

ANGUS COUNCIL – EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
STRATEGY FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT – AUGUST 2008

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ANGUS COUNCIL – EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION

1 STRATEGIC STATEMENT

1 Purpose of Strategy

This Strategy has been produced in order to provide a supportive and consistent framework in which all schools can engage parents meaningfully in the education of their children and in the wider life of the school. The Strategy also aims to extend the school-based framework so that as many parents as possible are given the opportunity to work in partnership with the education service for the whole of Angus. This Strategy takes full account of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

2 Principles which Underpin the Strategy

- Meaningful parental involvement takes place in a climate of mutual trust.
- All parents and all staff are partners in the education process, each with a distinctive role to play.
- Parent Councils are the main formal link between Parents and the school, and their work centres on three key areas:- Learning at Home, Home/School Partnerships and Parental Representation. All that work is directed towards improving the quality of educational experiences for children collectively and the individual child.
- Where other representative groups exist (e.g. Parents' Association and PTAs) they too have a valuable role in supporting the work of schools.
- Effective co-operation between home and school supports pupil learning and allows potential difficulties and opportunities to be identified at an early stage.

3 Who Should Implement the Strategy

The Director of Education, Head Teachers, school based staff and the education support services should comply with the terms of the Strategy, and the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 which underpins it. All parents (of nursery, primary and secondary pupils) should be encouraged to work within the spirit of the Strategy. Different arrangements for securing effective parental involvement may be appropriate in individual schools but they must be based on this Strategy and the associated Guidelines.

4 Origin of Strategy

This Strategy was originally developed by the Angus Parental Sounding Board, supported by a Working Group of staff and parents and by a number of Focus Groups (Parental Focus Groups and a Staff Focus Group). It was approved by the Education Committee of Angus Council on 26 May 2005 and has been updated and amended following the publication of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

5 Course of Action to be Followed

- a) The Director of Education will ensure that each Head Teacher has adequate support and resources available to enable the establishment and regular review of a meaningful school policy on parental involvement, in line with the terms of the 2006 Act, and in accordance with this Strategic Statement and associated Guidelines.
- b) The Director of Education and Senior Education Managers should be responsive to issues raised by parents and should ensure that parents' rights and responsibilities inform educational planning and delivery across the Council as a whole.
- c) The Educational Development Service (and particularly its Quality Improvement Officers) should offer appropriate support and challenge to Head Teachers in order to ensure that continuous improvement in the interpretation and implementation of this Strategy takes place. This support should extend to the operation of each school's Parent Council and be set in context of that school's Annual Improvement Plan.
- d) Each Head Teacher should ensure that an effective and meaningful School Policy is in place – taking into account the views of parents in accordance with the terms of the 2006 Act.
- e) A spirit of partnership should prevail between school staff and parents and underpin all the work of the Parent Council.
- f) Each Parent Council, supported by any other Parent Association, should promote and support informed dialogue between school staff and the whole parent body.

6 Other Council Policies

- Rights & Responsibilities of Pupils and Parents (published leaflet)
- Rights & Responsibilities of Staff (published leaflet)
- Customer Care: Guidelines for Schools.

7 Legislation

- Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

GUIDELINES

1. Operational/Procedural Advice

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 identifies three key ways in which all parents can be involved in children's learning, namely:

- Learning at Home (active involvement with children's education and learning)
- Home/School Partnership (active participation in the life of the school)
- Parental Representation (express views on school education generally, and work in partnership with the school).

Individual schools may develop different procedural arrangements. However, these arrangements must be based on these Guidelines, which take full account of the Act.

1.1 Two-Way Communication Between School And Parents About Individual Children

It is important to encourage an atmosphere in which parents feel able to share their perceptions of their child's educational progress with teachers – in as many different ways as possible. Parents should be given opportunities, for example, to be involved in the development of school policies and to influence the format and timing of parents' evenings. Informal discussions can offer one exceptionally positive way of initiating and maintaining this dialogue but schools need also to set in place systematic and effective channels of communication.

Schools should be proactive in providing parents with advice about their child's progress. This should be stated in jargon-free terms, should cover as many curricular areas as possible, and should be about each individual child's progress since the parents last received a report. Much of this will be conveyed by formal reporting arrangements but schools should take opportunities to engage with parents whenever possible. A plan of the school year distributed to all families each August is appreciated by parents, as is a homework diary provided for each pupil. Schools should establish effective channels of communication with all parents. Opportunities for informal discussion should also be provided in order to promote and support positive home-school relationships.

