



# Setting up a Parent Council

a resource pack



department for  
children, schools and families



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# Introduction

## What is a Parent Council?

A Parent Council is a body of parents, representing parents, run by parents with the support of the school.

Parent Councils can provide an excellent forum for parents to come together, share ideas, and put forward their views to the headteacher and governing body of their school. They can break down barriers, perceived or actual, between the school and parents who are less involved in the school.

Although every Parent Council evolves differently depending on the nature of the school, they all serve two distinct but related purposes:

- To give parents a voice and increase their active involvement in decision-making, fostering a culture of ownership and participation.
- To develop a partnership between the school and parents/carers in order to support and promote the pupils' learning and bring about change.

Parent Councils have an advisory and consultative role. The governing body remains the decision-maker and provides strategic leadership. There is no reduction in the role and responsibilities of the governing body in schools that have a Parent Council.

The responsibilities of other groups which may be in place, such as the Parent Teacher Association, will not be affected by the establishment of a Parent Council.

## Why have a Parent Council?

The most important factors in improving schools are good teaching and strong leadership. The biggest factor influencing the success of a child is the parents. Involving parents in schools brings these two forces together and improves behaviour, results and the school.

From May 2007 schools have a duty to take account of the views of parents. All schools are encouraged to review their current arrangements in relation to this duty and to consider enhancing them by setting up a Parent Council.

Although most schools have existing models and strategies in place that enable them to take account of parents' views, a growing number have found that a Parent Council can make a real difference to their efforts to increase parental involvement and confidence in the school. Parent Councils can develop parents' influence within the school, raising pupil achievement and helping schools to meet their strategic objectives.

As well as giving schools a means of meeting their obligations to consider the views of parents, a Parent Council can provide schools with support in many areas, from developing their strategies for engaging "hard-to-reach" audiences, to developing community cohesion, to supporting the well-being of the school and its pupils.

Only certain foundation or foundation special schools with a Trust that appoints the majority of the governing body members must establish a Parent Council. We call these "majority governance Trust schools". Detailed information about the requirement for these Parent Councils is set out in Part Three. All other schools can choose whether to set up a Parent or Council or not.

## Who is this pack for?

The pack is designed to provide practical help and guidance to:

**governing bodies**, either those required to set up a Parent Council, or those who are thinking about setting up a Parent Council

**parents**, who should be closely involved with the development of the Parent Council from an early stage

**headteachers and staff**, who may find elements of the pack useful depending on their level of involvement with the Parent Council.

## Using this pack

The resource pack includes this booklet, a PowerPoint presentation and a leaflet.

This booklet breaks down the process of establishing a Parent Council, setting out key activities and highlighting the issues that will need to be considered at each stage.

**Part One:** the decision to set up a Parent Council and steps to take before the first meeting.

**Part Two:** running the first and subsequent meetings and evaluating progress.

**Part Three:** information for schools required by law to set up a Parent Council.

**Part Four:** case studies describing how different types of school have set up their parent groups.

**Part Five:** practical resources for use by governors, governor trainers, parents and others involved in the process of setting up and running a Parent Council.

In Parts One and Two, relevant practical resources are indicated by this symbol followed by the resource number, for example:



The leaflet and the PowerPoint slides summarise why and how a Parent Council might be established.

You can find the pack, as well as editable Word versions of the resources in Part Five, at [www.governor.net.co.uk/parentcouncils](http://www.governor.net.co.uk/parentcouncils)

## Definition of terms used

As the case studies show, schools have adopted a range of different titles for their parent bodies. We have used the term "Parent Council" throughout this document, but schools and parents will want to decide if they would prefer to use a different name (such as "Parents' Forum" or "Parent Representative Group").

"Parents" has been used as shorthand to include mothers, fathers, carers and other adults with parental responsibility or care for a child, including looked-after children.

Throughout this pack we use the term Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to cover both PTAs and Parent Staff Associations (PSAs).



# Setting up a Parent Council: flowchart

Governing body establishes the need for a Parent Council



Governing body decides who will take the project forward, e.g. a working group, and whether there are any local governor services (or others) who may be able to offer support



Working group consults parents, staff, governing body and other interested parties and agrees:

- the remit, purpose and aims of the Parent Council
- the relationship between the Parent Council and other school bodies (e.g. the governing body)
  - who will be able to join
- how the Parent Council will be publicised and how to reach the “hard-to-reach”
  - practical arrangements for the first meeting
  - who will chair the first and later meetings
  - what the first meeting should aim to achieve



Working group publicises the first meeting



At the first meeting, attendees discuss:

- agendas, times, venues, chairing and formats for future meetings
- how future meetings will be publicised
- the need to establish clear goals



Dialogue between the Parent Council, school and governing body based on topics discussed at the first and subsequent meetings



Working group evaluates the success of the Parent Council regularly and reports back to governing body and Parent Council



Parent Council adapts and develops accordingly



# Part One: Background for the governing body

**We have come to trust the views of the Parent Council. Over the past 3 years we have consulted it before making many decisions.**

Tom Wilkes, Community Deputy  
Headteacher, Nova Hreod College, Swindon

## **Section 1: How could a Parent Council make a difference to your school?**

**This section lists some benefits of increased parental involvement through a Parent Council.**

### **1.1 Reasons for setting up a Parent Council**

Parents have a vital role to play, not only in their own child's achievements, but also in the life of the school and the well-being of its pupils.

Setting up a Parent Council will require a real commitment from the school and from some parents. It will take time for the Parent Council to become part of the life of the school. However there are benefits for all involved:

#### **Benefits for children**

- Children behave better and achieve more when their parents are involved in their education.
- Their parents will receive advice and information about how to support their learning.
- Their concerns can be resolved more quickly when their parents have a positive relationship with school staff.

#### **Benefits for parents**

- Parents have a forum in which they can come together, share ideas and put forward their views to the headteacher and governing body of their school.
- Their active involvement in decision-making is increased, fostering a culture of ownership and participation.
- They get the support and advice they need to help and encourage their children with their learning.
- They have more information about their children's education and the quality of that education.
- They can build their own confidence, skills and social networks, leading to personal development and increased employability.
- Parent Councils can break down barriers, perceived or actual, between the school and parents who are less involved in the school.
- Parent Councils can improve working relationships between the school and parents who are already involved in the school.

#### **Benefits for schools**

- Schools are able to develop a better understanding of the views and needs of parents and how they might address them.
- Parents contribute time, ideas and skills which complement the ideas, skills and expertise of staff and governors.
- Parent Councils enable the school to keep parents informed and allow them to be part of decision-making processes.
- Parents become involved in all aspects of school life.
- Majority governance Trust schools will satisfy a legal requirement.
- Other schools can demonstrate how they listen to, and act on, parents' views in relation to the new duty to have regard to the views of parents under the Education and Inspection Act 2006.
- Schools are able to provide details of their Parent Council in the section of the Ofsted Self Evaluation Form (SEF) relating to parental involvement.
- Parent Councils provide a clear route for parents as a group (rather than as individuals) to feed back to the school and governing body.
- They can reach out to parents who are currently less engaged, or not at all engaged with the school and overcome some of the barriers which prevent parents from engaging with the school.

#### **1.2 Areas where Parent Councils have made a positive contribution**

- Development and discussion of policies e.g. healthy-eating, homework and school travel plans.
- Development of websites.
- Arranging workshops on how parents can support their children.
- Running parents' evenings.
- Consultation on decisions about school uniform.
- Arranging welcome events and information.
- Packs for new pupils and their parents.
- Provision of after-school clubs.
- Setting up social events to draw in more parents.
- Setting up volunteer groups of parents to support reading in school.

## Section 2: Deciding to set up a Parent Council

**This section highlights some questions governors may wish to think about when considering setting up a Parent Council, particularly:**

- **whether there is a need for a Parent Council**
- **what input from the governing body and school will be involved.**

### 2.1 A decision for the governing body

In schools not legally required to set up a Parent Council, it is for the governing body of the school to decide whether it wants one and how it will support it.

Although a Parent Council is a body primarily for and about parents, governing bodies have a key role to play in a group's success after the decision to set it up has been made. The Parent Council will only be effective if governors recognise its value, support it and listen to what it has to say. The governing body will need to lead on some of this work and consider how tasks are shared.

The work for the governing body will include:

- ensuring everyone understands and agrees the purpose of the Parent Council and jointly owns the project from the start
- setting up the Parent Council
- ensuring a continuing dialogue (listening and consultation)
- making sure it is productive
- supporting its continued growth and development
- ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the Parent Council
- supporting the Parent Council chair/working group if issues arise.

