Ethnic Minority Parental Involvement within Parent Groups:

(PTAs and Parent Councils).

OUTLINE REPORT

Organisational Context

BEMIS works with key stakeholders including education across Scotland to promote equality, inclusion, active citizenship and human rights education. Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) provides help, information and support to parents and carers who want to be involved in their child's education.

It was highlighted that there was low participation of EM parents within Parent Council's (PC's) despite the high volume of EM pupils within certain schools[1].   This demonstrated a need for positive action to gain understanding of this pattern and so BEMIS and SPTC designed a survey to gauge what work was actually being undertaken by PCs to engage with ethnic minority parents to ensure their voices were being heard.

Bemis Scotland and SPTC formed a partnership to capture research and produce this report to provide greater understanding of the level of civic partition of the ethnic minority[2] communities within parent groups across Scotland, such as, PTAs and Parent Councils.

Purpose

Parental Involvement is a key driver to improving outcomes for Scotland's children against a policy backdrop in which active citizenship has come to prominence as part of a national solution ensuring that policy, services and communities take up their responsibility to assist in shaping their children's education.

The information gathered will be utilised to provide meaningful support to underrepresented ethnic minority parents and the parent groups improving connectivity, confidence and sustainability of PC's.

SPTC, met with BEMIS to discuss their perceived concerns at the low levels of ethnic minority participation within their member PTCs and PTAs.

BEMIS and SPTC were keen to identify an accurate understanding amongst parent groups and undertook a survey across all members of SPTC. SPTC recognise that parental involvement within their children's learning is likely to be beneficial to parent, child and school community by:

- enhancing children's self-esteem
- improving children's academic achievement
- improving parent-child relationships
- helping parents develop positive attitudes towards school
- raising understanding of the schooling process.

This demonstrates the importance of enhancing participation to improve long-term outcomes for families from ethnic minority communities. The research has a whole-Scotland focus and concentrates on an a mixture of City, urban and rural target groups providing a broader sense of understanding.

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[1] (The 2011 Scottish Annual School Census shows the proportions of ethnic minority and 'white other' pupils across Scotland). For the purposes of this research the term "ethnic minority" is mainly used in relation to people who are in the minority within a population on the grounds of "race", colour, culture, language, religion or nationality. The term is used to capture all who have arrived to live and/or work in Scotland including, for example, migrant workers, Gypsy Travelers, refugee and asylum seekers. This would include both EU and non EU citizens now living in Scotland, including English, Welsh and Irish people.

National Context

'The Guidance on the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006' should be seen within the broad context of legislation and policy which supports children and families. In particular, it reflects the vision of Scottish Ministers' that Scotland's children and young people will become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors by being safe, nurtured, active, healthy, achieving, included, respected and responsible.

The Act requires education authorities to promote the involvement of parents in their children's school education. School education includes the provision of facilities for social, cultural and recreation activities.

This Act replace the School Boards with Parent Councils, designed to be less formal and to encourage more and different parents to get involved in the life of their school. This then became part of the backdrop for Parental Representation.

The role of the Parent Council is 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 all the parents in the school (called the Parent Forum)

- play a role in the appointment of head teachers and depute head teachers

- support the school and pupils during school inspections.

The Act requires education authorities to prepare a strategy to promote parental involvement in school education. This strategy must have due regard by education authorities to how their parental involvement in school policies for promoting education will also promote equal opportunities.

The focus on "equal opportunities" builds on the 2000 Act which requires education authorities to prepare an annual statement of education improvement objectives which includes an account of the ways in which they encourage equal opportunities in the school education provided by them. The Act makes provision for Parent Councils to promote contact between the school, parents and the local community.

Data Sample & Analysis

The survey was sent to parent organisations across Scotland, of which 328 responses were returned 87.7% from PTCs and 38 (12.3%) from PTAs.