A range of communication methods should be developed and information about these should be well publicised within the school community. Appropriate methods of communication would include telephone, newsletters, e-mail, school website and the use of local radio. Parents should also be advised when making personal contact with the school who they should contact in the first instance and the most suitable times of day for this to take place.

1.2 Two-Way Communication Between School And Parents About Whole-School Matters

Parents should be involved in the development of school policies and the Parent Council can represent the Parent Forum in the development and review of policies. Each school should regularly seek and consider the views of parents on their priorities for improvement. (e.g. Anti-Bullying approaches) Detailed arrangements can vary from school to school and may include the use of informal parent focus groups, or the use of parental surveys.

1.3 Two-Way Communication Between Angus Council Staff And Parents

It is likely that most parents will see school staff as their main point of contact for discussion about their children's education. Angus Council wishes to promote the concept of a community of schools which work together for the benefit of all children and all parents. Centrally based Angus Council staff contribute to this process and are part of a wider team that supports school staff, parents and young people. Angus Council is committed to liaising with parents in the following ways:-

- Information leaflets on a range of issues
- Angus Council Website
- Regular meetings of an Angus Parental Consultative Group, the membership of which will change periodically, based on principles of openness.
- Regular training events for Parent Council members.
- The School & Family Support Service supports Parent Councils and can offer support in addressing parental concerns or complaints.
- The Educational Psychology Service provides information, advice and guidance on child development and on individual children's needs.
- The Education Development Service provides support and advice for schools on a wide range of educational matters, e.g. curriculum, parental involvement in children's learning.

In addition, the Council wishes to encourage parents (individually and collectively) to bring forward new ideas for more effective partnership working.

1.4 Parent Councils

Angus Council promotes and supports the establishment of a Parent Council in all schools. The key roles of a Parent Council are to:

- support the school in its work with pupils
- represent the views of all parents
- encourage links between the school, parents, pupils, pre-school groups and the wider community
- report back to the school's Parent Forum.

Each Parent Council will have its own constitution, which will reflect the aims and aspirations of the individual school community.

1.5 Parent Volunteers

Many parents are keen to offer assistance to their children's school, and schools have found that assistance to be invaluable. All schools should encourage the involvement of parent volunteers. Some specific initiatives which have been successful in the past include parents' involvement with:-

- musical events
- sports activities
- art and craftwork
- home economics
- computer work
- support with reading
- support with maths
- library work
- support during educational visits
- sports days
- extra curricular activities
- fund raising events
- preparation of resources
- translators
- peer parent support
- sharing cultural experiences.

The active involvement of parents as volunteers enables pupils to see parents and staff working in partnership to enrich the learning experience for young people. The benefits for parents include:

- a greater understanding of the life of the school
- a broader understanding of children's learning
- the sharing of skills
- the gaining of experience (and confidence) in working with children.

For staff, the benefits can include:

- improved communication with parents
- the support of adults with additional skills and knowledge to offer
- the enrichment of the learning environment
- effective communication of the aims and ethos of the school

Parent volunteers should be given the opportunity/choice to be in a class other than their own child's.

For the selection of any adults to undertake work in schools (including parents), Angus Council has in place an agreed set of procedures, including Disclosure, which are regularly reviewed. In developing the involvement of Parent Volunteers, schools must ensure consistent approaches to recruitment, selection procedures, deployment, training (e.g. in confidentiality), etc. Transparent guidelines should therefore be incorporated within the school policy on parental involvement.

The education authority supports schools and parents in the application of these procedures in order to encourage a high level of parental involvement in schools.

1.6 Links with Out-of-School Care Clubs

Out-of-School Care Clubs provide a safe, caring environment offering a range of active, stimulating and restful activities for school age children before and after school and during holidays. After-school care can help parents to take up employment, education and training opportunities.

The majority of clubs in Angus are managed by parents, who form a parent led management committee. Parents are charged fees for their child's attendance. Staff are recruited only after an Enhanced Disclosure check by Disclosure Scotland.