### 2.2 A commitment from the school

Setting up a Parent Council and supporting it also requires a commitment from the school. At the very least:

- from senior staff to consult, liaise with and be responsive to the Parent Council
- to help and support the Parent Council with practical arrangements, such as space for meetings, assisting with publicity, opening the school outside hours etc.
- support the Parent Council chair/working group if issues arise.

The school might want to give serious consideration to the benefits of further investment in the Parent Council by allocating (or helping the Parent Council to find) specific funds to cover costs such as:

- running a crèche
- paying for interpreters
- paying for administrative support
- providing training and support for Parent Council chairs and members.

It is important to be clear from the start how much time and money the school is prepared to commit as this will affect the way in which the Parent Council operates. The Parent Council is less likely to have unreasonable expectations of the school if there is clarity about what resources are available.



### 2.3 Establishing the need for a Parent Council

Governors might wish to ask the following questions:

- What happens at the moment in terms of parental involvement?
- How do we take account of parents' views now?
- Is it successful and how do we know?
- Is there anything we would like to do better or differently?
- How would the school benefit from greater parental involvement in decision-making?
- Do we know how people working in the school, parents and the community feel about the idea of a Parent Council?
- What would make people want to get involved or put them off?
- How could a Parent Council make a difference?

If the school already has a parental participation strategy, this may help you understand where you are and how you might build on existing structures. If there isn't a strategy and you would like assistance to develop one, this can be found in the "Further help and guidance" section at the back of the pack.

### 2.4 Setting up a working group

It is worth considering who is going to lead the project to set up the Parent Council. A small working group can be an effective way of being representative and involving key players from the start. Interested individuals from different parts of the school community could be invited to join (e.g. members of the governing body, link staff members and parents). Such a group could drive the work forward and make decisions about how the Parent Council will be set up and run, seeking the agreement of the governing body.

Some schools have found that a governor trainer from their local Governor Services or an external consultant can help with leading an initial workshop to decide how the Council might be run and act as facilitator at the first meeting. This can be particularly helpful if the governing body wants to demonstrate its support for the Parent Council without appearing to want to control it.

## R 2,3



### Section 3: A step-by-step guide to setting up a Parent Council

**This section is aimed at those leading the project to set up a Parent Council – probably the governing body or a working group reporting back to the governing body.**

#### 3.1 Step 1 – talking to parents, staff and others

Parents are more likely to support the Parent Council if they have been closely involved in getting it off the ground. Without knowing what parents want, you are unlikely to create a Parent Council that works for parents. It is important for the Parent Council to have a good understanding of what motivates parents and what barriers have to be removed to lead to greater involvement. Schools may already have consultation models in place that will help here, and/or may find the TDA remodelling tools useful ([www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/managingchange/tools.aspx](http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/managingchange/tools.aspx)).

It is important that members of school staff are able to contribute to discussions at an early stage. They will have ideas about how a Parent Council may be able to support their work. They may also have anxieties and concerns about this new body that need to be listened to and taken into account. Teachers and support staff may also have an important role to play in spreading the word about the Parent Council.

You may wish to consult representatives of accredited workforce unions.

Other professionals such as education welfare officers and learning mentors may be able to contribute to discussions. In some local authorities, parent support advisors are building bridges between schools and families as part of the development of extended services and may have a role to play. Schools with a religious character could consult their diocesan/religious authorities.

#### 3.2 Step 2 – agreeing the purpose of the Parent Council

It is essential that the **purpose** of the Parent Council is clear and that there is a shared understanding between all parties as to what it wants (and is able) to achieve.

The **limitations** of the Parent Council should be clearly understood by all those involved from the start, e.g.:

- Their role is consultative and advisory, but the governing body remains the decision-maker and provides strategic leadership.
- Parent Council is not the channel for individual complaints and issues. Concerns or complaints involving individual children, families or teachers will not be discussed. There should be well-publicised alternative complaints policies and methods of resolving disputes or disagreements.

It is important that these limitations are complemented by an open and responsive attitude towards the Parent Council on the part of the leadership team and the governing body.

Once the rationale, purpose and limitations have been agreed they need to be recorded and published so that everyone is aware what has been decided (this should probably be kept as short, simple and clear as possible).

**The aim of having class parent representatives was to try to encourage all parents to become more involved in school life. The representatives would communicate parents' views, concerns and ideas to the class teacher.**

Trish Stubbings, Teacher, Beech Hill Primary School, Luton, Bedfordshire

**Forum meetings are well run and have a constructive ethos – it is not a place to air individual issues, and everyone is clear that these should be raised with the headteacher.**

Octavia Reeve, Parent Governor, Grazebrook Primary School, London Borough of Hackney

### 3.3 Step 3 – deciding who will chair the Parent Council

However formal or informal you choose to make your Parent Council meetings, it is probable that it will need directional leadership in the form of a chair. Ideally this should be a parent, as this will help foster a sense of ownership and independence.

There are two distinct aspects to running any group of this sort:

- Strategically running the group – deciding what the Parent Council wants to achieve, setting agendas, chairing discussions, representing the group to the headteacher or governing body etc.
- Dealing with the practical arrangements for the group – setting up and servicing meetings, arranging rooms, equipment, childcare, note-taking etc.

It is helpful if the chair oversees both aspects, but responsibility for practical arrangements can be passed on to others.

If a group of parents is willing to run the Parent Council, there will be less of a burden on one individual. A system of “rotating chairs” (who take it in turns to chair meetings) or co-chairing can be used. Alternatively there could be a chair in place for one year with the next year’s “chair designate” identified and acting as vice chair whilst familiarising themselves with the role.

If no parents are willing to chair meetings, it may be necessary for the school to approach a parent, or several parents, and ask them to become involved. Alternatively the school may identify someone who is independent of the school and who would allow parents to feel confident about expressing their views.

The chair should ideally:

- have some experience of leading a group/ chairing meetings or be offered training and support to develop these skills (training can motivate people who might otherwise not become involved)
- understand that their role is to enable members of the group to speak and not to speak for them

- instil confidence in others
- represent the Parent Council to the governing body and elsewhere
- understand the relationship between the Parent Council and the governing body and school.

## **R** 11

### 3.4 Step 4 – agreeing the membership

The success of the Parent Council will depend on how inclusive it is. Only a minority of parents will attend meetings no matter how broadly the membership is drawn up, but these people will all have connections with other parts of the school community and will be able to act as links.

Questions to consider when agreeing the membership structure include:

- Will membership be limited to parents and carers or will others such as staff and governors also be members?
- If membership is limited to parents, will others be able to attend by invitation or by appointment?
- Will membership be open to all parents or be limited to specific “places” decided by appointment or election and if so, on what basis will parents be appointed or elected?
- What steps need to be taken to reach out to parents who are less likely to be involved?
- What can the school do to support representatives?
- Will a minimum number of members need to be present for a meeting to go ahead?
- Will you agree a procedure for excluding members of the Parent Council (e.g. by majority vote)?

Expecting the headteacher to attend every meeting is not realistic given their time commitments. However, there will be benefits to inviting different staff members to attend, if their workload allows them to, according to the items under discussion.

Some schools find it helpful to create a more formal structure where membership of the Parent Council is limited to those who represent particular groups,

e.g. year group representatives or representatives of particular ethnic or religious groups and/or parents of children with particular needs. This approach can ensure that diverse groups are represented, but schools need to identify those who see themselves belonging to these “groups” with care – if one group is given a place on the Parent Council and another group is not, there will be important issues of equity to address.

It is important that the Parent Council and the school help members who have a representative role to find out the views of those they represent. For example, if a parent is appointed or elected to represent Year 7, he or she needs to know that this requires them to keep in touch with the views of other parents from that group and to be given some support to canvass and report on the views of the group they represent.

**The Parents' Forum is open to any parent or carer of a child in the school... Governors and staff members may attend as observers, and members of staff may be invited to speak on a particular issue.**

Octavia Reeve, Parent Governor, Grazebrook Primary School, London

**Each class was asked to provide a parent member to represent their views on the Council.**

Liz Williams, Headteacher, Birchwood Church of England Primary School, Warrington



### **3.5 Step 5 – reaching the “hard-to-reach”**

Schools will always find it difficult to involve some parents (fathers are frequently an under-represented group). Often these are the very people the school most wishes to engage with. The reasons for this will be different for each school. One role for the Parent Council is to reach out to these people.

Most schools find that an informal “come if you are interested” approach appeals to the widest number of parents. It is worth avoiding unintended barriers. These might be practical issues such as the timing of meetings or access for people with disabilities, or cultural issues around language, single sex groups or appropriate refreshments. It is useful for the group to constantly review how it might attract new members, e.g. by varying the issues to be discussed, meeting times or publicity.

