

GATHERED TOGETHER

Cruinn Còmhla



INVOLVING ALL PARENTS

Good Practice Guide for Parent Councils



Gathered Together would like to thank all the participants who came along to the training sessions and shared their thoughts, ideas and experiences.

We would also like to thank all our colleagues at SPTC for their hard work in developing and delivering the sessions and bringing their years of knowledge and experience working with Parent Councils.

A big thank you to our contact in the pilot local authorities for your dedication in promoting our training and all the work you did to plan and arrange the sessions, especially providing coffee and chocolate biscuits.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	—	2
Communication	—	2
Getting to know the parents	—	4
Raising Profile	—	5
Events	—	6
Approaches	—	7
Appendix: Useful Contacts	—	9

INTRODUCTION

Gathered Together is a pilot project between BEMIS (umbrella body for ethnic minority groups in Scotland) and the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC). It was created following a survey conducted by BEMIS and SPTC of Parent Councils in Scotland addressing representation of ethnic minorities on Parent Councils. The survey found that 77% of the parent councils in the survey had no ethnic minority members¹.

There was concern that this meant that the views and experiences of Ethnic Minority parents were not being represented within schools and also that this lack of involvement in the school could impact negatively on Ethnic Minority children. There are clear links between parental involvement and children's academic success² and positive outcomes in later life. Berla and Henderson found that

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to... become involved in their children's education at school and in the community³

Gathered Together has been working to promote greater parental involvement by ethnic minority parents in their school communities- working directly with schools, Parent Councils and Ethnic Minority parents.

This report summarises the ideas and good practice that came out of our training, developed and delivered in partnership with SPTC for schools and Parent Councils. We have divided it into five sections, in line with five key areas of work that Parent Councils are involved.

¹ Ethnic Minority Parental Involvement within Parent Groups (2012)
<http://bemis.org.uk/documents/Outline%20Report%20-%20BEMIS%20SPTC.pdf>

² The Role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012) <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-achievement-poverty-summary.pdf>

³ A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement Henderson & Berla (1994).. Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education

COMMUNICATION

- Clear, simple communication – don't overload people with leaflets and newsletters or use complex language
- Texting Translation tool – does your school have it? (This has to be used carefully – we don't want people coming to a parent council meeting expecting it to be a parents evening.)
- Involve ESOL parents in teaching the children about different languages, such as a class on different numbers, letters
- Look at who is in your school for help with translation.
- Use as many different forms of communication as possible: ideally using both spoken and written forms; include “new,” online methods, as well as traditional ones
- Think about using social media
- Having a regular “news” communication across a number of formats can help keep you in peoples' minds
- Think about using podcasts to do this, so busy parents can listen whilst doing other tasks

Case study 1

St Albert's Primary School, Glasgow was aware that many of their parents' first language wasn't English and that the newsletters being sent home were not always read. As translating newsletters into the local languages would be expensive, St Albert's decided to make podcasts of the newsletter. Their office manager was able to read the newsletter in Urdu, the first language for many of the parents, and the podcast is available on the school website. Check it out at <http://tinyurl.com/pqxxd33>.

St Albert's is considering getting some of the children to help with podcasts, reporting some news in their mother tongue. Podcasts are very easy to make and can be done using a recording from a mobile phone. It also helps parents who may have literacy issues or just not the time to sit down and read a newsletter.

GETTING TO KNOW THE PARENTS


- Think about surveying the parent group. You could ask about:
 - What the parents want from the parent council
 - What they know about your role
 - What skills they have
 - What times are best for them
 - What they might want to get involved with
- When conducting surveys consider offering a prize e.g. free cinema tickets
- Engage with community groups to help get to engage with parents from particular groups- e.g. The local mosque or charities for parents like Home Start
- Have “class reps” so that each class has a parent attached to it to make it easier to make connections between the PC and the parent group

Case study 2

Rimbleton Primary School, Fife and the Parent Partnership (their name for the Parent Council) wanted to find out about parents’ opinions about school and also what skills they would be able to bring to the school. In order to reach the widest number of parents possible the Parent Partnership and the school worked together to get the children involved.

The children were involved in designing the survey and were asked to ask their parents as part of their homework. This helped engage with all the parents at the school, reaching out to parents who have not had much involvement with the school.

RAISING PROFILE

- Talk to the parents in nurseries whose children are joining P1 – you can bring food too to encourage parents to come.
- Have your AGM in September so you are recruiting from a new pool of parents.
- Organise information sessions throughout the year for parents with different themes;
 - How you can help your child with their homework, e.g. How does the school teach maths, English
 - Bullying Policy
 - What does the Parent Council do for the parent forum
- Be visible! Have a permanent display in the school.
- Let the children know about who the parent council are.
- Have an informal meeting for parents whose children are leaving p7 and joining a secondary school – a welcome session in May/June
- Be a friendly face – have coffee mornings, talk to parents in the playground
- Ask the parents who already volunteer with the school to help with a one-off crèche for meetings/sessions.
- Encourage people to go to your website for further information (including using QR codes like this )

Case study 3

Anstruther Primary School, Fife had been struggling to get enough people to run the parent council. Even though there was an enthusiasm for the work they were doing, there weren't many parents volunteering to join up. Having tried a few things, the existing members spoke with the head teacher and arranged for one of them to be present at the induction day for parents of the P1 intake. The work of the Parent Council was discussed and its importance to the school emphasised. This resulted in several new recruits and is an exercise they now repeat every year.

