



Validated Self Evaluation

Final report from theme group

February 2012

How well are parents involved in the life and work of the school

Section 1 – Scope and Remit of the Working Group

The Theme Group was set the following scope and remit by the Education and Lifelong Learning Senior Management Team:-

- i. Review the local implementation of the Parental Involvement Act
- ii. Evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies, procedures and practices that support parental engagement
- iii. Assess the level of influence parents have in decision making in and around the school
- iv. Look at how individually parents engage with the school and how that contributes to pupil experiences
- v. Assess how well schools deal with parental complaint/conflict identifying good practice and areas for improvement
- vi. Identify good practice including good examples that successfully support engagement with parents that are defined as hard to engage.
- vii. Investigate other models out with Scottish Borders and explore the impact they have had on pupils' experience.
- viii. Identify potential barriers to effective parental engagement
- ix. Identify areas for improvement/development

Section 2 – Approaches Taken

The Theme Group decided to take the following approaches to its work:-

- Analyse written evidence from the initial reading materials, School Improvement Plans, Standards and Quality Reports, HMIE reports from the last two years, School Review materials, and Parent Council sample minutes
- Conduct interviews with a range of personnel including the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, Community Learning and Development staff, school staff, ICS staff and other senior staff from the Authority
- Undertake visits to see parental involvement in some individual schools
- Survey all schools about their implementation of the Council's Parental Involvement Policy
- Follow up questions to all schools
- Meet with parent council members
- Meet with parents through a series of focus groups across the region
- Carry out an online questionnaire with parents during January 2012

All of the information obtained was then analysed by the group to identify strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations.

Section 3 – Specific Activities Undertaken

Initially the group examined the reading materials provided:

Parental Involvement Act
SBC parental involvement policy
Background information on number of parent forums and councils in authority
Record of parent council chairs forums
Sample minutes/reports from parent councils
Parental complaint procedures
Overview of complaints in last academic year

The group established that evidence from a wider range of parents and schools was required. Standards and Quality reports, School Improvement Plans, HMLe reports from the last two year, and School review findings for the last two years were requested centrally and a survey was sent to all schools to ascertain their progress in implementing SBC's Parental Involvement Policy.

Staff and parents were very accommodating and agreed to host / attend meetings arranged in three different venues across the authority with varying numbers attending. In each area (Galashiels, Peebles and Eyemouth) meetings for parents were held in the afternoon and evening. In addition to these 3 Parent Council members from different schools met together in Earlston. Members of the Theme Group also visited schools where good practice in parental involvement was evidenced.

Following the first week, further evidence gathering was required and additional meetings were arranged across the authority in January to ensure parents from all areas had the opportunity to meet with theme group members. In addition, an online questionnaire was carried out during January which had a high response rate. Parent Councils were also asked to provide copies of recent minutes which were analysed to identify the kinds of topics discussed at their meetings.

The group met at the start of February to consider all of the evidence which had been gathered and to agree on the findings.

Section 4 – Findings

The Theme Group's findings are:-

4.1 Strengths

- The SBC Parental Involvement Policy sets out clear expectations of how the Parental Involvement Act is to be implemented. This was developed in partnership with parents.
- The objectives for parents arising from implementation of this policy are very clear. They are:
 - “We want parents to
 - Be fully informed about their child's education and learning
 - Feel welcomed and involved in the life of their child's school

- Be encouraged to express their views on their child's education and school, and
 - Have confidence that their views will be listened to"
- The Theme Group's survey on the implementation of the Parental Involvement Policy in schools showed that most schools who responded:
 - Support children and families (including LAAC, separated families) well through a flexible approach
 - Provide a range of general information to parents including what the children are learning and how well they are progressing; celebration of successes; newsletters; information on exam timetabling; study skills; expectations of pupil behaviour and attendance; information about inspections and reviews
 - Involve Parent Councils in fundraising and some policy development
- HMle identified parental involvement as a strength in most schools (82%) inspected over the past two years, including parental complaints which were dealt with well.
- Examples of very good practice of parental involvement were found in the few schools which were visited.
- Most parents identified parents' evenings, with an opportunity to speak to their child's teacher, as useful in helping support their child's learning.
- The majority of parents identified the following information as useful in helping support their child's learning:
 - Reports
 - Written information including letters about trips / events
 - School events, including sports days / concerts
- Where it was available, parents identified the opportunity to observe their child in class, work alongside their child or sample lessons which their child would be undertaking as very useful in helping support their child's learning.
- Increasingly schools are trying to diversify the ways in which they provide information to parents, and there is evidence that a few schools are developing innovative communication methods.
- The Education Authority consults with parents on a range of issues including school uniform, holidays, admission policy, out of school care, 33-period week and composite classes, and all views submitted are taken into account before policies are finalised. Feedback on all consultations is made available.
- All schools in Scottish Borders have mechanisms to allow parents to have a voice. Almost all schools have a Parent Council as part of the process. Most (82%) of HMle reports since 2009 state that the Parent Council is supportive of the school.
- The Authority provides very good support and specific training opportunities for volunteer Parent Council members. The Education Authority employs a Parental Involvement Officer who provides proactive and structured support and development opportunities for Parent Councils.

- There are at least three opportunities each year for representatives of all Parent Councils to meet with SMT, Director and Education Executive Member.
- There are clear and effective communication channels from local Parent Councils in Scottish Borders to the National Parent Forum via the regional Parent Council Forum. These allow Parent Councils to raise issues to a national level and to be involved and to influence national discussions.
- Almost all schools provide an effective complaints system.
- All parental complaints directed to the Education Authority are acknowledged and dealt with following the procedures outlined in the SBC complaints policy.

4.2 Areas for Improvement

- Develop a shared understanding of what parental involvement is, with all stakeholders.
- Develop further opportunities for parents to be engaged in their child's learning including sharing good practice, identifying and addressing barriers and improving communications across all schools.
- Develop further creative ways that will allow all parents to access information and to contribute to the life and work of the school.
- Develop reporting structures for pupils' progress in partnership with parents in line with the guidance in Building the Curriculum 5 suite.
- Ensure the involvement of parents in the process of school improvement planning, including identifying priorities, creating action plans and reviewing progress, is consistent across the Authority.
- Extend opportunities for the Parent Councils to share good practice of parental involvement with others.
- Consider ways to further improve wider Parent Council engagement with the Education Authority.
- Develop a more robust approach to the acknowledgement and recording of complaints in schools in line with the new Complaints Procedure being introduced across Scottish Borders Council.

Section 5 - Recommendations

- The Education Authority should work with schools to improve parent participation in all aspects of school life.
- Schools should include information on all aspects of parental involvement in their Standards and Quality report.

- The Education Authority should disseminate good practice of parental involvement in all aspects of school life from across Scottish Borders
- The Education Authority will, where possible, meet national timescales for consultations with parents and Parent Councils.
- The Education Authority should support schools to maximise the use of technologies including social media to improve and extend communication to and from parents.
- The Education Authority should ensure appropriate training and development opportunities are made available to schools to increase their ability in handling complaints.