The Parent Council will need to find ways of keeping in touch with and seeking the views of the wider parent body. There are many different ways of doing this, for example: events to draw in different groups of parents; being present at parents' evening and school performances; putting notes of meetings on the website or email-based groups.

**R** 6,7,8

### **3.6 Step 6 – clarifying the relationship between the Parent Council and other school bodies**

The Parent Council needs to have a close working relationship with the governing body (and the leadership team). This will ensure that the goals of the Parent Council relate to the strategic direction of the school and its broader objectives. The governing body needs to know what issues are being raised in the Parent Council and what actions the school is taking in response. These links can be created by:

- a parent governor attending Parent Council meetings and reporting back to the governing body
- the governing body inviting a representative from the Parent Council to give regular verbal or written reports to the governing body
- the governing body producing written responses to issues raised by the Parent Council
- a representative from the Parent Council liaising regularly with the headteacher or a senior member of staff (allowing the school to respond promptly to requests and to discuss ideas and how these might be taken forward).

Many schools will already have other structures in place such as Parent Teacher Associations, School Councils and other groups. To avoid duplication and clarify people's roles and responsibilities, the school needs to be clear about the purpose of each body and how they relate to each other.

**R** 9

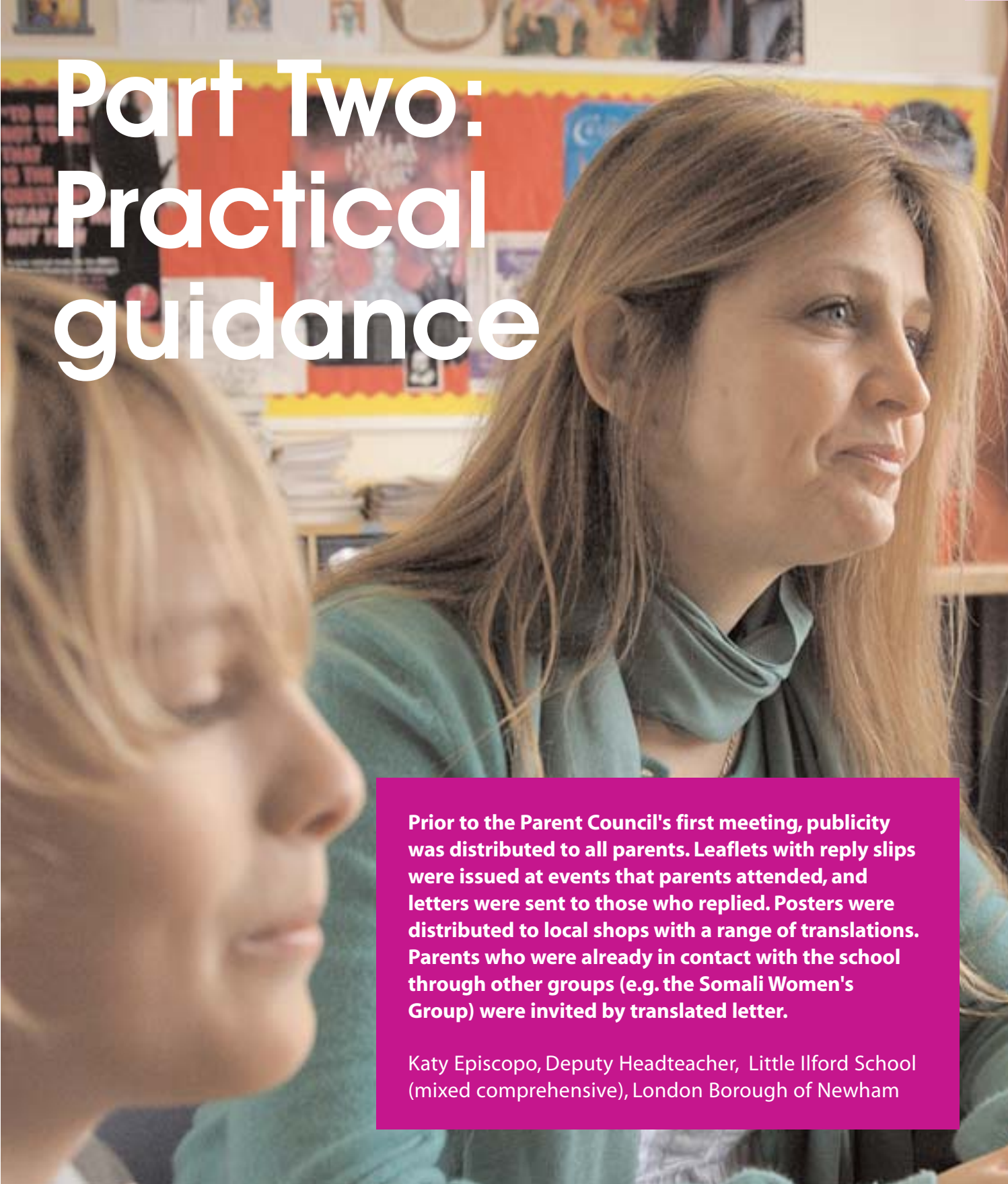
**We tried to get a range of publicity out to invite any parent who would like to attend to come to the meetings. Before every meeting a translated letter is given to every child in the school.**

Katy Episcopo, Deputy Headteacher,  
Little Ilford School (mixed comprehensive),  
London Borough of Newham

**Those parents who are involved work hard to find ways to draw other parents in. They recognise that to be inclusive there is a real need to vary the time and settings for meetings, and to offer childcare facilities and transport... They have also realised the need to provide interpreters at events.**

Geraldine Waterman, Headteacher, Bruce  
Grove Primary School, Haringey, London

# Part Two: Practical guidance



**Prior to the Parent Council's first meeting, publicity was distributed to all parents. Leaflets with reply slips were issued at events that parents attended, and letters were sent to those who replied. Posters were distributed to local shops with a range of translations. Parents who were already in contact with the school through other groups (e.g. the Somali Women's Group) were invited by translated letter.**

Katy Episcopo, Deputy Headteacher, Little Ilford School (mixed comprehensive), London Borough of Newham

## Section 4: Launching the Parent Council

**This section is aimed at the working group setting up and running the meetings of the Parent Council.**

### 4.1 Before the first meeting

Make sure the Parent Council has a named school staff member who can help with arrangements and find someone to keep a record of the meeting.

At the first meeting it may be worth attracting as many and as diverse a group of parents as possible. For suggestions on what can be done to help more parents become involved, see Section 3.5.

**R 6,10,11,12,16**

It is important that the first meeting is publicised well and long enough in advance to allow people to make any practical arrangements (the more publicity approaches used the better).

**R 7,8**

### 4.2 The first meeting

The first meeting is particularly important as it will launch the Parent Council and set the tone for future meetings. It will also be different from other meetings as its purpose will be to engage with parents to define:

- why the Parent Council has been set up (maybe a few words from the headteacher or chair of governors)
- what its purpose and remit will be
- the ground rules – how the group will work, what is acceptable and appropriate
- what issues parents would like to discuss or learn more about at future meetings (maybe discuss in small groups to start with)
- whether people want to continue to be involved

- a summary of what has been agreed and who will take forward any actions
- dates of future meetings.

Try and create a welcoming atmosphere and an environment in which people can work well together. Help people to get to know each other and feel comfortable putting forward their ideas and remember to collect people's contact details.

**R 13,16,14,12,18**

### 4.3 Complaints from parents

A Parent Council may have been set up as a way of responding to parental dissatisfaction and may initially be seen as a place where parents can go and express frustration or even anger. The Parent Council will need to acknowledge this and ensure the new organisation works in a positive and constructive way to seek improvements in the school through fostering a culture of openness, respect, and understanding on all sides.

Meetings can be an opportunity for parents and the school to listen to each other and understand each other's point of view so that they can work more effectively together. Once people have expressed their dissatisfaction they are often able to step back and channel their energies more positively, especially if they are being listened to and can be part of the solution. The chair of the group will need to ensure the conversation does not become inappropriate and it is important to have agreed ground rules.

If parents have specific complaints about the school which relate to a child or particular member of staff, they should be encouraged to use the appropriate existing channels for handling complaints and conflicts.

**R 15**

**Our first meeting went very well. We were shown.. bullet points setting out the aims of our Parent Forum. We were then asked to identify what we believe to be the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Our ideas were combined and distributed to all members as the framework for our aims.**

Linda Johnson, Parent, Hermitage School, Chester-le-Street, County Durham

**As more parents began to participate there were requests for workshops to take place. The first of these, organised by the Home School Coordinator in collaboration with the Science Museum, attracted a good turnout.**

Geraldine Waterman, Headteacher, Bruce Grove Primary School, Haringey, London

## Section 5: Subsequent meetings of the Parent Council

**This section is aimed at whoever is responsible for running the Parent Council. It may also be useful for the governing body in considering its relationship with the Parent Council.**

### 5.1 Agendas and formats for future meetings

It is important not to try to cover too many different things at one meeting. Examples of the types of meetings that might be held are given below.