Data was stored on the online web programme Survey Monkey which statistically collated everything entered onto the system producing visual representations, as follows:

Please select the name of your local authority from the drop down menu below.
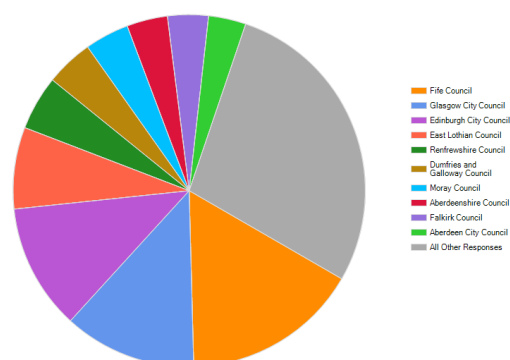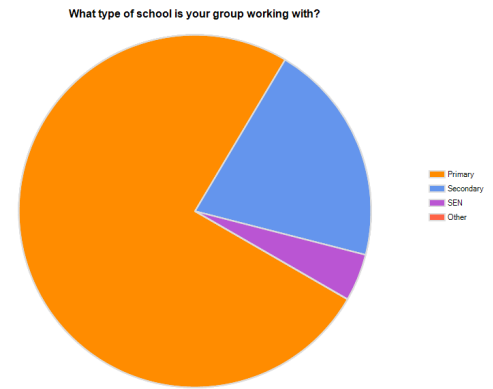
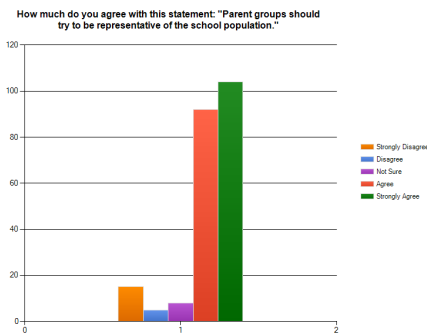|	Percentage	Number of Responses
Aberdeen City Council	3.4%	11
Aberdeenshire Council	3.7%	12
Angus Council	2.2%	7
Argyll & Bute Council	0.3%	1
Clackmannanshire Council	4.3%	2
Dumfries & Galloway Council	4.3%	14
East Ayrshire Council	3.1%	10
East Dunbartonshire Council	3.1%	10
East Lothian Council	7.4%	24
East Renfrewshire Council	0.3%	1
Edinburgh City Council	12.4%	40
Falkirk Council	3.7%	12
Fife Council	16.1%	52
Glasgow City Council	12.1%	39
Highland Council	0.6%	2
Midlothian Council	2.5%	8
Moray Council	4.0%	13
North Ayrshire Council	3.1%	10
North Lanarkshire Council	1.2%	4
Perth & Kinross Council	0.6%	2
Renfrewshire Council	5.0%	16
Scottish Borders Council	1.9%	6
Shetland Islands Council	0.3%	1
South Ayrshire Council	1.9%	6
South Lanarkshire Council	1.9%	6
Stirling Council	2.5%	8
West Dunbartonshire Council	1.2%	4
West Lothian Council	0.6%	2

Type of School

The survey was distributed across Primary, Secondary and Special Educational Needs School to capture a broad picture of parental involvement.

The participatory parental groups were 75.4% (175) Primary; 20.3% (47) Secondary and 4.3% (16) Special Educational Needs Schools.

What type of school is your group working with?

Findings

How much do you agree with this statement: "Parent groups should try to be representative of the school population."

One survey question enquired of the PC's respondents to assess if they felt that "parent groups should be representative of the school community'. Of the 226 responses 46% strongly agreed with the statement; 42% agreed; 4% were unsure; 2% did not agree and 6% strongly disagreed with the statement.

More interesting were some of the qualitative statements which demonstrated some very strong views in relation to ethnic minority communities and their access to participation, as follows.
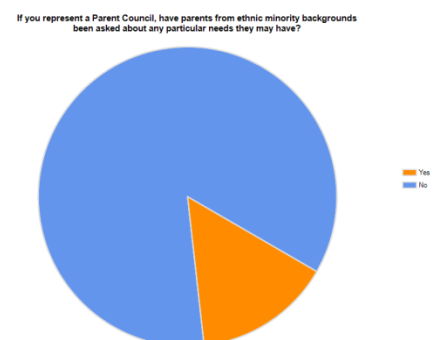
- Many highlighted language barriers as a common barrier for low EM participation

- Strong feeling that it was difficult to gain support from 'mainstream' parents

- Most groups felt that as they welcomed all parents this was a sufficient in being open to 'all'.

One respondent felt strongly that *"You do not have to be part of any ethnic group or indeed class to represent other parents effectively. Of far greater importance is the willingness to consider and listen to all parents and carers."*

A common theme was the aspiration to involve a more representative membership within their parent group, however, due to the membership being on a voluntary basis most groups found great difficulty in attracting and sustaining members from the ethnic minority community.

Reducing Barriers

This question raised some concerns around the parenting groups understanding of potential barriers to EM participation.