1.7 Contents of School Policy

Many schools have very effective policies on parental involvement. These policies should make reference to the expectations the school has of parents, and to the commitment which the school has to parents. The School Parental Involvement Policy should contain advice about what information is available and how parents can access it, e.g.:

- information on learning and teaching:
 - insights into how children learn
 - Curriculum for Excellence
 - formative assessment
 - homework
 - arrangements for reporting on pupil progress
 - how parents can be involved and support their children's education

- pupil care and support information:-
 - anti-bullying
 - child protection
 - promoting positive behaviour
 - drugs awareness
 - sex and relationships education
 - peer support/buddy systems
 - practical advice, e.g. on making contact with the school
 - school uniform

A school policy should also highlight the kinds of activities/approaches which are used to engage parents as meaningfully and actively as possible in the life and work of the school, e.g.:-

- parental surveys
- parent focus groups
- workshops
- leaflets
- presentations
- parents' evenings
- school notice board
- open days
- social events
- volunteering

The above information should appear in the School Handbook which is issued to parents when their child joins the school. This handbook should be the subject of regular review involving the Parent Council.

2. Parental Involvement – Key Strategy Opportunities

There are a number of issues which Education Authorities are encouraged to address which are identified in the 2006 Act

2.1 Promoting Parental Involvement

Schools and parents may wish to take account of a range of matters when considering ways of encouraging and promoting active parental involvement.

2.1.1 School Physical Environment

- a. School Buildings/Grounds
 - Building limitations, access for disabled, etc.
 - Parking
 - Safe areas for children, internal and external
 - Roadway or pathways

b. Geographical

- Size and range of catchment area
- Distances and mode of travel, e.g. to Parent Contact Evenings
- Safety of travel
- Lack of transport for individual families
- Outreach to parents in isolated areas

2.1.2 School Ethos

- Welcoming atmosphere
- User friendly reception, and waiting areas; clear signage
- Display boards, wall displays, use of IT
- Open discussion of ideas
- Flexible school attitude to meetings with parents
- Willingness from all parties to 'go the extra mile' wherever possible
- Proactive use of press and media
- Varied timing and formats for Parent Contact evenings which take account of the needs of the community.

2.1.3. Family Contexts

- New partner families
- Non-Resident Parents
- Migrant Workers
- Gypsy Traveller Families
- Other family commitments
- Work patterns
- Significance of grandparents and other child support arrangements
- Bilingual pupils and parents

2.1.4. Possible Parental Perspectives

- Parents with unpleasant memories of their own school
- Trust in the school is not automatically achieved, it has to be earned.
- Involvement of fathers in their child's education and school
- Children who can actively work against their parents' involvement, particularly in secondary schools
- Parents engaged positively from pre-school onwards
- Parents "buddying" other parents in school

2.2 Equal Opportunities

The Scotland Act 1998 defines Equal Opportunities as:- "The prevention, elimination, or regulation of discrimination between persons on grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds, or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs opinion, such as religious beliefs or political opinion."

Angus Council's Equal Opportunities Policy fully supports this statement. In its own Statement of Intent it states that:-

“The Council opposes all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origin, religion, age, sexual and marital status and disability.”

Each Parent Council should take an interest in this key area of the school's Equal Opportunity Policy. Schools should consider a range of issues including curriculum review, better behaviour and information access involving pupils with disabilities in the context of the implementation of Additional Support Needs legislation and the related Code of Practice.

2.3 Special Contexts of Pupils and Parents

The 2006 Act requires Education Authorities and individual schools and their Parent Councils, to consider ways in which arrangements for support of pupils and parents in special contexts can be improved.

2.3.1 Non-Resident Parents, and other Parent/Carers

The wide definition of parent adopted by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 is used by the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. It is as follows:-

“parent’ includes guardian and any person who is liable to maintain, or has care of, a child or young person.”

This could include:-

- non-resident parents who are liable to maintain or have parental responsibilities in respect of a child
- carers who can be parents
- others with parental responsibilities, e.g. foster carers, relatives and friends who are caring for children and young people under supervision arrangements
- close relatives, such as siblings or grandparents caring for children who are not looked after or are under home supervision arrangements.

Unless there is a legal reason why they should not, everyone defined as a parent, has rights under the Act to be informed about their child's education, and consulted on other aspects of school life.

2.3.2 Looked After Children

A child or young person is described as being looked after if he/she is, as defined by the 1995 Children (Scotland) Act:

- Provided with accommodation (by the local authority)
- Subject to a supervision requirement
- Subject to a child protection order

There is clear evidence that such children are at a serious disadvantage in comparison with their peers, lag behind them in attainment (leaving school with fewer qualifications), and are more at risk of being excluded from school.