- **Sessions with school staff** on issues about which parents want to know more, for example a workshop for parents on the way that maths is taught led by the maths co-ordinator.
- **Sessions with invited outside bodies**, e.g. from a specialist in healthy eating (school

staff could also attend this session).

- **Task-based sessions** addressing practical issues where parents can make a contribution, e.g. ways of improving communication with new parents, redrafting the information that goes out and planning a welcome event.
- **Consultation sessions** run jointly with the school to seek the views of parents, e.g. on a new school uniform policy (this could be virtual and conducted via email or the telephone). For schools that are required to have a Parent Council these sessions will be essential.

### 5.2 What is achievable?

The success and survival of the Parent Council will depend very much on whether people see that it is making a difference. Celebrating successes publicly helps those who have contributed to see that they have made a difference and encourages other parents to become more involved.

It is likely that the Parent Council will generate many suggestions for improvement and so it is very important that expectations are managed sensibly as to what is achievable and when. This could be done in close liaison with the leadership team and governors if appropriate. The school might already have plans in place or be working on some of the issues. Others will have to wait for more urgent areas to be addressed first. Where something cannot be achieved for some reason in the short term or at all, the school and governors should feed back to Parent Council to explain this and indicate what else might be done.

Because the governing body and the leadership team make decisions on how to address issues, it is probably best if the Parent Council focuses on the outcomes rather than the detail for achieving them.

### 5.3 Evaluating the effectiveness of the Parent Council

In order to ensure that the Parent Council is working for parents and the school, it needs to evaluate to what extent it is meeting its initial aims,

what benefits and impacts it is having and what might need to be improved/made more effective. It is also worth reviewing the level of resourcing of the Parent Council. Depending on the outcome of the evaluation, the governing body may wish to review the structure or remit of the Parent Council. This could be done annually.

Resource 17 can be used as a survey to distribute to interested groups, e.g. parents who do and do not attend Parent Council meetings, governors and members of staff. Alternatively, it can be used as the basis for a discussion at a meeting for all groups, especially if completing a written form is likely to be offputting for some. Further evaluation can be carried out by re-running aspects of the information-gathering exercise carried out when the Parent Council was set up to see if there has been any changes.

**R** 2,17

**The school began this project by sending a questionnaire to parents. It is continuing to sample parents' views as a way of evaluating progress and to help inform the development of the project.**

Michelle Howard, Community Development Manager, Ladybridge High School, Bolton

**The role of the Council is evolving from problem solving to taking the initiative; for example, the Parent Council has become proactive when tackling the issue of travel to and from school; it has sourced local foods for our school catering and it has built a bank of parental skills for the benefit of the children.**

Bea Gill, Teacher, Dartington Primary School, Dartington, Devon

#### **5.4 Dealing with membership turnover**

Over time the membership of the group will change. This may be because people's children leave the school or they may feel they have done their bit. Therefore it is important to refresh the membership of the group continually. Ways to do this might include:

- engaging with new parents each year through leaflets, letters, open evenings etc. – new parents are often the most likely to get involved
- running a stall at school events
- encouraging parents who have concerns with the school to get involved with the Parent Council
- running occasional “awareness-raising” campaigns
- providing training for existing members to encourage them to take on leadership or organisational roles
- analysing which groups of parents are not attending and planning special events to attract them
- enlisting the help of existing members to “spread the word” through one-to-one contact with other parents
- responding to negative comments on evaluation forms by making changes that address their concerns.

#### **5.5 Things to bear in mind over the first year and into the future**

- It will take time for a Parent Council to get established.
- Celebrate and keep a record of your successes.
- Keep lines of communication open between everyone.
- Set challenging but achievable goals with timescales and ensure that the Parent Council and the school are committed to achieving them.
- Keep trying to reach out to new people and think about how to help them get “up-to-speed”.
- Avoid revisiting the same issues at every meeting (make sure you have a record of issues already discussed to pass on to new members).
- Prioritise issues and try to stick to those priorities.
- But be ready to respond quickly if new issues arise.
- Review and evaluate the effectiveness of the group and your progress in general.

# Part Three: Statutory Parent Councils



## Section 6: Setting up a Parent Council in a school where it is required

**This section is only for schools where a Parent Council is required by law.**

### 6.1 Circumstances in which a Parent Council is required

Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 all schools will be able to become Trust schools by forming links with external partners. If the school chooses, these external partners will be able to appoint the majority of the governing body.

To strengthen the voice of parents in Trust schools where a majority of governors are appointed by the Trust, section 34 of the Act sets out a duty for governing bodies to establish Parent Councils in order to secure parental influence in the running of the school.

The governing body of a school which falls into this category must comply with the School Governance (Parent Council) (England) Regulations 2007 (see [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/20071330.html](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/20071330.html)).

These Regulations came into force on 25 May 2007. They set out the functions and membership of the Parent Council in a Trust school where the Trust appoints the majority of governors and explain the relationship between the governing body and the Parent Council.



In schools where a Parent Council is required by law, the governing body has particular responsibilities including ensuring that:

- the membership is constituted according to the regulations
- meetings are run as the governing body determines in agreement with the Parent Council
- the governing body consults the Parent Council and has regard to advice given or views expressed by the Parent Council on certain issues.

There are also certain obligations on the governing body to provide the Parent Council with information, support and assistance.

### 6.2 Membership

In these circumstances, the parent members of the Parent Council must include:

- the parent of at least one child in each year group
- at least one parent to represent any pupil or group of pupils identified by the governing body as requiring special consideration
- a parent governor or parent governors.

The Parent Council can also appoint any person who is not a parent as long as the majority of parent members agree.

The governing body will need to consider which individual pupils or groups of pupils do require special consideration. It is important to handle the process of identifying those who see themselves belonging to a particular “group” with care. If one group is given the right to a place on the Parent Council and another group is not, there will be important issues of equity to address.

It is for the governing body to determine how the members will be appointed or elected and the term for which they should serve. The number of parent members should always outnumber the non-parent members by at least one.



# Part Four: Case studies

# Case studies

## **Grazebrook Primary School, London Borough of Hackney**

### **The membership**

The Parents' Forum is open to any parent or carer of a child in the school (including parent governors and staff members with children in the school).

Governors and staff members may attend as observers, and staff members may be invited to speak on a particular issue (e.g. SEN and Gifted and Talented) or the headteacher may volunteer to talk to the Forum about a particular issue (e.g. SATs).

### **The meetings**

Forum meetings are well run and have a constructive ethos – it is not a place to air individual issues, and everyone is clear that these should be raised with the headteacher. The meetings aim to focus on areas of improvement and suggest solutions.

### **Support from staff**

Initial resistance to the usefulness of the Forum by some members of staff has been dissipated by the open-door policy, and by the constructive nature of the discussions at the Forum.

### **Benefits**

The Parents' Forum has fostered a positive feeling in the school, recognising the wishes of many parents to be constructively involved in their children's education, and representing a school willing to take on board parents' views and wishes.

### **Accessibility**

Accessibility is an issue, as meetings take place in the evening. A crèche is provided to help parents attend. Diversity is also an issue – the meetings do not represent every section of the very diverse school community. A translator is provided for Turkish-speaking parents, who form the largest second-language group. More work needs to be done, probably by parents and school professionals, to encourage participation throughout the school community.

### **Eighteen months on**

After eighteen months, the Parents' Forum still meets regularly twice a term to discuss issues raised by parents. It has a steering group consisting entirely of voluntary parent members who meet regularly to prioritise issues, feed back on meetings with the headteacher and organise additional meetings in response to parent interest (recently maths teaching in the school).

**Octavia Reeve, Parent Governor**

## Dartington Primary School, Dartington, Devon

### **Collaboration**

The school has developed an effective collaboration with parents through its Parent Council, which emerged Autumn 2003 when the headteacher and some parents met to discuss their vision for a new school philosophy. Part of their thinking was to build a consensus to promote a collaborative educational atmosphere between children's home and school lives by developing partnerships between parents/carers and school.

### **Reasons for success**

Our success is due to many factors – a passionate parent willing to look after the admin, parental ownership of the council from the outset, prompt action on matters raised, a crèche run and paid for by the school, flexibility over venues and times of meetings, communication via suggestion boxes, wish lists, networking, newsletters and, most importantly, a prompt report from the Parent Council from each meeting detailing matters raised and progress on actions taken which is circulated to all at the school – parents, carers and staff.

