

# GATHERED TOGETHER

Cruinn Còmhla



**INVOLVING ALL PARENTS**  
Review of Gathered  
Together training  
with Parent Councils  
2014





**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.

Finally thank you to our colleagues at Bemis for all the support, patience and proof reading we needed to pull this report together.



## 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 members<sup>1</sup>.

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 success<sup>2</sup> 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 community<sup>3</sup>*

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. Part of our work has been engaging with EM parents to learn about their experiences of contact with school and identify barriers that they faced in greater engagement. We have been able to use this information in our work with schools, Parents Councils and at a council and national level to raise awareness of the issues that ethnic minority parents face, share good practice and highlight gaps in policy and practice.



Rimbleton Primary training October 2014

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

<sup>2</sup> 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>

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

Gathered Together worked in partnership with SPTC to develop the training for Parent Councils- bringing together the knowledge and experience of SPTC has of supporting Parent Councils and the information Gathered Together had collated from working directly with ethnic minority parents. The training was informal and discussion based, facilitated by a member of both SPTC and Gathered Together. The relaxed atmosphere created a safe space for Parent Councils to talk about their experience and develop practical ideas to improve parental involvement.

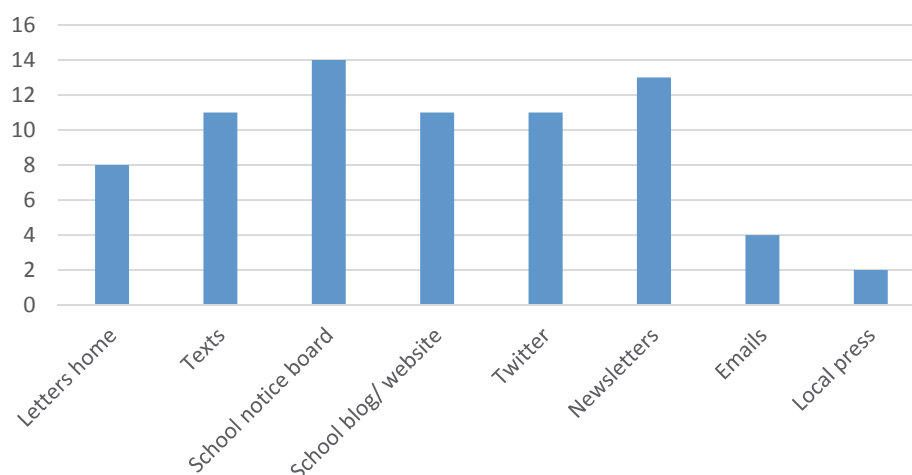
## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

At the beginning of each workshop with Parent Councils we would ask them to think of what they did to engage with parents. The responses we got were incredibly varied and the graphs below are an attempt to capture the most common responses.

We have divided the answers into two categories- passive, where the Parent Councils are just sending out information to the wider parent body, and active, where the Parent Council is able to actively engage with parents.