If you represent a Parent Council, have parents from ethnic minority backgrounds been asked about any particular needs they may have?

Many were unconcerned with directly targeting EM Groups as an 'open door' policy was thought to be sufficient.

Key Findings

- A clear under representation of ethnic minority parents within PCs (77% of respondents indicated that they have no EM parents on their councils)
- confusion over definition of ethnic minority (although definition had been given)
- Difficulty in engaging with parents from all groups ("never mind ethnic minorities": quote from survey)
- Low understanding of the barriers to participation faced from BME parents in particular ("Is this (translation) necessary? We live in an English speaking country!")
- Poor understandings of equality and child benefits experiencing diversity within the PC. Comments from the survey reveal a lack of understanding within some PCs . …. Survey quote stated that "at the last parent council it was raised that there was a lack of representation from our ethnic minority parents and they are seeking help with this".

Conclusion

As discussed in the findings many parent groups expressed the frustration of trying to involve parents and getting little response. *"People need to volunteer to be part and they would definitely, as there are spaces available, be accepted. there is quite a low number of parents who help the school. "*

For others they felt that their open door policy should ensure that no one is prohibited stating that ethnicity is not really a consideration as being active was the important thing. This point is further demonstrated by this quote from one parent member *'I THINK IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAT PARENTS CHOOSE TO TAKE PART RATHER THAN BEING CO-OPTED BECAUSE OF THEIR ETHNIC BACKGROUND'.*

It would appear from previous research that 'open door' policy is not sufficient as evidenced by researchers Reary, 2005; and Crozier, 2000 who found that, in relation to school boards (England) and Parent Councils (Scotland), the white middle-class mothers are most involved and most visible.

A recent BEMIS and Scottish Government consultation raised concerns from EM stakeholders that participation of EM within their child's education was extremely limited (May 2012). Lack of engagement within EM communities lead to confusion between school, community and parents (Gypsy Travellers 2011, BEMIS)

Disadvantaged parents are less involved in children's education (OECD Equity & Equality, 2012) it further states parental involvement in EM groups represents key direction for building positive attitudes and attainment (Closing the gap for Immigrant Students policies, practices and performance, 2010)

SG's National Parenting Strategy highlights that Scotland's family portrait is growing more culturally diverse, with greater numbers of families from EM backgrounds who may have different cultural norms around parenting.

The partnership recognises that significant institutional barriers continue to limit ethic minority children's opportunities, particularly when their communities are marginalised and invisible in terms of culture, faith and customs within the school community (Arshad et al., 2005; Arshad, 2001; Netto et al., 2001).

Recommendations

SPTC recognise that although there are many advantages to participation there are often barriers to parental involvement, for example time, energy, fear of authority, lack of access to childcare and work commitments.

Would training on engaging with ethnic minority parents be helpful to your group?

However, the research demonstrates that despite the perception of no barriers to become a member of PC's there is an under-representation of ethnic minority parents within the groups. Key themes have emerged as discussed previously within this report which has led to the following considerations:

- low awareness of benefits of participation within non active parents of EM communities.
- low understanding across PCs of barriers to participation from EM communities
- poor engagement with local authorities to support equalities-focused work in school communities in relation to PC's.
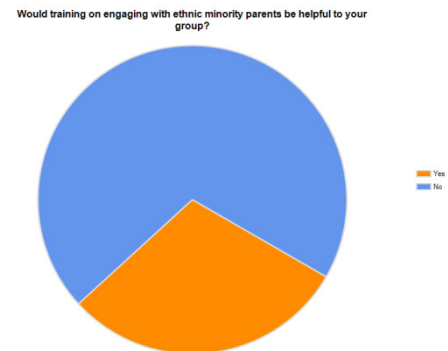
The evidence presented from both partners raises two key challenges.

1. Raising Awareness among EM communities with regard to their involvement within their child's education,

    a. Utilising BEMIS member networks to identify and reduce barriers to participation.
    b. Assisting BEMIS grassroots member network to carry out direct social marketing of PC's opportunity.
    c. Mentoring interested individuals to in a positive action approach to raise active citizenship amongst ethnic minority parents.

2. Building Capacity within PC's to enable them to attract and retain EM members to their Parent Council's.

    a. Develop a range of practical support, training and activities to improve understanding of ethnic minority communities.
    b. Agree a formal strategy between SPTC and BEMIS to reduce the under-representation.
    c. Test solutions within a pilot area with view to roll out across Scotland.