Angus Council recognises these difficulties, and states in its Support for Learners Policy, that all Looked After Children must have an Individual Education Programme, with oversight of each programme being the responsibility of a senior member of staff.

2.3.3 Placements Outwith Local Authority

There are two contexts to be considered in this regard. These are:

1. If a child attends a local authority public school outwith the local authority, e.g. living in Dundee, but attending public school in Angus, it is the responsibility of the host authority, in this case Angus, to liaise, through the school, with the family on all aspects of the child's education, in exactly the same way it would do with other pupils at the school.
2. If a child is placed by the host authority in an independent, or grant-aided, special school, outwith the direct domain of the host authority, the local authority remains responsible for the child's education. The authority must ensure that the parents and carers of the child are party to and, as relevant, involved in, all aspects of educational advice and information relevant to the child.

2.3.4 Pre-School Childcare and Education

Almost all Angus Primary Schools offer a pre-school class. In addition there are a number of Playgroups and Private Nurseries across Angus, working in partnership with Angus Council to deliver Pre-School education.

Angus Council is therefore in a robust position to ensure that all Primary School Parent Councils can embrace the needs of parents of pre-school children.

2.3.5 Integrated Children's Services

The need for all agencies to work closely together to support children is a priority for the Scottish Government. The report, *For Scotland's*

Children (2001) highlights the clear value of all agencies working together

The development of Parent Councils in each Angus Primary and Secondary School creates a most appropriate context for formal consultation and direct involvement of parents in the further development of Integrated Children's Services, particularly in relation to Parenting Support Strategies as they apply to Education.

2.3.6 Review of School Performance

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000) set the context for defining measures and standards of performance as elements in analysing the quality of education provided by schools. This analysis will now include "The extent to which pupils' parents are involved in the education provided to the pupil."

Education Authorities will require to include parental involvement as part of their analysis of standards of performance in their schools.

2.3.7 Complaints Procedure

Section 15 of the 2006 Act places additional obligations on Education Authorities in regard to managing complaints.

The construction of a Complaints Procedure, or, in the case of Angus Council Education Department, the review of extant Complaints Procedures, will use Parent Councils as the main focus for parental consultation.

3. Awareness Raising, Networking, Training and Support

3.1 Awareness Raising

Parent Councils will wish to be familiar with the contents of the Angus Council Parental Involvement Strategy, and to help to raise the awareness of parents and staff of both the Council's and individual school policies.

Schools are encouraged to make use of induction events, and other whole school opportunities to raise parental awareness about the school's Parental Involvement Policy.

The Parent Council, through the Head Teacher, has a statutory responsibility to prepare an annual report which should make explicit reference to how the Angus Strategy and the individual School Policy are being implemented. Parent Councils are encouraged to prepare their own annual calendar and to share this with all parents.

The Angus Parental Consultative Group will have the Strategy as a standing item on its agenda

3.2 Networking

3.2.1 Angus Parental Consultative Group

The composition of this group should include representatives from Parent Councils – ideally a geographical spread across all 8 Cluster Groups of schools and a balance between primary school representatives and secondary school representatives. Annual requests for nominations to the group will be made and the group will be chaired by the Director of Education, supported by a small number of colleagues.

- The remit of this group will be to:
 - maintain an overview of the Angus Council Parental Involvement Strategy
 - provide a forum for discussion of all issues relevant to parents across Angus
 - provide a link between each Cluster Group of Parent Councils and Senior Officers of Angus Council
 - offer suggestions for ways in which training/development for Parent Council members can best be delivered
 - if necessary, help to identify parents who can be asked to participate in the selection of HTs and DHTs.

3.3 Training and Support

3.3.1 Annual Programme

An annual training programme will be mounted comprising 3 sessions per annum structured along the lines of:

- session 1 – networking on what Angus Parent Councils are doing
 - session 2 – learning and teaching in Angus Schools
 - session 3 – support services for schools in Angus
- (plus other areas of interest identified by Parent Councils)

The School & Family Support Service will take the lead responsibility for coordination of this training programme with a clear remit given to all the Education Department's Support Services for training/supporting parents.

3.3.2 Recruitment and Selection Training

Any Parent Council member who is asked to participate in the recruitment procedures for selecting a Head Teacher or Depute Head Teacher should have received training within the previous 4 years. To achieve this, at least two training sessions per annum for parents will be delivered. In addition, it may be necessary to put in place ad hoc arrangements at short notice in the event that an individual Parent Council has to participate in selecting a Head Teacher (or DHT) and no member of the Parent Council has been trained.