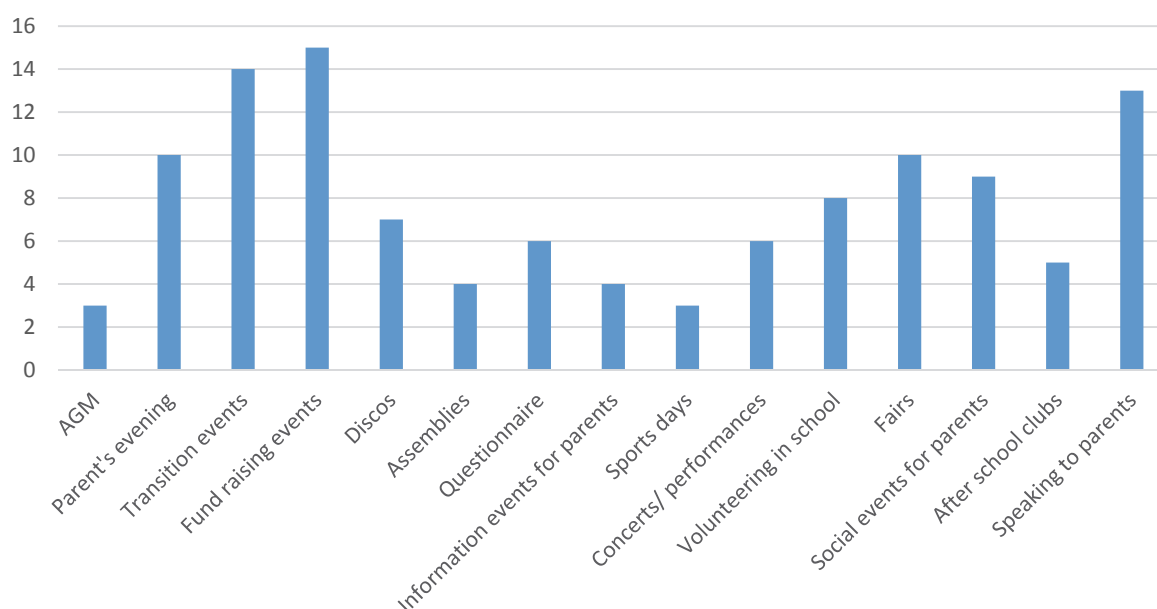


### Passive involvement



Almost every Parent Council has a newsletter, giving information about events in the school and the work of the parent council. An increasing number of Parent Councils have also started using twitter and facebook to give information to parents- this has the advantage of being cheaper and easier to send out information about up-coming events. Parent Councils have also been able to use their schools’ “group call” system to send out texts to parents with information including reminders of the next Parent Council meeting and fund-raising events.

### Active involvement



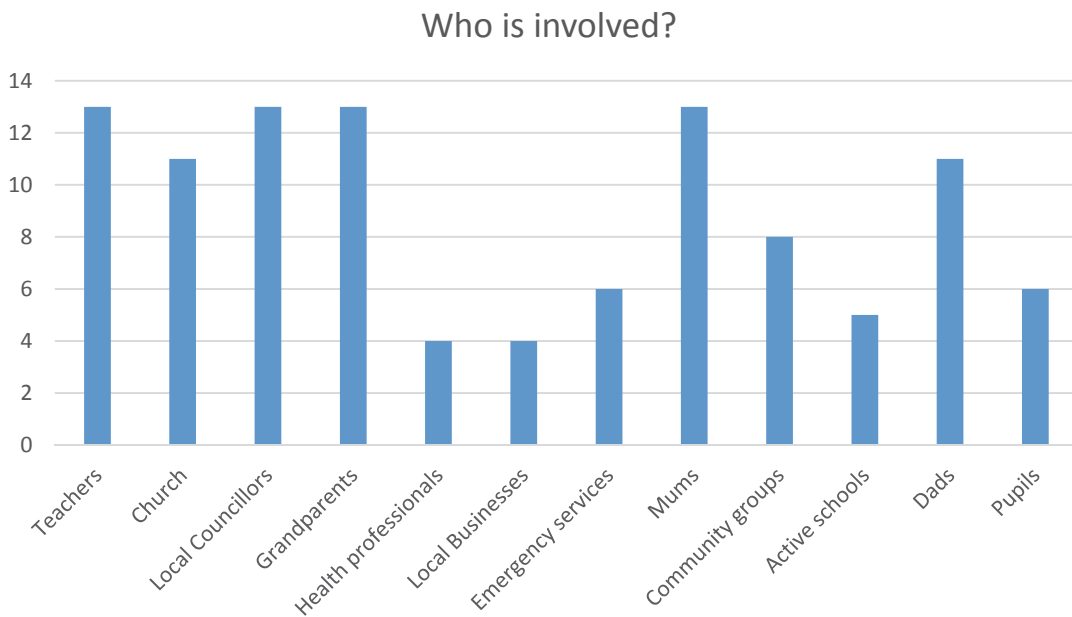
The activities mentioned in “active involvement” were very varied and this graph has attempted to put the answers into broad general categories. The PC members recognised that fund-raising events (such as coffee mornings) and school events (like assemblies and concerts) provided a valuable opportunity to engage with the wider parent forum and

were the main occasions when parents came into the school. There was also awareness of the importance of engaging with parents at transition times, from moving to nursery to primary school and primary to secondary and that this was a key opportunity to meet parents and make them aware of the role of the Parent Council. Many parents volunteer in school- helping with the school garden, coming on trips, assisting teachers with making materials etc.

Several Parent Councils referred to using questionnaires and surveys to get the views of parents on particular issues. One Parent Council informed us that they had done this with the school and children had developed the questionnaire and interviewed their parents as part of their homework. The majority of PCs also speak to parents directly, however this is much easier in primary school when parents can speak at the school gates- in secondary there is far less contact with the school.

### Involvement in the Parent Council

We first asked the Parent Councils to think about who **was involved** in their parent councils.

