



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Roinn an Fhoghlaim

Department of Education

Ag Amas air Adhartas - Aiming for Advancement

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

March 2008

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COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Parental Involvement Strategy

Strategy Leader: Head of Service

1. Rationale

There is considerable agreement that parental involvement in education has a positive influence on children's learning and that parents can play a pivotal role in the education of their children. Research has shown that when parents are effectively involved in their child's education, children do better, not only in terms of attainment, but also better attendance, improved behaviour and better attitudes to learning. Effective parental involvement provides teachers with a clearer understanding of children's home circumstances and personal achievements and increases parental understanding of what children are learning, how well they are achieving and how they can support learning in the home environment. The better the information that schools provide to parents, the more parents can support their children's learning and the school.

Information that parents share with the school can assist teachers in adapting their teaching to suit the learning styles of pupils and take account of any particular issues that may exist. Clear channels of communication will also ensure that the school and parents can respond quickly and effectively to emerging issues and concerns. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES) recognises, values and actively supports the central role of parents in the education of their children both at home and at school. CnES will endeavour to provide opportunities for parents, schools, young people, agencies, communities and the Comhairle to work together to improve the lives of children and young people.

2. National Context

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 was introduced by the Scottish Executive in June 2006. The Act places duties on local authorities to:

- involve parents in their own child's education and that provided by a school to its pupils generally.
- give advice and information to parents in respect of their own child.
- promote the establishment of parent councils in schools and support their operation.
- establish a complaints procedure for their duties under the Act.

This strategy takes account of and endorses the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 and should be seen within the broad context of all legislation and policies which support children and families. In particular, the Act builds on the:

- Education (Scotland) Act 1980.
- Standards in Scotland's Schools etc (Scotland) Act 2000.
- Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.
- Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

Furthermore, the Curriculum for Excellence being developed for Scottish schools means that schools and parents will need to work together in partnership to help all children become:

- Successful learners.
- Confident individuals.
- Responsible citizens.
- Effective contributors.

3. Aims of the Strategy

- to engage parents more meaningfully in the education of their children and in the wider school community.
- to promote the involvement of all parents in the education provided by the school for their own child and for pupils generally at their child's school.
- to promote and share good practice.
- to ensure that school policies, practices and arrangements for parental involvement reflect the requirements of The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

Throughout this document, the term 'schools' refers to schools and nurseries. In terms of pre-school education, the Act legislates for the involvement of children in nursery classes only. However, CnES will encourage all pre-school establishments to form a parent council or similar body where practicable.

4. Origins of Policy/Strategy

The Act requires each education authority to prepare a strategy document setting out its policies for parental involvement. This strategy has been developed by a working group comprising of parents and representatives from schools and the Department of Education. Pupils were consulted by means of a questionnaire.

5. Who should implement this Strategy?

All CnES staff should take note of and implement this strategy as appropriate. Schools should ensure that the School Improvement Plan and the School Parental Involvement Policy take account of the strategy. The Department of Education will have arrangements in place which allow parents to access its strategy through the school, its parent council or the Comhairle website. All parents will therefore be encouraged to take note of this strategy and to work within its framework. There are many different ways in which parents could be, and want to be, involved in their child's education. Therefore, individual schools may legitimately develop different procedural arrangements but should nevertheless operate within the framework of this strategy. Other partner agencies should also be made aware of the strategy and operate within its framework.

6. Parental Involvement

The term 'parent(s)' is used throughout the document to mean those people who are the primary carers of children and could include grandparents, foster carers and others who may be in loco parentis including those who have responsibility for caring for Looked After/Looked After and Accommodated Children. It also refers to parents who are not resident with the child. It is recognised that the role of parents is often carried out by carers, grandparents and other significant adults in children's lives and, wherever possible, they should be included in all parental involvement activities. Parental involvement also changes at different stages of a child's education with closer home and school interaction more common during early years and primary school years. Parental involvement also varies for children with different educational needs, in particular, there are, for example, specific rights for involvement for parents of children with designated additional support needs. The term "parental involvement" is therefore applied in this document with an understanding of this diversity of experiences, needs and practices.