The Angus Parental Consultative Group will contribute to the planning (and possibly delivery) of both forms of training.

3.3.3 Other Support

A database of Parent Council Office Bearers will be held centrally. Appropriate Education Department staff will be responsible for keeping it up to date and for sharing its contents with other colleagues as appropriate.

In particular, it will be essential that the Secretary of each Parent Council is contactable by e-mail: it is expected that most Parent Council Secretaries will have their own personal e-mail addresses (home or business) but any who do not have this facility will be linked to the school database, with an expectation that appropriate arrangements will be put in place to ensure that the Secretary is immediately alerted to any e-mails sent to her/him.

Parent Councils should be proactive in establishing and maintaining meaningful and sustainable links with the School & Family Support Service.

4 Monitoring

4.1 How will the strategy be monitored?

Informal monitoring at Angus Council level by way of the Angus Parental Consultative Group will form one strand of monitoring procedures. At school level the Parent Council will be charged with monitoring the school policy. Focus Groups, as sub-committees of the Parent Council, could be utilised if deemed appropriate.

4.2 Monitoring Reports

The Director of Education should be charged with bringing forward a report to the Education Committee at least once every three years. That report should be informed by some form of survey/questionnaire and/or by one or more focus groups, and by reports provided by individual Parent Councils. Similarly, each school should report on its activities annually within its Standards and Quality Report.

4.3 Roles and Responsibilities

- Each parent has a responsibility to support her/his child's education and to endeavour to work in partnership with her/his child's school to do that.
- Parent Councils should promote effective dialogue between school staff and all parents.
- Each member of staff has a responsibility to help to realise the potential of each individual child and to work in partnership with each child's parents to do that. It is however recognised that many staff voluntarily take on additional work and that staff can only be expected to undertake duties in accordance with their contractual obligations.

- The Head Teacher has a right and a responsibility to advise the Parent Council to ensure that effective arrangements are in place to promote and deliver the expectations under-pinning the Parental Involvement Act (2006).
- The Director of Education has a responsibility to ensure that adequate support and resources are available for Head Teachers to enable them to implement this strategy and that effective arrangements are in place to ensure that Head Teachers and The Parent Council are regularly encouraged and challenged in appropriate ways so that our practice continues to grow and improve.

5 Evaluation

5.1 How Is “Success” To Be Judged?

The ultimate success criterion is that children are happy at school and that they perform to their full potential. In addition, the Quality Indicators on working with parents set out in *“How Good is our School?3”* (Q.I.2.2 ‘The school’s success in involving parents, carers and families’ and Q.I.5.7 ‘Partnerships with learners and parents’) should be used as the starting points of any self evaluation. That self evaluation should also be undertaken, at least in part, by reference to some form of survey of parents and possibly by the use of parental focus groups.

5.2 Initial Evaluation and Subsequent Evaluations

In the initial stages of implementation, informal discussions need to be ongoing in terms of whether the Strategy itself is relatively easily understood and relatively easily translated into good practice. During this initial period, it should be recognised that some amendments to the details of these Guidelines may be desirable. Thereafter, the monitoring reports described above should be used as a regular opportunity to take stock about the Strategy as a whole and about any specific aspects of it which may appear to be in need of improvement.

6. Examples of Schools and Parent Working Together

It is possible to learn from the many schools where parental partnerships are strong, sustained and successful. Below are some examples of specific areas in which schools and parents have worked together.

- Help Your Child With Maths
- Home and School Working Together
- Our Policy on Bullying
- Sex and Relationships
- In the Playground
- School Details
- Nursery
- Parents’ Guide – Helping Your Child with Subtraction, Addition, Decimals, Division etc
- Handy Homework Hints – Parental Support Makes Such a Difference
- Partnership with Parents
- Homework Guidelines for Parents
- How to Learn to Spell

- School Discipline Policy (including Positive Behaviour and Action against Bullying)
- Homework Tips for Pupils and Parents

Social events take place in many schools on a regular basis. Those events which involve parents, staff and pupils working together are to be commended. Such occasions involve hard work and additional hours for staff and parents but are widely appreciated in terms of providing opportunities for building positive relationships.

Primary and Secondary Schools have held parents' nights aimed at supporting learning where discussion takes place about particular areas of the curriculum e.g. Mathematics, Sex and Relationships Education, P7 Induction, Course Choice Evenings, Coping with Standard Grades and Coping with Highers.