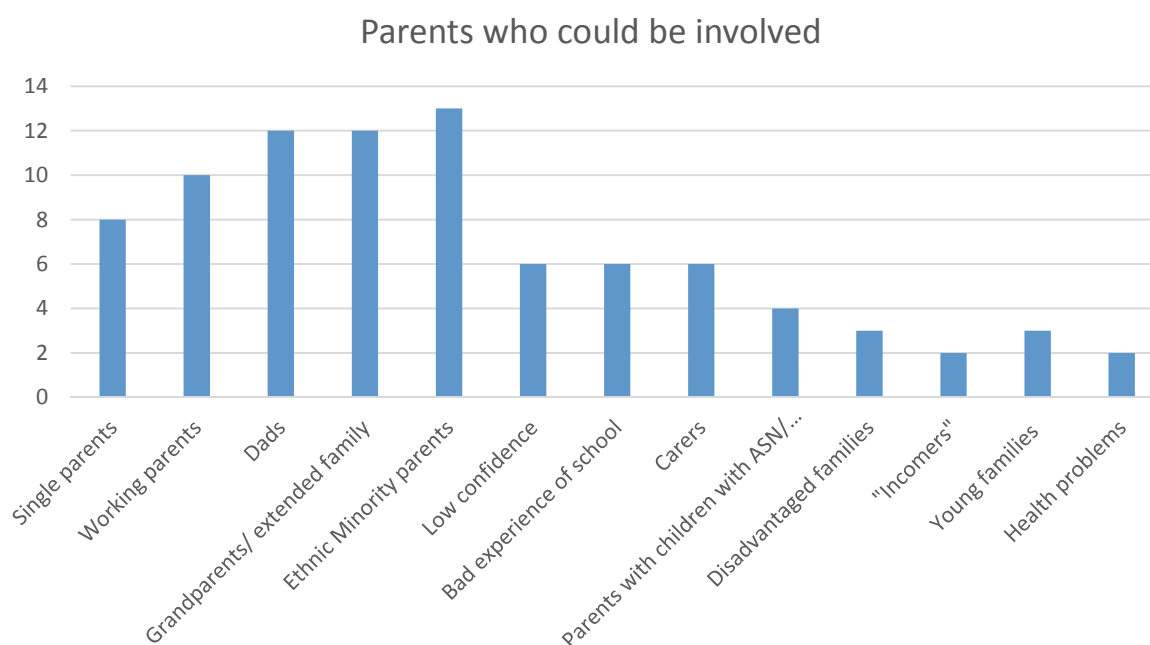


This is a basic summary of the answers given- while most participants said that dads were involved, this was referred to as “occasional dads” and that the PC was “predominantly mums”. Some participants thought further about the types of people who were involved- identifying particular profiles “parents with degrees”, “confident parents”, “people who feel comfortable with some responsibility”, “middle class” and “nosey people”. It was recognised that people who have had positive experiences of school and who were comfortable attending meetings were more likely to be involved in the Parent Council.



Emergency services, particular community police were often mentioned, as were Active Schools (a service that promotes sport in schools). Local councillors were also regularly mentioned and they can be an important source of information about the community and support to access additional funding. Grandparents were often involved in the school-attending events and assemblies etc. but rarely actually in the Parent Council despite having the right to join.