7. Parent Entitlement

The range and type of information requested by parents will change as their child progresses through different stages of education. The following outlines broadly what parents are entitled to:

- Information about education, schools and pre-school establishments in the area so that, subject to places being available, they can exercise an informed choice of schools and pre-school establishments for their children. The Department of Education will advise parents (via a leaflet) of all pre-school providers in the Western Isles and will encourage parents to enrol their child in one of them. The expectation will be that both the receiving school and parent council of that school will ensure effective contact is made with parents of pre-school children and also with all providers of early years nursery education in the area. The Department of Education will also advise parents of the normal receiving school for their child, usually designated in relation to his/her home address. However, parents have the right to ask for a place in any school managed by the Comhairle. For geographical reasons, CnES schools do not attract placing requests from outwith the authority. However, CnES does fund the placement of pupils in special schools on the mainland. Appropriate arrangements are in place for the pupils' parents to receive the advice and information they need to be involved with and to support their child's education.
- Information on the school's systems, procedures and policies. These should be written in a booklet, handbook or prospectus eg Admissions Policy, Behaviour Management, Curriculum, Health and Safety, Bullying, the arrival and departure of children etc.
- Information on their child's progress in school.
- A range of methods of communication including written, verbal and electronic to ensure accessibility for all groups. Strategies for communicating with parents are detailed elsewhere.
- Information on opportunities to be involved in their own child's education, the wider life of the school and to work in partnership with the school.
- Information on opportunities for involvement in groups which represent the parent community eg Parent Council, Working Groups, Community Groups.
- Information on equal opportunities for all parents.
- Information on the systems for registering queries, complaints or suggestions.
- Consultation on the School Development Plan.

8. Promoting Parental Involvement

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 recognises a number of ways that parents can be involved in supporting their child's learning and education. There are 3 key areas of parental involvement.

- Involvement in the child's learning.
- Involvement in the child's education.
- Parent representation.

Involvement in Children's Learning and Education

The Act recognises that parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to develop their child's learning at home, in the community and in the school. Schools should help families create a home environment that supports learning by providing them with information about such issues as:

- children's health.
- nutrition.
- discipline.
- adolescents' needs.
- parenting approaches.

At the same time, schools should seek to understand and incorporate aspects of their pupil's life into what is taught in the classroom. Most parental participation in children's education occurs in the home. Parents should be encouraged to:

- ensure that their children are well looked after and protected and that they know right from wrong.
- play, read and talk with their children and in general take an interest in what is happening at school.
- provide space and time in the home for children to do homework.
- ensure that their children work hard and behave well.
- ensure that their children attend school regularly and are punctual.
- take a close interest in reports on their children's performance.

Schools should therefore capitalise upon what parents are already doing by helping them to assist and interact with the children on home learning activities that reinforce what is being taught in school. In general, bearing in mind that what works at school will not always work at home, schools should nevertheless:

- aim to increase parents' understanding of the curriculum and the skills their children need to develop at each stage in their schooling. For example, parents could be told what their children will be learning each term. Suggestions could be given of what work could be done at home to reinforce what is taught in school. Schools should be aware of where parents may have difficulty, for example with literacy and numeracy, where parents have children in Gaidhlig medium education yet do not speak Gaelic themselves, where parents don't speak Gaelic or English. Parents should be made aware of training opportunities, e.g., Gaelic courses for parents, courses at adult learning centres, useful websites etc.
- inform parents in as simple a manner as possible of their assessment and tracking systems so that parents can make decisions that are in their children's best interests.
- work with parents to ensure that pupils set targets, prepare for transitions (Pre-school – Primary, P7 – S1, S2 – S3) and make appropriate course selections.
- give specific information to parents on their child's education and progress.
- design interactive work that taps parents' support skills and involves them in the learning processes.
- raise awareness of staff in relation to the importance of parental involvement at all stages of education.

Schools should have a clear policy in place for supporting parents with their own child's education and learning. It is important that the needs of all parents are taken into account.

The more frequent and positive the messages parents receive from teachers the more involved they are likely to become in their children's education, and it is important that parents should be contacted for positive as well as negative reasons. Schools should employ a variety of techniques for communicating with parents and encouraging parents to communicate with the school:

- phone calls and text messaging.
- letters and newsletters.
- individual letters to parents when the need arises.
- information on tape if the parents have severe difficulties in literacy or communication.
- homework diaries.
- target booklets.
- sticker charts.
- questionnaires/surveys.
- face to face informal contact.
- e-mails and websites.
- GroupCall.
- parent information evenings and parent workshops.
- careers conventions.
- report cards.

