



Parents as partners

in their children's learning

April 07

Issue No: 2

- **Where does the time go?**

Is it really four months since the last newsletter? Has anything happened? Well, quite a lot, actually. Schools and parents have been very busy planning for the introduction of Parent Councils in August. So, how's it all going? Read on and find out.....

What is a 'parent'?

- **Moira's Grand Highland Tour**

Moira McCarrell, Highland's Lead Officer for the implementation of the Parental Involvement Act, has been attending lots of meetings to talk to parents about how to set up their Parent Council. So far, she has been to around 30 meetings all over Highland, from Nairn to Acharacle, from Newtonmore to Thurso. Attendances have varied hugely - as few as 6 at one meeting, but around 130 at another! Overall, however, at least 800 parents have attended the meetings in schools, community halls - and, on one occasion, even the local pub! With another 10 meetings still to go, we should easily reach a total of over 1000 parents - a really encouraging number.

- **So what happens at these meetings?**

Using a PowerPoint presentation, Moira has been explaining to parents the basic aims of the Parental Involvement Act, outlining the differences between the Parent Forum and the

Parent Council, and suggesting some practical steps parents should take to get their Parent Council set up for August. Of course, all the necessary information is already available in the 'Parents as Partners Toolkit', but parents seem to have found it really helpful to have the whole thing cut down to relevant bite size chunks.

One of the real challenges of these events is the unexpected question from a parent - Moira likes to think of them as her 'rogue questions' and she reckons she gets at least one rogue question every evening. You'll find some of these questions dotted around this newsletter - do you know the answers??

- **Are parents / schools making progress?**

A resounding yes. The main task facing parents is to produce a constitution for their new Parent Council - don't panic though! An

Can the School Board simply 'become' the Parent Council?

excellent sample constitution is provided in the Toolkit - if you use it, you can't go wrong. Already, 29 constitutions have been sent in to Moira for checking, a very encouraging start. Of course, there's a long way to go to ensure all schools have their Parent Council constitutions in place in time for August, but we know that work is underway on many more.

What will happen if the parents in this school simply do nothing?

- **We haven't done anything yet - what should we be doing?**

If you haven't yet begun planning for your Parent Council, here's a brief outline of the

Can we re-name the School Board bank account so that it becomes the Parent Council account?

suggested way ahead:

- Set up a planning group of parents (& Head Teacher) - include members of School Board, PTA and any other parent groups, and parents not currently involved in either SB or PTA.
- The key task for the planning group is to write a draft constitution for the Parent Council (you'll find a step by step guide to this process in Section 8 of the 'Parents as Partners Toolkit', as well as an excellent sample constitution).
- A couple of practical suggestions for the constitution :
 - use a range rather than a specific number of parent members eg. 'minimum of' to a 'maximum of'
 - think about the balance of parents / co-opted members to ensure a parent majority
- Send the draft to Moira for checking.
- Consult the whole parent body (Parent Forum) on the draft constitution.
- Send the agreed final constitution to Moira.
- Select your Parent Council. Remember that the requirement for formal elections has gone. Keep the process as simple as possible eg: draw names out of a hat where

Can pupils serve on the Parent Council?

the number of parent volunteers is greater than the planned maximum number.

- **Insurance - hot off the press.....**

Your Parent Council would be well advised to have

Can the Parent Council buy the field next to the school?

public liability insurance because of the kind of activities it can now get involved in eg. fund-raising, social events, etc. To keep things as simple as possible, the Highland Council is currently negotiating the possibility of taking out blanket public liability insurance to cover all schools within the Council area. That way, you won't need to worry about organising insurance - instead, it'll be done for you. We'll send out more information on this once the details are finalised.

- **Useful contacts**

Parentzone: www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk

BBC Parents: www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents

Learning & Teaching Scotland:
www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentsaspartnersinlearning/toolkit

- **In the meantime....**

If you have any queries relating to Parental Involvement, Parent Councils etc, please ring Moira McCarrell (01463 702075) or drop her an email: moira.mccarrell@highland.co.uk

If a teacher becomes a Parent Council member, is she there as a teacher or a parent?