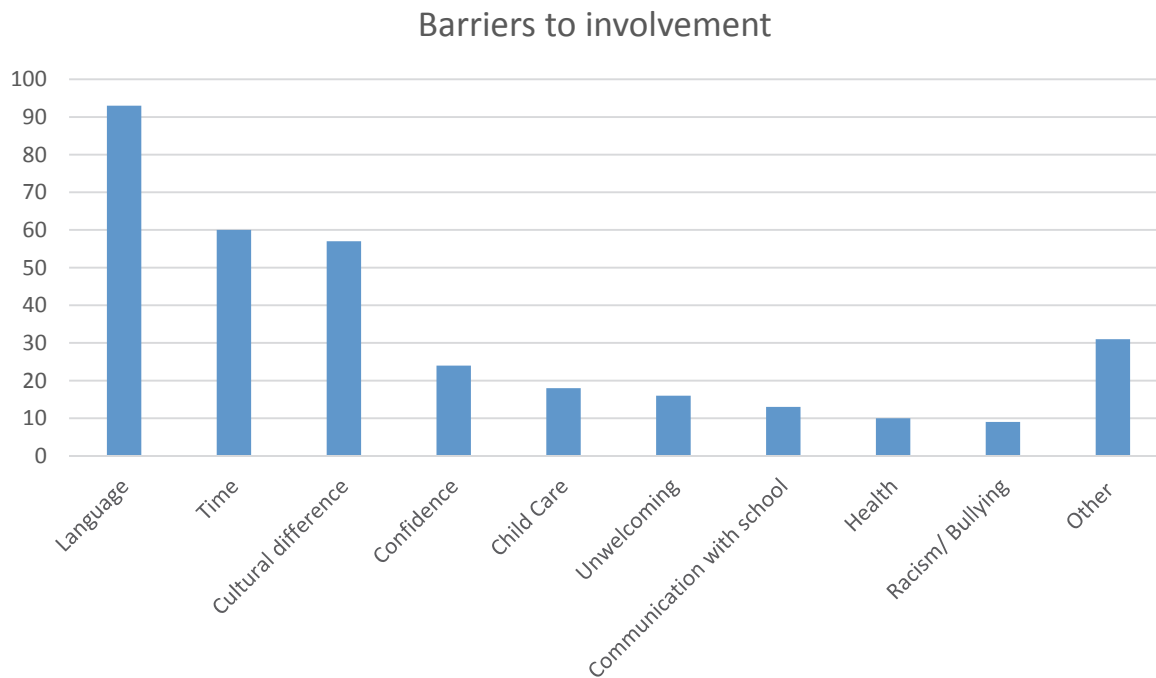
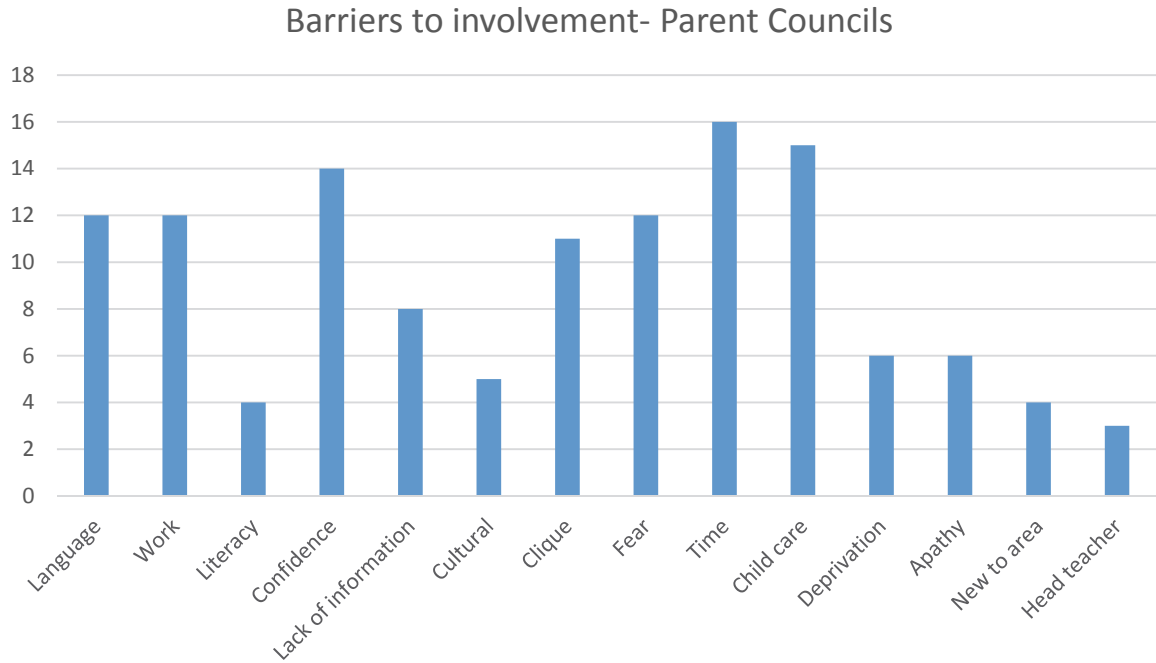
We then challenged the participants to think about who **could** be involved, asking them to think of specific groups who might be under-represented in the Parent Councils. The Parent Councils were generally very aware that they struggled to involve fathers and extended families in the life of the school community. They also mentioned parents who did not speak English as a first language, those from the BME community and specific groups including Chinese and Eastern European parents.