In their communication with parents, the school should:

- involve the parent council in monitoring communications to ensure they are reader friendly and where possible, free of professional jargon.
- be sensitive to the known home and family circumstances of a parent and their children and exercise caution when those circumstances are not known e.g. the parent's first language and culture are major considerations.
- be aware of the different needs of parents e.g. mobile families, those whose first language is not English or Gaelic, foster parents or grandparents, other relatives who may be looking after the children.
- be aware of the needs of looked after children and those with additional support needs.
- be aware of the needs of non-resident parents.
- develop strategies for the involvement of fathers in their child's education. This would include non-resident fathers and other men who may have the father role. They should regularly receive news about their child, information about their progress and what's happening at school. There are many strategies available to convince fathers that they are welcome, appreciated and trusted and have much to offer to their children and the school. e.g.
 - Storysacks work with men and boys.
 - Using sport as a link.
 - Cycling Proficiency.
 - Discos.
 - Eco Schools Committee.
 - HPS Committee.
 - Enterprise Education.
 - Dads into school days.
 - Seminars and workshops which can offer fathers an opportunity to come in and talk to each other about the things they could do to help the children, involvement in after school clubs (e.g. art, technology, music etc)
- encourage apprehensive parents to visit the school and to contribute as much as possible to their child's education.
- use electronic communication if parents indicate this is what they would like.
- use bilingual support staff or interpreters/translators if necessary.
- provide information on tape if the parents have severe difficulties in literacy or communication.
- provide information on other individuals and agencies that can support parents/carers e.g. Inclusion staff, home link worker, social workers, Community Education Workers, Health Board Personnel.
- provide information in places other than in schools. (e.g. libraries, community centres etc).

More information on communicating with parents is also available from the Parentzone website

(www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk) and sections 3 – 5 of Parents as Partners toolkit.

Strategy to maximise liaison between the Department of Education and parents

It is likely that most parents will see school staff as their principal point of contact for discussion about their children's education. However, parents should also be encouraged to see centrally based staff as an important part of the team who support the education of the individual child. From the Department of Education's point of view, there is a commitment to liaising with parents in the following ways to ensure access by all:

- Comhairle nan Eilean website – basic information on schools.
- Meetings with parent councils twice a year.
- Newsletters.
- Special conferences.
- Provision of certain authority wide information and guidance for parents. (e.g. of all P7 pupils/entry to school etc)
- Promoting Glow, the national schools' intranet, which will have pages specifically targeted to parents.
- Promoting the Storlann websites (for parents of children in Gaelic medium education).
- Support for parents from home – link officer and early years staff.
- Support for individual schools from quality improvement officers for specific parents' events.
- Support from Inclusion staff.
- Support of the educational psychology service, which provides information, advice and guidance on child development and on individual children's needs.
- In addition, the Department of Education wishes, by promotion of this strategy, to encourage parents to bring forward at any time new ideas for more effective partnership working.

The Department of Education, in association with the schools, encourages parents to:

- develop links with their school(s).
- attend parents meetings regularly and respond to advice.
- support school functions and activities.
- be active members of the parent forum and parent council.
- encourage and monitor homework.
- discuss school work in the home and provide space and time in the home for children to do homework.
- encourage their children's participation in study support and similar schemes.
- support the school's positive behaviour policy and ensure that their children work hard and behave well.

Formal Parent Representation

The Act ensures that all parents have an opportunity to have a formal say on policy matters affecting the education of their children.

- All parents who have a child attending a school in the Western Isles are automatically members of the parent forum. Membership of the forum allows parents to have a say in the local arrangements, to enable their collective view to be represented on matters such as the quality and standard of education at the local school and other matters of interest to parents. Those views can be represented as appropriate to the headteacher of the school, the local authority and HMIe. All schools in the Western Isles should be represented by a parent council, however, where there are only a small number of pupils, parents may choose to have the forum itself represent their views. In the case of shared headship schools, these can join together if they so wish and have one parent council to represent the views of these schools. Schools should consult with the parent forum as to the format of the parent council. Schools should therefore support the establishment of a parent council and should then support its ongoing operation.
- At the beginning of each session, new parents should receive a letter from the headteacher outlining what parents might expect in terms of partnership and involvement in their child's school education. This would also apply to children coming into school during the session. Schools should employ a wide range of formal and informal approaches to stay in touch with the views of parents (detailed elsewhere).
- The headteacher will provide an annual report to the parent council evaluating the school's performance and setting out the ambitions for the school.