### **Evolution**

The role of the Council is evolving from problem solving to taking the initiative; for example, the Parent Council has become proactive when tackling the issue of travel to and from school; it has sourced local foods for our school catering and it has built a bank of parental skills for the benefit of the children.

**Bea Gill, Teacher**

### **The beginning**

I volunteered to organise a steering group of parents. The aim of this meeting was to explore what parents' visions were for the school. We did this by having small working groups focusing on discussing key themes, e.g. education, communication, environment, facilities, relationships, then feeding back. At the end of the meeting it was proposed that we continue the dialogue on a regular basis.

### **Membership**

We chose to select parents randomly by choosing the tenth parent on the class list and inviting them to be parent representatives for one year by letter signed by the headteacher and parent chair. There have been occasions when it was difficult to get volunteers so current reps ask for volunteers.

**Caroline Murphy, Parent**

# Case studies

## **St Andrew's Church of England Primary School, Crawley, West Sussex**

The governing body decided to launch a Partnership with Parents with the aim of improving communication with parents and involving them more in school life. Governors were convinced that if the school was going to move forward in the way that they wanted there had to be a greater sense of partnership between all the adult “stakeholders”.

The School Community Forum has become a settled part of the school scenery. The quality of decision-making on some issues has been increased by the involvement of parents, and the Forum has improved communications between parents and staff.

**Derek Lawrence, Chair of Governors**



## **Bruce Grove Primary School, Haringey, London**

### **The beginning**

A member of staff was appointed to oversee the Parent Council project and liaise with parents. She worked with the Home School Coordinator and a Learning Mentor.

A Parent Council meeting was arranged, at which parent representatives and school staff involved with the project met to discuss issues of concern to parents and to explore ways forward for the Council. It was keen that this meeting should be for the benefit of parents and that they should determine the way forward. A number of issues were raised by parents e.g. the question of security within the school, the state of the children's toilets.

### **Reaching the "hard-to-reach"**

Those parents who are involved work hard to find ways to draw other parents in. They recognise that to be inclusive there is a real need to vary the time and settings for meetings, and to offer childcare facilities and transport. They have found that a good time to hold sessions for parents is at the beginning of the day, directly after parents have brought their children to school. They have also realised the need to provide interpreters at events.

The school realises that to involve parents more actively there is a need to develop a safe and relaxed environment where parents feel their views will be heard and respected and they have worked hard to achieve this.

### **Agendas for future**

As more parents began to participate there were requests for workshops to take place. The first of these, organised by the Home School Coordinator in collaboration with the Science Museum, attracted a good turnout. Further workshops were requested and organised on themes such as parenting, how parents can help their children with homework, literacy and numeracy. More workshops are being planned, for example on sex education and on nutrition.

English as an Additional Language (EAL) courses were already being held for parents from abroad and a group of Somali mothers have requested their own group.

The parents have continued to meet, and have been able to propose different activities and events. They have been supported throughout by the Home School Coordinator.

**Geraldine Waterman, Headteacher**

# Case studies

## **Beech Hill Primary School, Luton, Bedfordshire**

The aim of having class parent representatives was to try to encourage all parents to become more involved in school life. The representatives would communicate parents' views, concerns and ideas to the class teacher. The role was to consist of:

- talking to other parents/carers in the playground first thing in the morning, at home time or by telephone
- finding out parents'/carers' views about issues that affect their child's class such as bullying in the playground, school trips, lost property
- explaining and discussing these issues with the class teacher at half-termly meetings
- listening to and discussing issues that the class teacher wished to raise, for example, children learning their spellings at home or bringing a PE kit to school each week
- feeding back to parents and carers what had been said at these meetings
- attending whole school PTA Committee meetings and taking part in wider school issues.

**Trish Stubbings, Teacher**

## **Birchwood Church of England Primary School, Warrington**

The aims of our Parent Council are:

- to encourage parents to participate fully in the life and work of the school
- to be a forum for parents to express their views of the school
- to gain the support of parents and actively encourage them to participate in the process of school improvement.

Each class was asked to provide a parent member to represent their views on the Council. Parents were recruited through the weekly newsletter and by direct "lobbying" of possible parents by class teachers and the headteacher.

The membership includes governors, teachers and teaching assistants. We meet at least once every half term. During an HMI inspection of the school, the chair of the Parent Council was interviewed by the Lead Inspector who reported that relationships with parents were judged as being good.

**Liz Williams, Headteacher**

## **Nova Hreod College, Swindon (secondary school)**

### **Consultation**

We have come to trust the views of the Parent Council. Over the past three years we have consulted it before making many decisions. For example:

- the location of tutor groups on our split site
- the timing and arrangement of tutor-parent contracts
- the drafting of the annual school improvement plan
- the inclusion of a 'progress' grade in assessments that are sent home
- the application of new technologies e.g. the school website and VLE, text alert and truancy alert systems.

Members of the Parent Council feel that the meetings are of value to them, even if they are only able to attend two or three in a year, and that they are able to hear and be heard. It is surprising to all parties how the views of parents can often be in direct opposition and subsequent discussions can be quite "lively".

### **Meeting dates and topics**

Meeting dates for the following year are agreed in June and entered on the school calendar. Meeting topics are suggested by the group and planned in advance. There have been presentations to the Council from all aspects of the school (subject and cross-curricular areas). The process of designing and building the new school has proved of great interest with twice-yearly visits to the build as it progressed. There has also been a "drugs awareness" presentation hosted by the Parent Council for other parents of pupils at the school and a workshop on the use of ICT.

Two years ago the group decided that they would like the topic of homework to become a standing item on the agenda. This topic can be quite challenging at times as school protocols are sometimes seen to be working less well in practice than we might hope!

**Tom Wilkes, Community Deputy Headteacher**

# Case studies

## Ladybridge High School, Bolton

### Setting up a working group

A Parent Forum was set up in the Autumn term 2004. A number of parents, parent governors and staff were invited by the headteacher to join in the first place to get it started.

An open meeting was then held and a number of issues were raised which the school has subsequently been working hard to address.

A small group of parents and parent governors have continued to meet and discuss different aspects of the school such as building plans, ICT, and cross-age tutor groups. Some of these meetings have taken place without members of the school staff present, at the request of parents.

### Clear goals

The Forum continues to meet and those parents who have participated are keen to involve many more parents. There are plans now to ensure that two parents on the Forum can report back to the Governing Body on a regular basis. The school also plans to ask students how they would like their parents involved and to create a link to the school council.



### Evaluation

The school began this project by sending a questionnaire to parents. It is continuing to sample parents' views as a way of evaluating progress and to help inform the development of the project.

**Michelle Howard,**  
Community Development  
Manager

## Little Ilford School, London Borough of Newham (secondary school)

### Commitment from the school

The headteacher and the governing body felt that parents needed greater opportunities to be involved in the running of the school. We wanted to empower parents, enabling them to take a greater role in supporting their child's education. We recognised that we may not always fully comprehend the needs of some groups in our diverse community and that a Parent Council would provide an opportunity to give a voice to a wider cross section of the community.

### Purpose

I set up the Parent Council, and I am still planning and running the meetings with the support of another member of staff who runs the Somali Women's Group.

The Parent Council is there:

- to provide a voice for parents and to take up the issues that they dictate
- to provide a range of support to parents to empower them to be more involved in their child's education
- to be a critical friend to the school.

### Publicising the first meeting

Prior to the Parent Council's first meeting, publicity was distributed to all parents. Leaflets with reply slips were issued at events that parents attended, and letters were sent to those who replied. Posters were distributed to local shops with a range of translations. Parents who were already in contact with the school through other groups (e.g. the Somali Women's Group) were invited by translated letter.

### Subsequent meetings

We try to get a range of publicity out to invite any parent who would like to attend to come to the meetings. Before every meeting a translated letter is given to every child in the school. Anyone who attends the meeting is deemed to be part of the Parent Council and they are informed of the next meeting by letter. A number of parents agreed to help develop the Parent Council and take positions of responsibility. They were co-opted on as a group by the Parent Council.

**Katy Episcopo, Deputy Headteacher**

# Case studies

## **George Green's School, Tower Hamlets, London (secondary school)**

Parents agreed that a Parent Council would help to involve all parents in decision making. It was recognised that it was important that there was ownership of this council by the parents themselves.

One of the biggest challenges for the project as a whole is in getting information to parents. The school is working on this in a number of different ways – through the website, weekly newsletters, text-messaging, email, home visits and telephone calls. An innovative scheme whereby the school can send a text message to all parents at the same time is proving extremely valuable in improving home-school communication.