It was also recognised that the Parent Council was perceived as being for “confident parents” and that parents who were less confident, shy or not comfortable speaking at meetings would be less likely to become involved. The impact of a bad experience of school was also thought to be a barrier for parents. In the more rural communities “incomers” were thought to be less involved as they were not a part of the community and might feel uncomfortable attending events and meetings. Parents of children who displayed challenging behaviour at school or had additional support needs were also thought to be less likely to get involved.

They also identified practical issues that could make parents less likely to become involved including distance from the school, health problems and having a young family to take care of.

Finally we asked the PCs to think about the barriers that parents face to getting involved. This helped us to understand what Parent Councils perceive are the reasons that parents do not get involved- after this exercise we would compare it with the findings from our workshops with ethnic minority parents and the barriers that they reported.



*From workshops with ethnic minority parents, Gathered Together 2013-2014*

For both ethnic minority parents and Parent Councils language, time and confidence are identified as barriers to getting involved. Within Parent Councils there was some awareness of the difficulties that parents from other cultures face but this was limited and not many were aware of the different approaches to parental involvement and teaching styles in other countries. The barriers identified by Parent Councils did not mention racism and bullying. The ethnic minority parents who highlighted this as a barrier had felt that the school did not take action to address the bullying and had not been aware of the role the Parent Council can have in developing anti-bullying policies or holding events celebrating cultural diversity to address racism in the school.

Parent Councils were very aware of the perception that they were “cliquey” and that this could make parents reluctant to get involved. From speaking with parent councils we know that they are often a small group of parents who have been involved for a long time (sometimes longer than they would wish!) and this can create an unfriendly atmosphere. “Apathy” was also identified by the Parent Councils- parents who don’t care, from our work with EM parents we don’t believe that they are not interested in their children’s school and education, confidence and language difficulties are the most likely reasons for not getting more involved in school.

## GOOD PRACTICE

In the final part of the session we asked Parent Council members to think of practical actions that they could take to support parental involvement, including how to raise the profile of the Parent Council, overcoming barriers and recruiting more people. We have recorded the ideas that came out of this discussion, divided into the five key areas that Parent Councils work in. This is not an exhaustive list but provides ideas for good practice and ways of engaging with all parents.

### 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
- Engage with community groups to help get to engage with parents from particular groups- eg. 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.
- Put up some QR codes pointing to your website

### Case study 3

One of the primary schools that we worked with in 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 <http://gatheredtogether.bemis.org.uk/getting-parents-in-over-the-door/> our interview with the head teacher, Mrs Cerexhe.

## IMPACT OF TRAINING

### Introduction

A random sample of participants of PC training was selected from our records, then randomly distributed across the team. Several attempts were made to contact each party. A semi-structured questionnaire had been devised<sup>4</sup> that mixed qualitative and quantitative data. The response rate was very mixed and showed no clear pattern, however, overall, there was a 33% return rate, which is positive for a survey of its type. Due to time constraints, the overall sample was 60, so the sample analysed here is 20 returns.

### Headline findings

The main finding was from the responses to the question, “Has your PC implemented any of the ideas that came out of the training?” This is the only measure we have of direct and tangible impact in the survey, since many of the others are more attitudinal. Only one of the respondents hadn’t made a change and their response was, “Not so far, maybe in the New Year” having only attended the training a month previously, implying that change

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 3

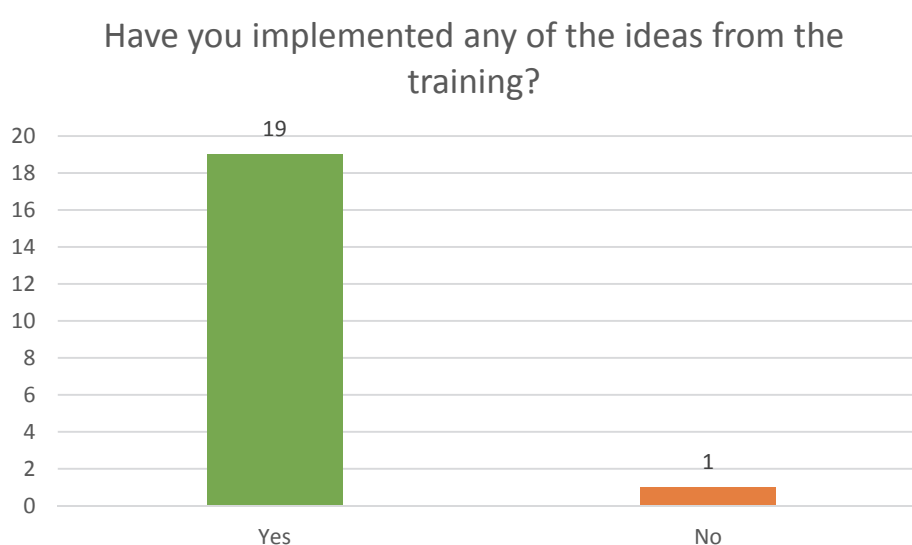
was likely to occur in the future. Some of the changes have been quite minor (making a timetable of events up for the next term) through to quite significant.