- The new legislation does not apply to Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and they can continue in their present form, but parents might decide that they would prefer to have one body. The parent council may take on the duties currently undertaken by school boards and those undertaken by PTAs. The new parent council may then want to set up a sub-committee to coordinate specific activities (e.g. fund raising).
- The Department of Education will provide support to parent councils to enable them to operate and to carry out their functions effectively. For example, training will be provided for those members involved in the recruitment process for headteachers and deputies. The Department of Education will consult with the parent council and will allocate reasonable funding to enable the council to meet:
 - its administrative expenses, including any expenses incurred in the appointment of a clerk to the council.
 - expenses for the training of its members.
 - other costs incurred in carrying out its functions under the Act.
 - support from early years staff.

The Department of Education will also provide the parent council with services or accommodation. This might include:

- administrative support from the school secretary/business support officers.
- e-mail access.
- use of photocopying services.
- distribution of council materials to parents.
- provision of room or other suitable accommodation.

9. Parent Volunteers

Schools should actively encourage and welcome volunteers to participate in school activities. Support from volunteers generates substantial benefits and studies indicate that the more a parent is involved at their child's school, the more engaged the child is in the school community. Therefore, schools should provide reasonable opportunities for parents to volunteer their services for the good of the school.

Some specific initiatives which can be used include parents helping with:

- drama and music productions.
- on site assistance with special events. (e.g. sports days).
- work in the library.
- field trips and other educational visits.
- holiday trips.
- sharing family and local heritage and past history with songs, talks etc.
- investigation of Internet sites which could be useful.
- preparation of resources.
- sports activities.
- driving minibus.
- support with reading, maths etc (e.g. reading a story aloud).
- fund raising.
- other extra curricular activities.
- enterprise and work related activities.

In developing the involvement of parent volunteers, the school needs to ensure consistent approaches to recruitment, selection procedures, disclosure, deployment, training (e.g. in confidentiality issues). Further information detailing set procedures is available in the CnES Schools Administration Handbook, Section M3.

10. Barriers to Involvement

All schools will look in detail at the barriers that make it difficult for parents to support their children's education due to family or other circumstances.

Every school has a different group of "hard to reach" parents. There is a need to get to know the barriers for each particular group and work at overcoming them in a partnership. The assumption that parents are not interested in their children's education is fundamentally incorrect. The challenges to getting parents involved may range from a simple lack of interest and motivation to a lack of confidence. However, many of the obstacles can be overcome by creating a climate that encourages parental involvement.

This could include:

- providing crèche facilities at meetings.
- alternating the day/time/venue of meetings. Organising transportation.
- taking account of minority groups in the community. (e.g. translation facilities where possible for newsletters, letters etc).
- making it as easy as possible to obtain disclosure.
- making the school as welcoming as possible. (e.g. attractive reception area).
- face to face invitations.
- telephone invitations.
- informal meetings and social meetings as well as more formal ones.
- family events.
- workshops for parents.
- taking into account the needs of fathers (detailed elsewhere).
- taking into account the differing needs of parents/carers of looked after children. (detailed elsewhere).
- taking into account the needs of parents with additional support needs (detailed elsewhere).
- taking into account the needs of non resident parents (ref elsewhere).

There are many other strategies to involve all parents and these are detailed elsewhere and in many publications.

Equal Opportunities

Ref: All Department Policies, in particular, Inclusion – A Policy for All (March 2005), Racial Equality Policy (March 2003); Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Equality Act 2006, Additional Support Needs Act (2004) and accompanying departmental guidelines.

The Department of Education continuously works towards creating education opportunities and children's services that are fair and equitable to all. The department always identifies and considers the needs of all sections of the population in the planning and delivery of education services. It makes every effort to eliminate barriers for all who need or wish to access services, including barriers relating to language, accessibility and culture. No children or families are discriminated against on grounds of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, language, faith or belief, and age. In order to ensure this, the Department of Education through all its policies but particularly its Inclusion Policy, the Additional Support Needs Act and accompanying departmental guidelines, and its Racial Equality Policy:

- ensures that inclusion underpins all local developments and that schools demonstrate a commitment to inclusiveness in their dealings with children and their families.
- works with schools to develop inclusive policies and practices.
- monitors progress towards inclusive practice.
- ensures that the rights and views of children, young people and their parents are respected and listened to.