**Dawn Spiteri, Home School Liaison Officer**

## **Hermitage School, Chester-le-Street, County Durham (secondary school)**

Our first meeting went very well. We were shown these bullet points setting out the aims of our Parent Forum:

- to act as a barometer to measure progress and school wellbeing
- to act as a sounding board for future developments
- to make suggestions for future improvements
- to possibly raise money for the school.

We were then asked to identify what we believe to be the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Our ideas were combined and distributed to all members as the framework for our aims.

There was nothing too heavy – just a feeling of being able to help our school to improve and develop.

**Linda Johnson, Parent**

# Part Five: Supporting resources



**Resource 1: Checklist for setting up a Parent Council**

Step	Activity	To be carried out by	Key dates	Resources	Notes	Completed/ ongoing/ review date
	Establish the need for a PC	GB		2, 3, 4		
1.	Consultation	GB or WG		5		
2.	Agree purpose and limitations	GB				
3.	Who will chair?	GB or WG		11		
4.	Agree the membership	GB or WG		8		
5.	Consider how to reach all parents	GB or WG		6, 7, 8		
6.	Clarify roles of different bodies	GB		9		
	Ongoing support and monitoring	GB				
	Plan and publicise the first meeting	WG/Chair		6, 7, 8, 10, 11		
	First PC meeting	WG/Chair		11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16		
	Subsequent PC meetings	WG/Chair		10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16		
	Evaluate the PC	PC and GB		16, 17, 18		

**Note:** GB = governing body, PC = Parent Council, WB = working group.

## Resource 2: Parental involvement in the future

**Purpose:** This task aims to help the governing body to look at parental involvement at present and how the school would like it to change over time.

**How to use:** The diagram should be drawn as shown on the flip chart.

Start by carrying out the exercise to look at *where you are now*. Participants, working in small groups if preferred, could discuss the issues, write their views on post-its and stick them on the relevant quadrant. Common responses could then be grouped together. This would allow participants to see what others have written and share ideas. A brief discussion could take place to agree that this is an accurate picture of where you are now.

The exercise could then be repeated, looking at *where you would like to be in three years' time*. A longer discussion could then take place about how the school hopes to get from "here" to "there". This might include a discussion of how a Parent Council might contribute to this work.

### At the moment, what do parents at this school...

<b>Think?</b>	<b>Feel?</b>
<b>Say?</b>	<b>Do?</b>

### In three years' time, what do we want parents at this school to...

<b>Think?</b>	<b>Feel?</b>
<b>Say?</b>	<b>Do?</b>

**R**esource 3: Thinking about setting up a Parent Council

**Purpose:** This task aims to help the governing body to decide whether a Parent Council would be useful. Ideally it should follow on from the previous task in which the governing body has identified how it wishes to develop relationships with parents. It could also be completed by the working group charged with setting up the Parent Council. It will help the school decide whether to set up a Parent Council and what issues may need to be addressed if it is to succeed.

**How to use:** The following table should be drawn on the flip chart. It can be filled in either using post-it notes which can be grouped together under specific issues or it can be filled in as the discussion with the group progresses.

<p><b>If we were to set up a Parent Council, what would be its strengths and weaknesses and what possible opportunities and threats might it present?</b></p>	
<p><b>Strengths</b></p>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p>	<p><b>Threats</b></p>

## Resource 4: Parental participation checklist

Use this checklist to help identify what is happening in the school at the moment. The checklist can be used with any group and you may get different answers depending on who is in the group. If you do not know exactly how many parents a particular method reaches, think about how you might assess this and ask other people who might be able to help. This is about getting a general impression of how things are working in the school and what more you could be doing.

\* Estimate % of parents covered \*\* Score 1–5, where 5 is very useful

Checklist completed by (name of individual or group):

Date completed:

Type of involvement	Methods currently used	Reach*	How useful to school? **	How useful to parents? **
<b>1. Parents talking to class teachers</b> <i>Examples: parents' evenings (1:1), group meetings with all parents, drop-in sessions, email</i>				
<b>2. Parents helping in school</b> <i>Examples: coming into class to help with reading, coming on trips, getting involved in special projects</i>				
<b>3. Parents supporting their child's learning at home</b> <i>Examples: homework, reading support, trips, activities</i>				
<b>4. Social events attended by parents</b> <i>Examples: assemblies, performances, sports days, parties</i>				
<b>5. Information to parents</b> <i>Examples: newsletters, noticeboards, websites, letters to parents</i>				
<b>6. Parental involvement in decision-making</b> <i>Examples: parents on working groups, PTA, parent meetings, forum or group meetings, governor links with parents, parent surveys</i>				
<b>7. Extended schools activity</b>				

<p><b>8. What are the three most successful examples of parental involvement in the school? Why do they work well?</b></p>	
<p><b>9. Are you satisfied that all parents have the opportunity to be as fully involved in decision-making within the school as you would like?</b></p>	
<p><b>10. Is there more that could be done to reach out to certain groups of parents? If so, who are they and what do you think is stopping them from becoming involved?</b></p>	
<p><b>11. How could a Parent Council help to improve parental involvement?</b></p>	
<p><b>12. What are the three most important things the Parent Council would have to do to make a difference?</b></p>	
<p><b>13. Apart from a Parent Council, what else could the school do to help parents become more involved in their children's education and in decision-making within the school?</b></p>	

### Resource 5: Tips for an effective consultation

- Focus initially on what you are trying to achieve rather than on the detail of how you might do it.
- Whenever you consult, think about what is in it for the people you are consulting.
- Try to consult as early as possible in the decision-making process even if your own thinking is not very clear. People often complain that they are consulted too late in the day when it feels like all the decisions have already been made.
- Consultation should be thought of as an ongoing dialogue rather than a one-off exercise.
- Whatever you want to consult on it must be relevant to the people you are consulting.
- Try to avoid talking in abstract terms.
- Don't bombard people with information or over-consult.
- Questionnaires can be useful, but they need to be well designed and should never be the only way of finding out what people think.
- Rather than calling special meetings or circulating heavy written documents try going to where people already are and talking to them: other meetings, the school gate, by text and email.
- Don't underestimate the importance of personal and one-to-one conversations.
- The effectiveness of the dialogue will grow the more you go back to people and talk to them about what you are doing and continue to seek their views.
- Try to find new and different ways of engaging with people.
- Never dismiss people as "the usual suspects" or under-rate their views. The people who are most engaged should be seen as an asset. They are likely to be influential in the wider school community.
- Only a small number of people will respond directly to you but lots more will read, listen, absorb and talk amongst themselves.
- If you feel some specific group is missing out, talk to someone from that group about what you could do to reach them, or better still, enlist their help to do it for you.
- Listen to advice on what might be putting people off.
- People need to see that their input has made a difference and so you need to keep people informed as your thinking progresses.
- Where you are not able to give people what they have asked for, you need to explain why not.

Schools may find the TDA's Consultation toolkit is useful for developing more ideas for consultation.

([www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/c/consultationtoolkit.pdf](http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/c/consultationtoolkit.pdf)).



**Resource 6: Removing barriers to involvement**

Barrier	Possible solutions
What's in it for me?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make it relevant: start from where parents are – find out what they want and see how this can be addressed</li> <li>• Provide incentives</li> <li>• Explain how their involvement can help their child</li> </ul>
I am not a meetings person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make your events look different and attractive</li> <li>• Provide refreshments</li> <li>• Use plain language not technical terms</li> <li>• Think about how you set up the room</li> <li>• Use different approaches such as small group work</li> </ul>
Meetings take place at times when I cannot come to school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vary the times of meetings</li> <li>• Provide quality childcare</li> <li>• Provide refreshments</li> </ul>
These things never start on time and they always last for hours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep meetings short and efficient – everybody values their time</li> </ul>
It is just a talking-shop – nothing will come of it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that you identify some “quick wins” as well as longer term goals, that you achieve them and that parents are given credit for their input</li> <li>• Make sure that the process of sharing information with the school is clear, and that everyone understands it.</li> </ul>
I have spent years going to meetings and no-one ever seems to appreciate my input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say thank you and keep saying thank you</li> </ul>
I only have a limited amount of time to commit and I am worried about being pressurised in to doing more than I am comfortable with.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't have too many meetings</li> <li>• Don't allow too many working groups to evolve</li> </ul>
I never liked school and I am not comfortable there.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider holding meetings outside the school premises</li> </ul>
I don't want to have to sit there with a load of school teachers telling me what to do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure people understand that the Parent Council is run by parents for parents</li> <li>• If staff attend, make sure it is by invitation and that they do not dominate the meeting</li> </ul>
English is not my first language. I will not understand what is going on and I will not be able to contribute to discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicise meetings and outcomes in the main languages of the school</li> <li>• Provide an interpreter where necessary</li> </ul>
It's not acceptable in my culture for me to be involved in something like this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to find someone in the school community who is from the same culture who can act a bridge and seek out the views of minority ethnic groups and report them back to the Parent Council</li> </ul>
I went to one meeting but I didn't like it and I am not going back.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep a record of who attends meetings and if they do not come again, try to find out why.</li> <li>• Ask those who attend to fill in an evaluation form after every meeting so that you are aware of concerns and can address them</li> </ul>
I don't want to commit myself to lots of meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make it clear that attendance is voluntary</li> </ul>

## Resource 7: Publicity checklist

### Publicising meetings

Use as many different ways as you can to spread information about meetings, as this will attract the maximum number of parents. These could include:

- posters around the school or in the wider community where parents will see them
- letters/emails to parents
- newsletters
- website
- text messages
- asking teachers to mention it when meeting parents
- enlisting parents to talk to other parents
- informing other parent groups such as Parent Teacher Association
- encouraging word of mouth invitations from parent to parent.