We met the P1 induction group this year and got some new recruits from there!

We advertise the Parent Council far more energetically and widely and one of us has the responsibility for greeting people at each session

Met a Polish mum who is able to translate our newsletter into Polish

This means that 95% of attending PCs took action to improve accessibility after attending the training, with the 5% not acting intending to in the future: effectively a 100% response of action following training, which is a huge endorsement of the work undertaken.



### Further analysis

In addition to the above question, 6 questions were posed on a variety of aspects of the project that asked respondents to score their response on a 1-7 scale. This scale was picked because it is the Likert scale with the most flexibility; facilitating the maximum nuance in responses.

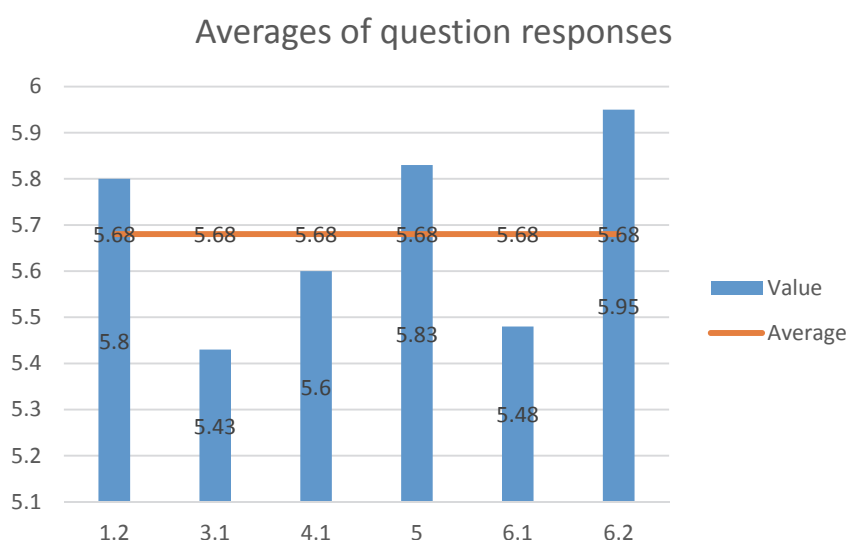
The questions asked were as follows (the numbers in brackets after each question is the question number in the questionnaire and is listed for reference):

- How much has your knowledge of parental involvement and the different ways of getting parents involved in the school increased since the training? (1.2)
- Since the training, has parental involvement become more valued in the school? (3.1)
- To what extent has your PC helped to increase parental involvement in the school community since the training? (4.1)
- To what degree are you now more aware of the ethnic and cultural diversity of your school? (5.0)

- How much more confident to engage with parents from ethnic and cultural minorities are you now? (6.1)
- How much do you feel that the discussion about barriers in the training session helped with this? (6.2)

The overall average of responses on the 1-7 scale was 5.68, or 81% in percentage terms. There are, however, some variations within these responses that are worthy of note.

A graph of the average responses to the questions (with the references noted above) is given here:



There are two questions that gave feedback that was a lot lower than the others (3.1 and 6.1); these are worth looking at in more detail. The first that is worth considering is 3.1. This had the lowest overall response, but looking at the comments, a theme comes through the lower scores given. Three quotes that sum these up are as follows:

*I think it was already fairly highly valued, so it's hard to think of a way in which it is even more valued*

*Not directly related to training – just a general change*

*Always been valued*

So it appears respondents were saying that this isn't always in the control of the Parent Council and that, for many PCs, Parental Involvement is highly regarded anyway. The lower score, therefore, does not reflect a lower view of the project in this regard, but reflects other things happening within the schools.

The next lowest score given was 6.1. This is part of a two part question with 6.1 asking about increases in confidence and 6.2 assessing to what degree an element of the training helped with this. The impact of the training was the highest rated response overall, which reflects very positively on the training, however, that confidence was not as high as it

could have been was something recognised by the team and led directly to the creation of the follow-up training: these levels confidence are addressed directly in one of the exercises in this follow-up.

