

Parent Council Newsletter

August 2008



Welcome to our first newsletter for Parent Councils. We aim to issue one a term and hope it will help to keep up the communication on what is going on nationally as well as providing you with some suggestions and ideas. One of the strong messages from Parent Councils and parents that we had from our Conference on 7 June is that they value knowing what is going on and sharing ideas with others. The networking with other Parent Councils was of key value for many.

One of the other messages that came across was how to keep up the momentum and enthusiasm within Parent Councils. Some are still looking for some focus and purpose for their Parent Council, with others already becoming involved in consultation with their local Authority or school. We have included some suggestions in this newsletter which may give you a starter for the coming year. (More details on the conference can be seen in our conference report.)

I am keen to hear more and learn for future events, so if you have any feedback, I'd be pleased to hear from you on the new Parent Council blog – there are already some interesting comments. Blogging is easy once you get used to it!

I am sure we are all looking forward to a busy term ahead. *Curriculum for Excellence* is picking up pace and a new DVD is being sent to parents explaining more about this. There is also an important development in relation to proposals to change the current system of National Qualifications. There are Learning Festivals and Events in local authorities around the country which I know many of you will be taking part in. I hope I get the chance to meet with you and hear more about your progress, as well as your challenges. It is only by hearing about these, that we can hope to move the Parental Involvement agenda forward in Scotland. Working together, we can achieve more.

All the best for the new school year ahead.

Lorraine Sanda

Lorraine Sanda
National Parental Involvement Coordinator

<http://itsblogs.org.uk/parentcouncils/>

What lies ahead for Parent Councils

- **AGMs and agreeing new Committees**

For many of you this may be the first task of the new term. It may be worth revisiting some of the evidence gathered in your consultation phase. What were the interests of the parents, young people, staff and the headteacher and what did they want from the Parent Council?

- **Agreeing priorities – working with your headteacher and the rest of the staff team**

Find out what the headteacher's ambitions are for the school in the year ahead. Think about how parents can help support improvement in the school. How can you help other parents to support their children's learning? Are there events, resources or suggestions that would help?

- **Support from local Community and others**

We know that schools are part of communities and working alongside others may help you achieve more. Think about who can help you achieve what you want. Use the Parent Council Toolkit and Welcome Pack for ideas on making the most of your community. (Further copies can be ordered through the parentzone website.)

- **Ask your local authority for help**

All authorities have someone to support Parent Councils and they have a duty to help. Many authorities now have Network Events for Parent Councils, some in Cluster areas. Make use of these. They are a valuable source of training, advice and networking. Contact web addresses for all local authorities are on parentzone.

- **Use parentzone website**

Through parentzone you can access and order resources for parents as well as keeping up to date with all the latest developments in education (<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone>).



New field team to support parental involvement

The Scottish Government has set up a field team to work directly with schools over the next 12 months. The team consists of three secondees from local authorities who will work with Lorraine Sanda, the National Parental Involvement Coordinator, to focus on learning at home and home/school partnerships. The overall aim is to identify good practice in terms of parental involvement and to share that across schools and authorities. The schools involved are covering a wide variety of projects, ranging from nurture groups and transition programmes to family learning and improving communication with parents through IT. Examples of interesting practise and emerging lessons will be highlighted over the next 12 months on parentzone. They will also help to develop CPD materials for staff in schools to enhance their work with parents.



Ideas to support your child's learning

Parents are always keen to find out more about how they can support their own child's learning. We also know that at whatever age, parents becoming involved in their children's education can be one of the biggest influences on attitude, success at school and beyond. Involvement can range from taking part in school activities, to home activities which support learning.

Here are just a few ideas to share with your Parent Forum:

- Join the Parent Council, a short term-working group or interest group at school – you can contribute to one which interests you. If there isn't one – set one up!
- Work with your headteacher to set up a Parents Room for drop-in or occasional use. Ask parents what would be helpful to have in it.
- Join with other parents in your child's year group and see how you can support each other. Think about an online support group for your year.
- Find out more about the IT that young people are using at schools. Ask the school to run an information session for parents on blogging, GLOW, new technologies etc.
- Give PRAISE when it is due! Positive self-esteem and confidence support learning.
- Spend some time in the week talking and listening about what is going on at school. Your child can help you understand what they are learning. Encourage them to explain to you what and how they are learning. Ask questions about homework – you may not be able to help with actual content but asking questions still helps.
- Organise a "school community" day – focus could be on historical event/site, sporting event or other area of interest – eg Family Flower Show; World Food Day etc. – *Determined to Succeed* issue an annual Year Planner with lots of ideas – a copy of this will be sent to all Parent Councils shortly.
- Prepare for work and life after school – look at Careers Scotland website, parents section (<http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk>). Talk about different jobs and skills that you know about. Find other people in the family or community who can share their experiences.
- Help organise a "bring a family member to school day". Think about a "Men Only" day – men have a strong influence on the outcomes for children when they are supported to take an interest in education.
- Provide a quiet place and time for study and homework. Think about what else would help – tidy room, mobile phone switched off, setting time limits, refreshments and rewards. Everyone learns differently; try to think how your own child learns best.
- Ask the school what resources they have for parents to support learning. Offer your own suggestions.
- Keep up to date with health issues that may affect or influence your child eg drugs, alcohol, relationships, diet, exercise opportunities etc. Ask the school what support they can provide for parents in partnership with Health, Police, Faith Groups, Parenting Support etc.



A national voice for parents

Many of you have had the chance to meet with, and hopefully build up contacts with, other Parent Councils in your area over the last year in events organised by your local authority. I know that some of you have already expressed a desire to work together with other Parent Councils on issues of local concern.

We asked local authorities last year to discuss with Parent Councils how they might be represented at a local and national level. The feedback that we had indicated that many Parent Councils felt they needed time to bed in before they felt ready to look at issues of national representation. Some saw the need for a single organisation to represent them, but there were different ideas as to how this might be achieved.



Some voices at the national parent conference in June called for a single national organisation to represent parents views. As Fiona Hyslop said at the conference: *"It is not for Government to impose anything on you when it comes to how you wish your voices to be heard nationally."* We are keen to hear your views on this issue, which is why over the coming months, we will be carrying out a survey of all Parent Councils to determine what your thoughts are on how your views can be represented. Once we have this feedback, we will consider how we can best support you to take forward your suggestions on this issue.

Keep up to date on the latest developments

The Scottish Government is taking forward *Curriculum for Excellence*. This aims to help young people to gain skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work (see <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence> for more details). A handout for parents which explains the *Curriculum for Excellence* is available on the Parent Council blog (<http://ltsblogs.org.uk/parentcouncils/>). There are also proposals for changes to the National Qualifications exam structure (see <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq> for more details). The Scottish Government is also currently consulting on proposals to safeguard rural schools and improve the consultation processes for all proposed school closures.

More information on all of these things, links to the different areas and details on how you can have your say is available on our parentzone website (<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone>).



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