### Publicising the work of the Parent Council

For the Parent Council to continue to attract parents to meetings and keep in touch with those who do not attend meetings, it is vital that parents are aware of its work and its successes. The Parent Council will therefore need to promote its work widely and develop innovative ways of keeping in touch with parents. These could include:

- posters and information around the school where parents will see them
- regular reports in school newsletters, magazines etc.
- having a presence, e.g. a stall, at other school events such as parents' evenings, events for parents of new pupils etc.
- making sure there are references to the Parent Council and contact details in parent leaflets and on websites
- sending people to talk to other parents' groups
- distributing a brief annual summary of Parent Council activities to all parents
- regular updates on the website
- setting up email or internet-based groups or forums
- reports in local press
- references to Parent Council contributions to other work in the school
- making sure other schools and the Local Authority knows what the Parent Council is doing
- developing "telephone trees" within classes, where each parent will phone or talk to two or three other parents to pass on information or seek views.



## **Resource 8: Sample publicity materials**

### **Sample poster or flyer for a first meeting**

#### **CALLING ALL GREEN VALE PARENTS**

Want to find out more about what goes on in school?

Want to get together with other parents?

Want to talk about the things that matter to you?

Come along and have your say at the first meeting of the

Parents' Forum

Junior Hall

Wednesday 7 December

6.30 to 8pm

Come and help us set up a new group run by parents for parents

Informal chat, group discussion, refreshments, crèche, translator

### **Sample advertisement for inclusion in school newsletters/websites etc.**

#### **Crandon Park Parents' Council – Positively Empowering Parents**

***As a Crandon Park parent, what do you want this Christmas?***

- A revamp of the playgrounds?***
- Improved communications between the school and parents?***
- More information on what your child is doing in class and how you can support them?***

If these are top of your wish list, you are not alone. A recent Parents' Council meeting showed these were the most pressing issues for parents. That's why we have made them the topics for the next PC meeting. In this meeting you'll hear:

- an update from the school on plans for the playgrounds, and how we as parents can help make it a reality
- proposals for re-introducing class reps to improve school/parent communications
- about the infant reading programme started last year – and how parent's can help out with this structured and successful programme.

**Want to know more? Come along on Wed 29 November, 6.30– 8.00pm, infant hall. Refreshments and crèche provided.**

**Remember, the Parents' Council is your line of communication with the school.**

## Sample advertisement for inclusion in school newsletters/websites etc.

### PARENTS' FORUM THEY'RE COUNTING ON US!

**Thursday 22nd March**

**3:45–4:30**

#### **Crèche and refreshments provided.**

As parents and carers we all want to support our children's learning, but it can be hard to help when without understanding how they learn at school. The next Parents' Forum meeting is a chance to bridge this gap with a special presentation by Maths Coordinator **Mr Syme** on the teaching of maths and numeracy in the school. Don't miss this opportunity to hear how children in Key Stages 1 and 2 learn maths and numeracy and what you can do to support your child at home.

## Sample letter approaching a parent to act as a class rep on the Parent Council

Dear Mrs Decima

I am writing to ask whether you would be interested in helping the school by agreeing to become a "class rep" for your child's class (7T) on our new Parent Council. I am writing to the parents of the tenth child in each class in order to try to get a wide range of different parents involved.

The governing body has decided to set up a Parent Council to help the school find out more about what it is like being a parent at Framlington School and to give parents a chance to meet up together and talk about the things that matter to them.

We are hoping to hold around two meetings a term. Meetings will last about an hour and a half. It would help if you could talk to other parents in Year 7 from time to time to find out what they think. The Parent Council will help you to do this. There might also be a small amount of work helping to arrange meetings but this will be shared with all the other reps.

We have still to agree what time of day the Parent Council will meet. If you are interested we will try to arrange our meetings at a time that will suit you.

Please let me know if you are interested. If you want to know more about what is involved, please call me for a chat.

With best wishes

Miss Havi Sham  
Deputy Headteacher  
Framlington School

## Sample letter to all parents

Dear Parent

We are writing to invite you to join a new group in the school which is being set up to help parents get more involved in the school. The Knowley Fox Primary Parents' Council will be meeting for the first time on Thursday 19 May at 4pm in the Hall.

The governing body has decided to set up the Parents' Council to:

- give you a voice in the school and find out what you think
- help you get more involved in the school
- help you to help your child do well at school
- help the governing body find out what you are thinking about the school and what changes and improvements you would like to see.

The group is being led by parents, for parents and all parents are welcome to come along. Please try to come and encourage other parents to come too. There will be a crèche and refreshments and a Turkish translator will be present.

Hope you can come

Mary Keen  
Headteacher

George Columbo  
Chair of Governors

## Resource 9: Different bodies, different roles

Body	Role
Governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main strategic decision-making body for the school</li> <li>• Financial and legal management of the school</li> <li>• Appoints the headteacher</li> <li>• Sets the strategic direction of the school</li> <li>• Sets targets and monitors progress</li> <li>• Responsible for taking account of parents' views</li> </ul>
Parent Teacher Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Bringing parents and staff together socially</li> <li>• Organising social events</li> <li>• Enabling parents and carers to get involved in the life of the school</li> <li>• An opportunity for personal development</li> <li>• Reaching out to other parents</li> </ul>
Parent Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A route through which parents as a group advise the governing body of their views</li> <li>• A route for the governing body to consult parents as a group</li> <li>• Bringing parents together socially</li> <li>• Enabling parents to share views and ideas</li> <li>• Providing support to parents</li> <li>• Helping parents to support their child</li> <li>• Enabling parents to get involved in the life of the school</li> <li>• An opportunity for personal development</li> <li>• Reaching out to other parents</li> </ul>
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A route through which pupils' views are represented to the school/governing body</li> <li>• A route for the school/governing body to consult pupils</li> </ul>

### Some questions

- How does the Parent Council report to the governing body?
- How does the governing body keep the Parent Council informed?
- How does the Parent Council report to the governing body?
- Are there any "linking" people (e.g. is there a parent governor on the Parent Council, a representative of the Parent Council on the governing body etc.).
- Are you clear about the difference between the issues the PTA will deal with and the issues the Parent Council will deal with?
- Are there any formal links between the PTA and the Parent Council?
- How does the Parent Council relate to the school council? How do they share ideas, views and information?
- Are there opportunities for joint events or joint working on certain issues between different school bodies?
- Can you draw a diagram that clearly shows how the various bodies relate to each other?