The discussion around barriers was widely felt to be really helpful- one respondent said

*The barrier thing was really helpful, made a practical task out of something that was a bit scary!*

Participants also appreciated the chance the discussion around barriers gave them to think about the experiences of other parents.

*I think that barriers sometimes happen because you don't think things through enough. We find the school really friendly so we assume that everyone else does.*

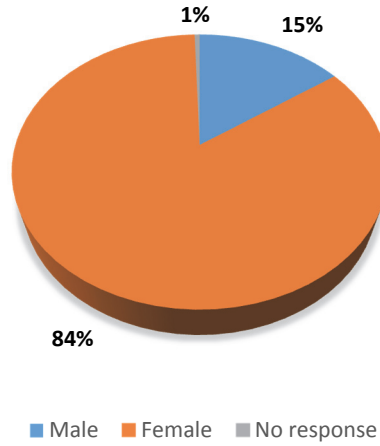
*It (discussion about barriers) allowed the Parent Council to see things from a different perspective- eye opening*

## APPENDIX 1

### Profile of Participants

#### Gender

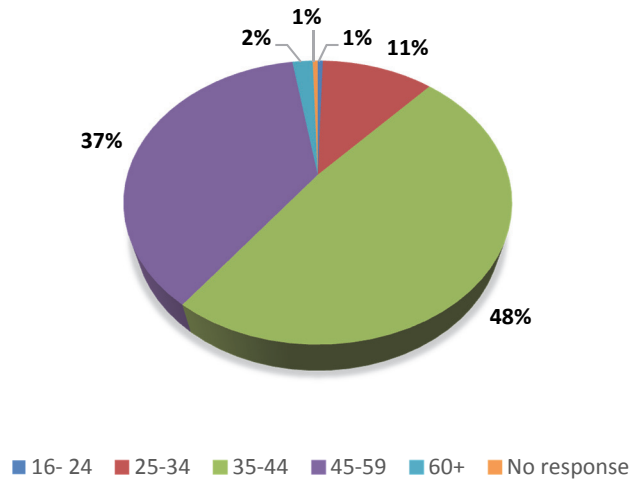
Gender of participants



Male	Female	No response
29	161	1

#### Age

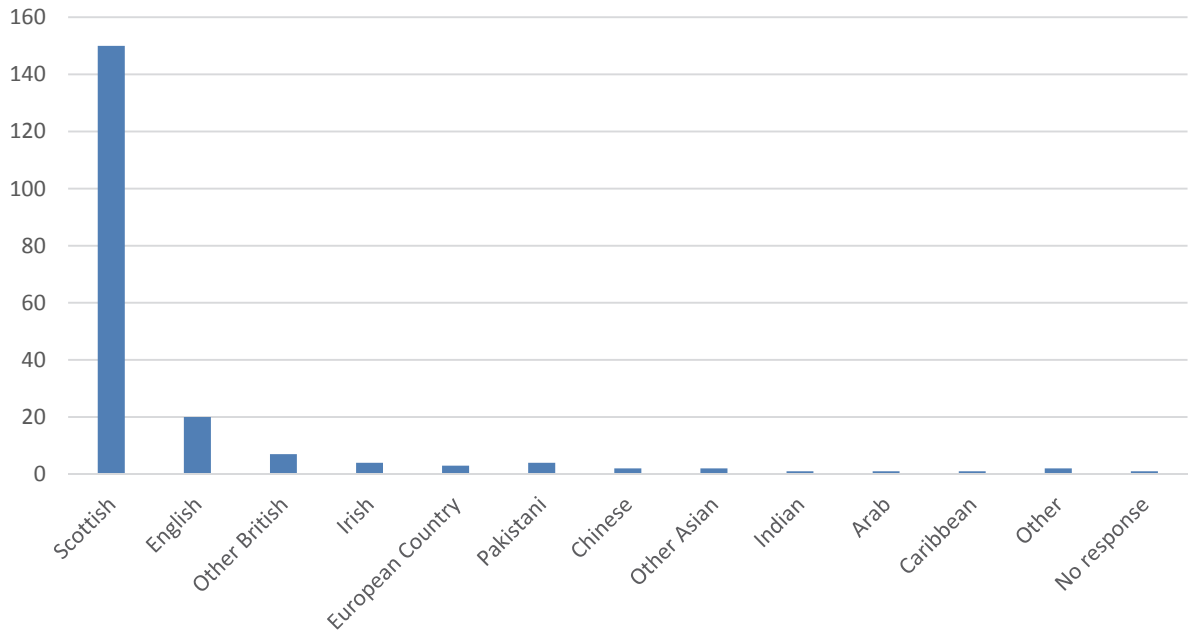
Age of participants



16-24	25-34	35-44	45-59	60+	No response
1	22	95	73	4	1

## Ethnicity

Ethnicity of participants



<b>Scottish</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Other British</b>	<b>Irish</b>	<b>EU</b>	<b>Pakistani</b>	<b>Chinese</b>
150	20	7	4	3	4	2
<b>Other Asian</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Arab</b>	<b>Caribbean</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No response</b>	
2	1	1	1	2	1	

“EU” included Swedish and Portuguese

“Other Asian” included Nepalese and Thai

“Other” included USA

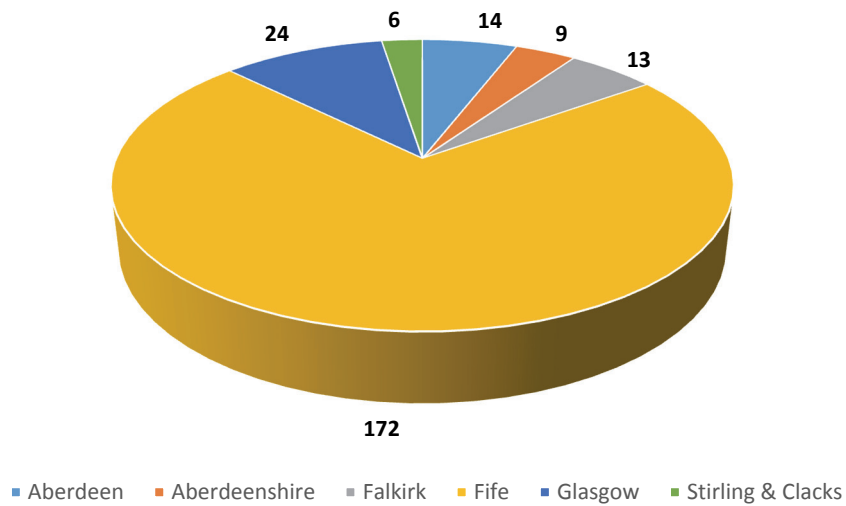
## APPENDIX 2

Parent Council training sessions by area

**238** people attended our Parent Council training sessions. We held **21** sessions across 6 local authorities

Aberdeen	Aberdeenshire	Falkirk	Fife	Glasgow	Stirling & Clacks
1	1	2	14	2	1

Number of participants by local authority



Aberdeen	Aberdeenshire	Falkirk	Fife	Glasgow	Stirling & Clacks
14	9	13	172	24	6

## APPENDIX 3

### Gathered Together – Evaluation Questionnaire – for parent councils

1. Where and when did you attend the Gathered Together training?

Date:	Location:
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2. How much has your knowledge of parental involvement and the different ways of getting parents involved in the school increased since the training?