- ensures that the allocation of resources by the department itself, schools and other partners demonstrates a commitment to inclusiveness and takes account of the diversity of the local pupil population.
- ensures that schools undertake ethnic monitoring of pupils and carries out data analysis of pupil attainment levels and rates of exclusions.
- provides targeted support to pupils with additional support needs in line with the Additional Support Needs Act. Ensures that parents are aware of the new rights given to them under the Act.
- encourages and supports the parents/carers of looked after/accommodated children, non resident parents, lone parents, and fathers to participate fully in all school activities.
- promotes improvements to the physical environment to enable all pupils and parents to play as full a part as possible in school life.
- offers equality training to enhance the knowledge and awareness of personnel within the education service.
- ensures effective partnership working structures with other Comhairle departments, voluntary sector organisations and community groups to aid successful partnership with parents.
- regularly monitors and reviews the Racial Equality Policy to assess the impact of its effectiveness and bring it in line with any government changes in education and/or race relations.
- contributes to the Western Isles Integrated Children's Services Plan (2005–2008) which is for all children and families in the Western Isles.
- This plan (available on the Comhairle website) contains shared objectives and targets across organisations for the continued improvement of services and can help all families in the Western Isles have an equal right of access to all good quality universal services. The needs of all children and young people will, whenever possible, be met from within universal services. However, targeted services will be provided to children and their families in a manner that is supportive and continuous efforts will be made to avoid the potentially stigmatising effect of selective services.

Looked after Children and Young People

Ref : Inclusion – A Policy for All. (CnES – 2005) ; Revised Absence Monitoring Procedures (Looked After and Accommodated Children) (CnES – Sept 2006 Draft) ; Draft Staged Intervention Guidelines (CnES January 2007); The Children (Scotland) Act 1995

The Parental Involvement Act uses the same definition of 'looked after' as that in Section 17(C) of the 1995 Guidance on Children (Scotland) Act. This refers to children or young people who are accommodated by the local authority or are subject to one of the specified orders made under the 1995 Act, including a child protection order, a parental responsibilities order or are subject to a supervision requirement.

CnES arrangements for children who are looked after are contained in some detail in the 2 CnES documents referred to above. (Inclusion – A Policy for All and Revised Absence Monitoring Procedures). These emphasise that children who are looked after will have exactly the same educational and developmental opportunities as all other children. These also ensure full and integrated participation in compliance with all the requirements of the Parental Involvement Act 2006. All schools should have a member of staff specifically in charge of 'looked after' children. Schools need to ensure that they are aware of the children who are looked after and they must ensure that they keep in touch with the appropriate parent or carer. This may be a relative carer, foster carer, a local authority or another carer. Care planning for looked after children should clarify who is taking responsibility for keeping in contact with the school and helping the child with their education. Schools should ensure that parents receive regular information about their child's progress in school, unless there are good reasons not to do so, e.g. a court order.

Schools should also ensure that carers, including any residential staff or foster parents, receive regular information on the progress of a child's learning. Further information on involving parents in the education of looked after children can also be found in the joint HMIE and Social Work Services Inspectorate Report, Learning with Care. (www.hmie.gov.uk). Copies of the CnES response to this report will also be available in schools.

Additional Support Needs (ASN)

(Ref: The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004; Inclusion – A Policy for All (CnES – 2005)

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 introduces a new framework for providing support for children and young people who require some additional help with their learning. The new concept of additional support needs refers to any child or young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support for learning. Consequently, additional support needs can arise from any factor which causes a barrier to learning, whether that factor relates to social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic disability, or family and care circumstances, and some needs will be long term while others will be short term. CnES arrangements for children who have additional support needs are detailed in the document referred to above (Inclusion – A Policy for All, CNES 2005). The arrangements to be followed by the Department of Education, school and others (e.g. Social Work, Health Board, and Careers Scotland) ensure full and integrated participation in compliance with all the requirements of The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

Under the terms of the Act, the Department of Education and schools should be aware of the new rights given to parents and should be prepared to respond appropriately. Parents have rights to:

- request the education authority to find out whether their child has additional support needs.
- request the education authority to find out whether their child needs a Coordinated Support Plan or to review an existing plan.
- request a specific type of assessment/examination.
- request the use of mediation services.
- make a placing request to an independent special school if their child has additional support needs.
- be informed of the outcomes of these requests and any applicable rights of appeal.
- receive a copy of the Coordinated Support Plan or, if not eligible for a plan, receive advice and information about their child's additional support needs.
- have their views taken into account and noted in the Coordinated Support Plan.
- appeal to independent tribunals on decisions by the education authority to prepare or not prepare a Coordinated Support Plan, the time being taken to prepare or review a Plan, the information in the Plan, including the support to be provided.
- make use of dispute resolution arrangements for matters about additional support needs that are not eligible for formal appeal.
- have a supporter or representative with them at any meeting with the school or education authority and at hearings of the Tribunal.

