

Parent Council Newsletter

January 2009



Welcome to our second Parent Council Newsletter. I hope you find it useful in keeping you up to date with developments. I would value any feedback or ideas that you may have.

I continue to be inspired and encouraged as I travel around the country to events involving parents. One of the most satisfying things that I see in my role as National Parental Involvement Coordinator is how Parent Councils are evolving. I never fail to be amazed how committed many parents are to working to make things better for their school and its pupils. Of course, there are challenges. I still hear pleas of how can we get more parents involved or how to get others to join in. I wish I had an easy answer to this. However, I am clear that although there may be strength in numbers, I can also see lots of examples of where the efforts of a few can make a huge difference.

The range and variety of activities of Parent Councils around the country continues to evolve. I heard just recently of a Parent Council in a secondary school where the number of sub-groups, ranging from Curriculum to Fundraising, had reached seven, with some groups having up to 20 parents and others two or three. The big benefit of this model is that parents can dip in and out in a way that suits their circumstances and interest.

The other encouraging development is Parent Councils coming together in their own areas to form Networks or Forums. This means that the agendas are being set by parents themselves and you can see real partnerships emerging, where parents are helping to shape decision making at local levels. I find this really encouraging.

Curriculum for Excellence is of course moving forward and again I am aware that parents and Parent Councils are becoming more involved in the changes either in their own school or within their own authority. It is clearly important that Parent Councils are involved in these changes and for that reason, we have included an update in this newsletter with links to where you can get more information.

I would be really interested to hear more about the progress you are making and of any developments in your area. Please get in touch with me either through the blog <http://ltsblogs.org.uk/parentcouncils/> or directly by email l.sanda@ltsotland.org.uk.

Lorraine Sanda

Lorraine Sanda
National Parental Involvement Coordinator

Update on Curriculum for Excellence

“ Parental Involvement is incredibly important to the success of Curriculum for Excellence ”

Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary
for Education and Lifelong Learning

Most Parent Councils will now be thinking about how they can become involved in Curriculum for Excellence. A DVD was included with the last newsletter which aimed to summarise the reasons for the changes and explain some of



the key messages. Some Parent Councils have shown the DVD at their own meetings, or with the wider Parent Forum and it has helped kick off discussions with the school. You can download the DVD from <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/video/video-tcm4500634.asp>.

Here are some examples to help you engage with parents. You will find more details on these at Lorraine Sanda's blog <http://ltsblogs.org.uk/parentcouncils/>.

- The “Shift Happens” presentation is a good introduction to the pace of change in the world that we are all facing. Used at the beginning of events for parents, it helps explain why education needs to change.
- Curriculum for Excellence places particular emphasis on Skills for Learning, Life and Work. Really innovative and successful events and school assemblies are now being held for parents where children and young people are sharing their experiences so that parents can see for themselves how Curriculum for Excellence can make learning more enjoyable, challenging and inspiring.
- Some Secondary Schools have already been involving parents in Focus Groups to help discuss the implications of Curriculum for Excellence. In some cases, this has led to greater links with local business, and the Further Education and university sector.

What lies ahead?

Schools will have all the information they need by August 2009 to start to make changes to structures, course content and timetabling arrangements required by Curriculum for Excellence.

The National Qualifications Consultation closed on 31st October 2008. An announcement on the way forward will be made by the Scottish Government in Spring 2009. The additional time for implementation of Curriculum for Excellence means that the proposed new exams system will now be introduced in 2014. That means that the first group of young people to take the new exams are those currently in Primary 6. This decision was made to allow teachers more opportunity to plan for Curriculum for Excellence and prepare for the new exams.

We have enclosed a leaflet from Strathclyde University about an exciting opportunity for Parent Councils to take part in their long-standing Summer School and find out more about Curriculum for Excellence. The event will be held on 1st and 2nd July 2009 at Strathclyde.



Parental Involvement Field Team

The field team are **Laura Fowler, Lorraine Fisher, and Eleanor Jess**. They have been working since April 2008 on parental involvement projects in schools and nurseries around the country. The main aim of the projects is to help develop parental involvement and to share practise with others across Scotland. Here are some examples:

Children helped their parents understand about Cooperative Learning at an evening event at **Mattocks Primary, Angus**. They set the parents the challenge of making a mask in groups of four. Parents were then given a role in the group as *Time keeper, Reporter, Quality controller, Materials manager*. The children were able to explain to the parents how Cooperative Learning helps them learn as a team. *“Enjoyable time. Great to know what the children are doing and learning to be able to continue at home.”* (parent)



Bathgate Early Learning Centre, West Lothian.

Everyone recognises the important role that grandparents play in children’s lives. A very successful “Grandparent Day” was held where grandparents were able to take part in different activities including gardening, using the interactive whiteboard, handprinting, with the children. Grandparents were then involved in setting up more morning events. Topics include:

- Getting ready for reading
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Making Christmas decorations with the children

Senior pupils from **Knightswood Secondary School, Glasgow** have been helping parents of S1 pupils with their children’s homework. A series of evening sessions have been offered where parents learn how to use recommended websites which encourages learning at home. Some websites that you may find useful to help with homework are:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/revision/>

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentsaspartnersinlearning/homework>

<http://www.channel4learning.net/apps/homeworkhigh>

Information from the projects will be available on the Parentzone website

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone/> in the coming months. There will also be an opportunity to hear first hand from some of those involved in the projects at our Sharing Event – see attached leaflet.

Have your say

As we reported in the August newsletter, Ministers have agreed to conduct a survey of all Parent Councils about how the views of parents can be heard at a national level. This survey is now underway and is being carried out by Carole Millar Research. Carole has over 30 years' experience as an independent researcher, and this survey provides a great opportunity for you to tell us about the type of support you need, and what more we can do to help you, as well as find out your views on the issue of national representation.

If you have not already sent your survey back, we would strongly encourage you to do so before the deadline on **31st January**. As Ministers have made clear, this is not about imposing anything on parents or Parent Councils but enabling as wide a discussion as possible about how parents' views on education can be heard.

If you need a new survey form, they are available online at <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone>. They should be emailed to carolemillar@carolemillarresearch.co.uk. As well as sending out the survey, Carole Millar has also been meeting a range of parental groups to find out what they are thinking on this issue. Ministers will consider the survey results in the next couple of months, and consider how best the government can support you in taking forward parental involvement.



Keep up to date with the latest developments

Over the course of this school year, there have been over 30 projects running all over Scotland developing partnerships between parents and schools. We are running events in **Stirling** on **14th March** and in **Aberdeen** on **21st March** where there will be opportunities to see some of the work that has been taking place and how you can transfer some of the ideas to your own school. The attached leaflet gives more information on the events and how you can book a place. We are also planning to run a second National Conference for Parent Councils later this year following on from the very successful one that was held last year. More details on this in the next newsletter.

If your child's school has been involved in anything special, then we would encourage you to nominate them for the Scottish Education Awards <http://www.scottisheducationawards.org.uk>. Nominations for this are open between now and **27th February**. More details on this and all the latest events and developments are available on the parentzone website <http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk> where you can also download a copy of this newsletter.