Score on a 1-7 scale from 7 representing 'A great deal' to 1 representing 'Not at all'

Score
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3. Could you tell us a little about how it has changed?

Comments:
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4. Has your PC implemented any of the ideas that came out of the training?

Yes/No
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5. If yes, could you tell us about what you have done and what impact it has had?

Comments:
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6. Since the training, has parental involvement become more valued within the school?

Score on a 1-7 scale from 7 representing 'A great deal' to 1 representing 'not at all'

Score:
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7. Could you give an example of this?

Comments:
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8. To what extent has your PC helped to increase parental involvement in the school community since the training?

Score on a 1-7 scale from 7 representing 'A great deal' to 1 representing 'Not at all'

Score:
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9. Could you give us an example of this?

Comments:

10. To what degree are you now more aware of the ethnic and cultural diversity of your school?

Score on a 1-7 scale from 7 representing 'a great deal' to 1 representing 'not at all'

Score:

11. How much more confident to engage with ECM parents in your school are you now?

Score on a 1-7 scale from 7 representing 'a great deal' to 1 representing 'not at all'

Score:

12. How much do you feel that the discussion about barriers in the training session helped with this?

Score on a 1-7 scale from 7 representing 'a great deal' to 1 representing 'not at all'

Score:

13. Can you tell us a little about this?

Comments:

14. Is there anything else that Gathered Together could have done to help you to engage with all parents?

Comments:

15. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Comments:





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