## Resource 10: Practical arrangements checklist

- The **meeting date and time** (start and finish) should be agreed several weeks in advance to allow time for publicity. Let people know what the meeting will be about, whether there will be a crèche, refreshments etc.
- Plan the **agenda** in advance and think through the timings of items, tasks etc.
- Make sure **a room is booked** and the relevant people know that the meeting is taking place (caretaker etc.).
- If it has been agreed that the Parent Council membership will not include people who are not parents, decide if you want to **invite anyone else** to attend this meeting as a guest/contributor/observer such as the headteacher, Chair of Governors, other relevant members of staff. Make sure they get plenty of notice. Decide if you want that person to be there for some or all of the meeting and let them know. If you have decided to offer childcare, book a crèche and find an appropriate space.
- If you have decided to provide **interpreters**, book them well in advance and explain the nature of the meeting.
- Organise **refreshments** if possible and let people know that you are doing so.
- Do you want to give people **name badges/**stickers to write their names on?
- Think how you will **arrange the furniture**. Make sure that latecomers will arrive behind the group rather than at the front of the room. A horseshoe or circle rather than rows of seats is less intimidating and people are more likely to feel involved. Tables with chairs will encourage people to sit in small groups in which they can work.
- Provide **paper and pencils** plus Post-it notes if needed for tasks.
- Think carefully about any presentations. Do you want a formal **presentation** or would it be better to have an informal discussion? If you do want a presentation, keep it very short. The most important talking will be done by the parents.
- Will you need any **equipment** (e.g. overhead projector and screen)? Make it clear to whoever is doing the presentation how long you expect them to speak and how long will be given for questions and answers.
- Do you want any **handouts**? If so, keep them short and to the point.
- How will you keep a **record of the meeting**? Who will ensure that it is circulated/publicised? Who apart from those at the meeting need to be sent copies?
- A **flip chart** may be useful to record conversations/decisions. Ask someone to be a **scribe** and write up people's view and ideas.
- How will you **record who is there**? Consider also recording the year group their child is in.
- Do you want to collect **contact details** for future reference?
- Consider how the meeting can be **evaluated**.
- Consider taking some **photographs** of the event for newsletters, website etc. Remember to get permission from all involved before taking or using photographs.
- Set a **date and time for the next meeting** (and subsequent ones if possible) early on in the meeting so people who might leave early have it.
- **Thank everyone** for their input and encourage them to attend the next meeting.
- **Follow up action points** before the next meeting.

## Resource 11: Chair's meeting checklist

Before the meeting, go through the *Resource 10: Practical arrangements checklist* and make sure you have worked out what you want to achieve during the meeting. Plan the timings for each item.

At the beginning of the meeting:

- welcome everybody and introduce any guests
- remind everyone of practical arrangements such as toilets, fire exits etc.
- encourage people to help themselves to refreshments or tell them when they can do so
- explain the purpose of the meeting and the Parent Council if necessary
- clarify the ground rules (assume that for some people this will be their first meeting).

During the meeting:

- start by reporting on any actions taken following the previous meeting (refer to the meeting record form for the previous meeting)
- keep to timescales and make sure other people do
- stay in charge of who speaks next and for how long
- make sure people observe the agreed ground rules
- keep the discussion focussed
- do not allow inappropriate behaviour and if necessary remind people of other routes such as complaints procedures etc.
- keep your own views to yourself
- repeat people's comments if you think they have not been heard or understood or ask for clarification

- sum up each discussion in terms of what has been discussed and what has been agreed and record who will take any agreed actions forward and how progress will be reported back.

At the end of the meeting:

- tell people what will happen to the record of the meeting
- agree a date and time for the next meeting if possible and if not possible let people know how they will be kept informed
- thank people for their input
- ask people to complete evaluation sheets if needed
- seek help in clearing up and for future meetings if necessary
- ensure room is cleared before leaving.





## Resource 13: Breaking the ice

**These exercises are designed to be used at the beginning of meetings of the Parent Council to help people relax and to get them talking to each other.**

### 1. Paired interviews

Ask everyone to work in pairs ideally with someone they don't already know. Ask them to introduce themselves to each other and find out their first name and something amazing that they have done. Allow about five minutes. Go around the room and ask each person to introduce their neighbour by name and with one interesting fact about them.

### 2. Family places

Ask everyone to break into groups depending on whether they were first born, second born, in the middle of their family or the youngest. Tell each group where to sit/stand. Ask each group to spend around ten minutes discussing how they think their position in the family has affected the way they are.

### 3. Swimming pool antics

Ask everyone to imagine that they have just come out of the changing room at a swimming pool. Would they stand on the edge and watch the others for a while, dive in elegantly, bomb dive into the pool? What stroke would they do? Would they head for the high board or the hot-tub?

### 4. Alliterative introductions

Ask each person to find out the name of the person on their left. Start with one person introducing themselves and their neighbour: "I am Lively Linda and this is Generous George". George will then introduce himself and the person on his left: "I am Generous George and this is Devilish Dawn."

### 5. Fact or fiction

Ask each person to write three statements about themselves, two of which are true and one of which is false. The statements go into a "hat" and each attendee draws one out and has to work out who they are about and which statement is made up.



## **R**esource 14: Agreeing the ground rules

**Purpose:** This task could be completed by the Parent Council at its first meeting. The aim is to develop an agreed set of ground rules for all meetings. Participants should be reminded of the purpose and limitations of the Parent Council before they begin (see Section 3.2, Agreeing the purpose of the Parent Council). Make sure new members not involved from the start are aware of the ground rules that have been agreed.

**How to use:** Participants should work in small groups and complete the handout or copy this onto a larger sheet. The positive messages should then be collected from each group and then collated on a flip chart and turned into a series of short clear messages.

What sorts of behaviour might stop us achieving our goals or put us off coming to meetings?	What positive things can we do to avoid these problems?

Suggestions for the sorts of ground rules you might agree are provided.

## **R**esource 15: Sample ground rules

- Support and be guided by the Chair of the meeting
- Respect other people's opinions and ideas
- Have one person speaking at a time
- Take turns
- Indicate a wish to speak by raising hand
- Allow the Chair to decide who speaks next
- Limit the length of individual contributions
- Listen to other people's contributions
- Don't immediately jump on people with whom you disagree
- Keep to time
- Keep to the agreed agenda
- Contribute to discussion in small groups but avoid splinter groups
- Respect confidentiality and be cautious about naming individual pupils or teachers and discussing individual instances/ events inappropriately
- Concentrate on positive outcomes for the Parent Council that will be of benefit to the school, its pupils, staff and parents/carers.

These ground rules can be added to or changed as agreed by the Parent Council. Ideas on how to develop the ground rules with the group are provided.

**R** 14





**R**esource 17: Evaluating the Parent Council

**Purpose:** To help those seeking to evaluate the Parent Council.

**How to use:** This task can be carried out by the various stakeholders (Parent Council, any other parent group, the governing body, staff) and the questions adapted for each group. Alternatively it may be possible for a joint meeting to be held (perhaps with key stakeholders invited to attend a Parent Council meeting) so that stakeholders can work together and share views. This task need not be carried out in writing.

**Please tick who this response is from:**

- A parent who attends PC meetings regularly or fairly regularly**
- A parent who does not/cannot attend PC meetings**
- A governor**
- A member of staff**
- A mixed group of the above**

How do I as an individual/we as individuals benefit from the existence of the Parent Council?	
How do I/we think parents in general benefit from then existence of the Parent Council?	
How do I/we think the school benefits from the existence of the Parent Council?	
How have things changed since the Parent Council was set up?	
Does the Parent Council discuss the right issues? If not, what else could it discuss?	
Is the Parent Council helping the school to achieve its objectives?	
What could be done to make the Parent Council more effective?	

**R**esource 18: Meeting evaluation form

**Name of Group** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Meeting** \_\_\_\_\_

How many meetings of the Parent Council have you attended including this one?

Were you clear about the purpose of this meeting?

Did you get what you wanted/expected out of this meeting?

Were you able to have your say at this meeting?

Will you be coming to the next meeting?

Would you recommend to others that they come to the next meeting?

Would you be willing to help with the planning and or running of future meetings?

Do you have any further comments?

Contact details

# Further help and guidance

## Legislation

Education and Inspection Act 2006

[www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/20060040.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/20060040.htm)

The School Governance (Parent Council (England) Regulations 2007)

[www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/20071330.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/20071330.htm)

## Useful links

[www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

[www.governornet.co.uk](http://www.governornet.co.uk)

[www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/managingchange/tools.aspx](http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/managingchange/tools.aspx)

[www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentsaspartnersinlearning/toolkit/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentsaspartnersinlearning/toolkit/index.asp)

## Reference materials

Setting up Parent Councils Project – Evaluation Report (CCCI), London South Bank University, 2005  
(available from [www.hse.org.uk/pwp/publications.html](http://www.hse.org.uk/pwp/publications.html))

Setting up Parent Councils Project – Case Studies of Project Schools, Human Scale Education, 2005  
(available from [www.hse.org.uk/pwp/publications.html](http://www.hse.org.uk/pwp/publications.html))

Every Parent Matters, DCSF, 2007

(available from [www.teachernet.gov.uk/everyparentmatters](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/everyparentmatters))

Materials for schools: Involving Parents, Raising Achievement, Professor John Bastiani / Sheila White, DCSF, 2003,  
ref. PICE/IPRA (available from [www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_doc/5477/IPRA\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/5477/IPRA_booklet.pdf))

Reading Connects Family Engagement Toolkit, 2007

(available from [www.literacytrust.org.uk/readingconnects/familytoolkit.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/readingconnects/familytoolkit.html))

## Acknowledgements

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