EVENTS

- A Community Assembly – once a month invite the parents for an assembly where the children deliver the schools news and get awards, parents will come in when it's for their kids. This works well in smaller schools.
- Celebrate Scottish culture – e.g. Scottish Dancing, this can be expanded to make it a cultural exchange, such as events where children bring stories or foods that have cultural importance to them
- Recruit people from the local community, e.g. Imam
- Contact interfaith groups for a presentation/assembly
- Organise sports events (utilise what is happening around you) e.g. host a mini commonwealth games, national sports around the world
- Breakfast sessions/coffee mornings so parents can stop in on their way to work
- Asking parents to contribute to “World of Work” week, or similar career choice oriented events; this is easier to do if you have surveyed the parents (see above).

Case Study 4

Denny Primary School, Falkirk has started holding events around the curriculum, showing parents how they teach things (including maths) and what parents can do to support their children's learning. This is particularly important for parents who are new to Scotland and may be unfamiliar with the way children are taught, the Parent Council can be instrumental in highlighting the need for support for parents.

To hear the head teacher, Mr McPherson, talking about the “Big Maths” events go to <http://tinyurl.com/mbyqrgv>.

APPROACHES

- Thinking of Parental Involvement as more than attending a Parent Council meeting
- Change expectations of what it mean to get involved; parents may not want to sit around a table but they will want to offer practical help.
- Make any meetings as informal as possible
- Keep yourself informed about the different make up of your school.
- Think about timing – if you have an info session, think about having one during the day and one in the evening.
- When consulting, make sure you collect all the voices of parents not just the most vocal (again helps to know the make-up of the school, know someone who can help translate)
- Ask parents to come along to Parent Council meetings to see what happens, how things function and what the meetings involve.
- Offer lift-sharing for as many events as possible; the PC can co-ordinate this.
- Stick to advertised times for any meetings since overrunning can cause people difficulty with childcare
- Organise meetings with guest speakers who the parents might be interested in hearing
- Think about attractive venues for the meeting: they don't always have to be in the school!
- Change the name of the Parent Council: they can be called anything you want them to be and “Friends of [school name]” is popular, as well as less formal
- Think about “virtual” membership of the PC, or different ways to be a member:
 - Parents can get involved by commenting on the agenda if it is circulated in advance
 - Parents can get involved by adding comments to minutes of meetings (such as “I can help with that” next to action points)
 - Meetings can be joined using video calling/video conferencing software
 - Tasks can be delegated to consenting parties without them being at the meeting (someone might want to run a stall or audit your accounts, for example)
- Think about having some sort of “buddying” system for people attending meetings for the first time, whether this is someone delegated to meet, greet and talk through the process with new attendees or whether it is something more formal can be chosen locally.

Case Study 5

Oakgrove Primary School, Glasgow hold monthly community assemblies, where families and friends are invited into the school to attend the school assembly- seeing their children share their work and share the school news. The Parent Council decided to offer teas and coffees after the assemblies, this gives the Parent Council the opportunity to speak to parents and find out what they think of the school, problems they may have etc.

The community assemblies attract a lot of parents and children love having their parents present. By providing coffees after the assembly (and sometimes students from the local music college providing backing music!) the Parent Council is able to reach out to parents in an informal, non-threatening manner. To hear more about the assembly go to gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk/getting-parents-in-over-the-door our interview with the head teacher, Mrs Cerexhe.

APPENDIX: USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

BEMIS

BEMIS is the national Ethnic Minorities led umbrella body supporting the development of the Ethnic Minorities Voluntary Sector in Scotland and the communities that this sector represents.

www.bemis.org.uk | 0141 548 8047

Scottish Parent Teacher Council

SPTC is a national organization for parents' groups in Scottish schools. They offer a wide range of membership benefits to parent groups as well as help and advice to all parents

www.sptc.info | 0131 474 6199

PARENTZONE Website

Information about education in Scotland and ideas to help parents support their children's learning. Includes choosing a school, the curriculum, parent councils and more.

www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone

Enquire

Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. They provide practical advice and information about the education and additional support needs system in Scotland. Enquire will explain how the system may relate to your situation and advise you on possible ways forward.

www.enquire.org.uk | 0345 123 2303

Parent Network Scotland

Parent Network Scotland supports parents to develop the ability to bring up confident, happy and co-operative children.

www.parentnetworkscotland.org.uk | 0141 948 0022

Education Scotland

The government body whose work includes delivering the curriculum for Scotland; HMIE (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education) is also part of this organisation.

www.educationscotland.gov.uk

National Parent Forum Scotland

The National Parent Forum of Scotland was set up, by the Scottish Government, to give Parent Councils and parents an opportunity to discuss and raise educational issues of mutual interest or concerns at a national level.

www.parentforumscotland.org

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