Young people (16 and 17 year olds who are still at school) will have all the same rights as parents.

The Education and Social Work Departments cooperate to develop a shared database designed to track every young person referred within the Authority to ensure that the appropriate assessments, interventions, reviews and evaluations have been undertaken within prescribed timescales. The database identifies children and young people by referral category, their key workers and review dates. Schools must update the database on a weekly basis.

Non Resident Parents

Everyone who is a parent, whether they are a resident or non resident parent, has the same right to participate in decisions about a child's education and receive information about the school. Schools must treat all parents equally, unless there is a court order limiting an individual's exercise of parental responsibility. In such cases, where court orders have been made, the school should be made aware of them and abide by their terms. However, for day to day purposes, the school's main contact is likely to be the parent with whom the child lives on school days. It is important to remember that people other than a child's natural parents can acquire parental responsibility. In addition, a local authority can acquire parental responsibility if it is named in the care order for a child. Individuals/organisations who have parental responsibility for, or care of, a child have the same rights as natural parents.

11. Recruitment of Headteacher or Depute

Parent councils have a right to be involved in the recruitment of a new headteacher or depute headteacher, except when the appointment is made on an acting basis. The new regulations are intended to ensure that both parents and the Comhairle engage with each other throughout the appointment process. The Department of Education will ask the parent council to nominate members to assist the department in drawing up the person specification, selecting a short list and interviewing the candidates. Training is mandatory and will be made available for parent council members involved in the recruitment process.

12. School Parental Policy

Headteachers should ensure that an effective and meaningful school policy is in place in accordance with this strategy, taking into account the views of parents and all other interested parties. The policy should be made available to parents in an understandable format and language in so far as this is practicable. The policy should be updated periodically to meet the changing needs of the parents and the school.

13. Complaints Procedure

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 requires that all councils establish a complaints procedure for all matters coming under the Act. A person, or someone acting on their behalf, may make a complaint in connection with how the authority carries out, or fails to carry out, its function under The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. This could include the local authority's duty to:

- provide advice and information to parents about their own child.
- promote parental involvement.
- promote and support the operation of parent councils.

The CnES current Complaints Procedure (April 2005) meets the requirements of the Act. The guidance on the Act stresses that complaints should be dealt with locally whenever possible. In practice, therefore, it is hoped that almost all issues will be able to be resolved at school or education authority level.

It is usually better for all parties if parental concerns/complaints can be resolved as quickly as possible, nevertheless, it is important that all educational establishments follow the corporate complaints procedure when complaints reach that stage (available on the Comhairle website and from the Comhairle Offices).

- The Department of Education will ensure that schools are familiar with the Comhairle Complaints procedures. Schools should then ensure that parents are aware of the complaints procedure and should be encouraged to raise any issues at an early stage. Schools should also ensure that all staff are aware of how to deal with complaints in the first instance.

- The schools own procedures for dealing with informal complaints should be detailed in the school handbook but could also be made available in other formats (e.g. on website, displayed at entrance etc). It would also be useful to have a complaints/compliments box in the reception area. The arrangements for dealing with complaints should be :
 - easy to access and well publicised.
 - simple to understand and use.
 - clear about timescales for action and keeping people informed.
 - confidential.
 - effective in providing suitable solutions.
 - provide information on next steps, if parents still dissatisfied.
- If a parent has a complaint/concern in relation to the Act, then he/she should raise the matter in the way that is easiest for them (e.g. by e-mail, phone, or in writing). Schools should make clear who the point of contact is. This would normally be someone in senior management unless the complaint is against them. Simple clarification or the provision of information by the school can resolve many matters and it is anticipated that almost all concerns will be resolved at this early stage. It is important that the complaint is dealt with as quickly as possible, for example within 5 working days.
- A full copy of the Comhairle's Complaints Procedures is available on the Comhairle website or at any of the Comhairle offices and schools. The procedure, which has 4 steps, can be summarised as follows:
 - Step 1 – complaint dealt with informally by the school or the Department of Education in an attempt to resolve the problem to the satisfaction of the complainant.
 - Step 2 – complaint dealt with formally and investigated by the Department if Step 1 above fails to satisfy the complainant.
 - Step 3 – appeal to the Chief Executive if the complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant at Step 2 above.
 - Step 4 – appeal to an Appeals panel of Elected Members if the complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant at Step 3 above.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman service may investigate the case on behalf of the complainant if the above process has been exhausted.

