred around the roles and responsibilities of all those involved - Scottish Government, Local

Authorities, Schools, teachers, parents; the need to be more imaginative with resources in times of financial restraint; importance of striking the balance between flexible approach at school level and sound structure for parental involvement at local authority level; focus on finding local solutions to local problems but opportunity to feed common concerns at a national level and different interpretations of schools' role in wider community engagement.

The afternoon started with contributions from **Jim Collins**, Director of Education, City of Dundee Council and **Don Ledingham**, Executive Director, East Lothian Council, on their vision and experience of parental involvement in their local authorities.

In Dundee, the promotion of parental partnership arose through their Communication & Consultation policy – 'Involved and Informed'. There was a focus on openness and transparency in communication with parents, involving parents in the development and support of CfE as well as in budgetary discussions. The strength of parental involvement strategy in Dundee was the appointment of a dedicated Parental Involvement officer and her commitment to reaching out to all schools and providing support and training for staff and Parent Councils (including supporting PC to assist parents with English as a second language)

In East Lothian, there was a developing understanding of the role of education and children's services as "service" to parents (and children). Don echoed the need for transparency and openness in communication with parents and the need for a culture change in terms of higher expectations of parents, teachers and Headteachers of schools' role in the wider community, being "school-centred" not "school-centric". In East Lothian, school had a role as a hub for community engagement and with wider community involvement (not just parents). In this model, the Headteacher was accountable to the local community and vice versa.

There was a discussion and Q&A session with Panel Members – **Iain Ellis** (NPFS), **Lorraine Sanda** (Scottish Government), **Glenn Rodger** (ADES), **Ann McIntosh** (AHDS), **Alistair Marquis** (HMIE), **Mhairi Gilfillan** (LTS Community Learning Team) and **Jim Stephen** (Scottish Government – Early Years).

The appropriate model for parental involvement was discussed, all agreed that there was no one size fits all approach but there was an acknowledgment that parental involvement has a potential to reflect the holistic experience of CfE and go beyond school and education and link with wider community/other agencies including early years and community learning. It was also recognised that there is a need to take account of young people's experiences/pupil voice and combine pupil involvement and parental involvement to impact and improve learning and teaching in school. There was acknowledgment that reaching all parents was challenging but we should keep trying to reach as many as possible.

In closing, David concluded that the emphasis of the parental involvement agenda has moved from schools' focus towards the focus on child and community. This required a change in the culture and expectations of all involved, clear structure of responsibilities at different levels and above all, quality of leadership at all levels characterised by courage of convictions. Parental involvement was not an end in itself but a means to work together across different services to improve outcomes for all children and young people while involving a wider community.

Thank you to everyone who contributed on the day. Scottish Government will now consider how best to build on these discussions and explore the following issues arising from the round table and closing panel discussions, in partnership with the key contributors to the Seminar:

- **The role of Parent Councils** – how they can be better supported, particularly
 - to help them work with the Pupil Council and pupils in the school
 - to support them to become more involved in school improvement and curriculum
 - to help them engage more widely with their school community and speak up for the parents who may not use their voice

- **Developing Leadership** to support Parental Involvement

- **Further collaboration with Early Years and Family Learning** to help promote the involvement of all families in their children's learning, but particularly those who may struggle to get involved

- **CPD for all staff**, including trainee teachers in parental involvement