- It is important to note that there are some cases which require to be taken through other more formal routes in any case and do not fall within the scope of this procedure. An Education Appeals Committee can hear placing request appeals (where there is no CSP), exclusion appeals and transport appeals.
- The Additional Support for Learning Act also provides for various appeal routes in respect of an individual child who has additional support needs. This includes mediation, dispute resolution and the Additional Support Needs Tribunal (in the case of Coordinated Support Plans and associated placing requests). An Additional Support Needs Tribunal can be taken to appeal on a point of law. Mediation is a voluntary process during which a neutral third person (a mediator) assists those involved in a disagreement or dispute to work towards finding a mutually acceptable solution. Mediation is available to all children and their parents in the Western Isles. While parents are not obliged to use mediation, the local authority must enter into mediation where a parent/carer/young person wishes to do so. The mediation service for the Western Isles is administered by Resolve: ASL (more details available from the Inclusion Section, Department of Education – leaflet available).

- Parents can also raise concerns with the parent council of the school with regard to general school policies (e.g. bullying, discipline, healthy eating etc). If, after discussion with the school and the Department of Education, the parent council is unable to reach a satisfactory outcome for these concerns, they are able to refer the issue to HMIE. However, generally the parent council can only take a matter to HMIE if they have raised the issue with the headteacher and the Department of Education and have received a reply from both.

This is in line with the expectation that most issues can be addressed fully at either the school or authority level. In exceptional cases, where the parent council consider it inappropriate to take an issue to the headteacher, they can raise the matter with the education authority, and if not resolved at that level, make representations to HMIE.

14 **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Compliance with this strategy will be monitored by senior staff in schools and by quality improvement staff as part of their regular monitoring of the implementation of Comhairle policies in schools. Parental involvement will also be evaluated through the HMIE inspection process and the Department's own Assisted Self-evaluation (ASE) process. Each school will be expected to have a policy on parental involvement. The parental involvement working group will also evaluate the strategy as and when appropriate.
- All schools will be expected to report on the quality of their engagement with parents in their annual Standards and Quality Reports. The headteacher will also formally report, at least once a year, evaluating the performance of the school and stating what the objectives and ambitions for the school are.
- A range of support materials will be used by the local authority staff, schools and parents to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy e.g. How Good is our School - Partnership with Parents 2006; HGIOS 3; Child at the Centre 2; Parents as Partners in their Children's Learning Toolkit 2006; The Journey to Excellence 2006.
- The strategy should be reviewed every 3 years or earlier if necessary.

15. Resources

The following websites are sources of advice on a range of aspects relating to parental involvement in children's education and learning:

- Parentzone – information on education in Scotland and advice for parents on supporting their child's learning – www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk
- Parents as Partners in their Children's Learning Toolkit –available on www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk or on www.scotland.gov.uk
- Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 Guidance www.scotland.gov.uk
- Cross Curricular Themes Website – contains a section called 'Parents as Partners in Learning' www.ltscotland.org.uk/crosscurricular.
- Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) – the national organisation for PTAs. – www.sptc.info
- Scottish Parent Council Association – formerly Scottish School Boards Association – www.scottishparents.com
- Scottish Network for Parental Involvement in Children's Learning – www.snpicl.org.uk/
- Parent Network Scotland – www.parentnetworkscotland.org.uk
- Careers Scotland – services, information and support on career planning – www.careers-scotland.org.uk
- Children in Scotland – for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families – www.childreninscotland.org.uk
- Enquire – the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning – www.enquire.org.uk
- Fathers Direct – advice on role of fathers in education – www.fathersdirect.com
- HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) – school inspection reports, good practice and other publications – www.hmie.gov.uk
- Making the Difference – a series of leaflets giving parents advice on supporting their child's learning. Available from the Parentzone website at www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk
- A Parenting Agreement for Scotland – for further information on separated parents. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/19135817/7
- National Standards for Community Engagement – for information on engaging with the wider community – available from Communities Scotland – www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk

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