

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	12.
Report No	EDU/13/24

Committee: Education

Date: 30 May 2024

Report Title: Parental Engagement Strategy

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members on the approaches taken to meet the duties outlined in The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 and to seek approval for the Parental Engagement Strategy, attached at Appendix 1 and the Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy Improvement Plan at Appendix 2.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the content of the report;
- ii. Approve the Parental Engagement Strategy – Appendix 1; and
- iii. Approve the Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy Improvement Plan – Appendix 2.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - There are no new implications. Schools have autonomy to support family learning, learning at home, parental engagement, and involvement. They may use Pupil Equity Funding to support this, where it is a priority for the targeted pupils in their school. The Devolved School Management Scheme recognises the need to consult with the stakeholders on budget matters.

3.2 Legal - There are no new implications.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)

Equality: It is important that the strategy encourages a broad and representative range of parents/cares to be involved and engaged with early learning and childcare settings

and in schools and parents/carers are supported effectively to do so, appropriate to their needs.

Poverty: It is important that where poverty is barrier to parent/carer involvement and engagement, appropriate support is offered to overcome this.

Rural: It is important that the strategy uses all suitable, available means to connect and engage with parents in rural, remote and island communities and that barriers to engagement resulting from rurality are effectively addressed.

- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - There are no new climate change/carbon clever implications.
- 3.5 Risks - Parents/carers who are most able to be engaged and involved are the ones most likely to. The children of parents/carers who have barriers to involvement and engagement may be further disadvantaged if those barriers are not effectively addressed. This could have a detrimental impact on the attainment and achievement of children and young people who are disadvantaged, experiencing poverty or who have additional support needs.

There is a risk of not responding to the increased focus on Parental Involvement and Engagement within national priorities and frameworks such as the National Improvement Framework, United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and The Promise.

- 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - There are no new implications for Health and Safety.
- 3.7 Gaelic - There are no new implications for Gaelic.

4. Parental Involvement & Engagement

- 4.1 The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 applies across all sectors, including early learning and childcare (ELC), primary, secondary, special schools and childminders. The Act covers parent/carers of children attending ELC provided in public primary schools, and they are members of the school's parent forum and may join the Parent Council. The Act does not apply to parent/carers of children in 'free-standing' local authority nurseries or those attending ELC provided by funded partner settings. However, we work collaboratively with our private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) ELC partner providers to support parental involvement and engagement in all settings.

The Act aims to ensure that parents are involved with their child's education and learning; welcomed as active participants in the life of the school; and encouraged to share their views about the school and work in partnership with the school. It requires local authorities to prepare a strategy, setting out their policies for parental involvement which covers their duties to:

- Involve parents in their own child's education and the education provided by the school more 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.

4.2 The Scottish Government has identified parental engagement as a key driver to secure educational improvement and a way for parents, carers, families, and schools to work together to support children's learning and development.

The purpose of parental involvement and engagement is to support the learning and development of children and young people. Priorities and approaches should be guided by the needs and interests of the child and their family, recognising that parents/carers are the first educators of children. Positive relationships between families and those working with children and young people, based on trust, mutual respect and partnership are essential to achieving these aims.

All parents/carers and families should be supported to be involved and engaged in the life and work of their children's early learning and childcare setting or school and encourage and support collaborative partnerships between practitioners, parents, and families. School staff should be supported to deliver on this in their early learning and childcare setting or school.

By working collaboratively with parents/carers, families and other partners, schools and settings can support children and young people to raise their aspirations, achieve their ambitions and ensure they are well-placed to take advantage of the opportunities available to them at every stage of their learning journey.

5. Parental Engagement Strategy

5.1 The proposed Parental Engagement Strategy is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration and approval.

Learning together: national action plan on parental involvement, engagement, family learning and learning at home 2018 – 2021 underpins this strategy. It sets out the Scottish Government's vision for parental involvement and engagement. It presents a national vision, informed by national and international evidence and expertise, but which focused on promoting local and community innovation and flexibility.

It has been informed by engagement with stakeholders:

- Parents/carers via a questionnaire pilot, trialled across 64 schools, including primary, secondary, 3-18 and those delivering Gaelic Medium Education. Areas included urban, rural, and remote rural.
- Representatives of primary and secondary school leaders.
- Representatives of parent councils.

- Representatives of third sector organisations.
- Representatives of school staff.

Our priorities are to work with parents/carers to support their children through every stage of their learning and to provide the best life chances for all children and young people by raising levels of attainment and achievement.

Effective self-evaluation is key to improving performance and outcome. Frameworks such as the “How Good is our...” will be used to evaluate and report on outcomes. The intended impact of the strategy is to improve attainment and achievement for all children and young people. We will include attainment and achievement performance measures, including health and wellbeing measures, as part of our self-evaluation work.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1
- Officers will work with schools and settings to support training and development of staff. Where appropriate, third sector, community and other partners will be meaningfully involved with this work.
 - Officers will work with schools and settings, third sector, community, and other partners to further develop training, development, and support for parents/carers to build confidence and capacity in families and communities.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 17 May 2024

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Learning Together: The Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy

Appendix 2 - Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy Improvement Plan

Appendix 3 - Legislation, Guidance, Support and Advice

DRAFT
Learning Together

The Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy

Date Created	17/05/2024	Date Approved	
Live Date v.1	30/05/2024	Review Date	May 2025
Responsible Officer	Colette Macklin		

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Introduction

The Highland Council recognises that Parents, Carers and Families are the most important influences in a child's life. We know that parental involvement and engagement in early learning and school plays a big part in a pupil's achievement and wellbeing and, when this happens effectively, can have a significant positive impact.

This strategy seeks to build on the Scottish Government's vision for parental involvement and engagement as set out in the Learning Together National Action Plan 2018-21 and the Learning Together National Action Plan Update which was published in December 2023. At a local level, parental involvement and engagement in early learning and school has great importance and our overall work in recent years as an Attainment Challenge local authority, as we continue to evolve systems and approaches to support families to be involved in and engage with the learning of their children.

The Highland Council is committed to improving the quality of parental involvement and engagement throughout all stages of their child's development and to overcome barriers preventing families from engaging with their child's school. Ongoing consultation and collation of views from children, young people, parents/carers and professionals is therefore an important feature of this strategy.

This strategy has been informed by engagement with stakeholders:

- Parents/carers via a questionnaire pilot, trialled across 64 schools, including primary, secondary, 3-18 and those delivering Gaelic Medium Education. Areas included urban, rural and remote rural.
- Representatives of primary and secondary school leaders.
- Representatives of parent councils.
- Representatives of third sector organisations.
- Representatives of school staff.

Vision and Aims

The overall aim of the Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy is to ensure that all parent/carers and carers are encouraged and supported to engage as partners in their children's learning and to become involved in the life of the school. The strategy also ensures that it can continue to build on good practice and create further opportunities for our parent/carers and schools to work together in the best interests of children and young people. The strategy will be reviewed in line with parental engagement legislation.

The main aims of the strategy are to ensure that parents/carers:

- Are informed about their children's education and learning.
- Are welcomed and involved in the life of their child's school/setting.
- Are able to support their child's learning and to participate in a range of family learning opportunities.

- Are encouraged to express their views and take part in decision making.
- Have opportunities for their voice to be heard, through involvement in forums for discussion and debate on education policy.
- Are encouraged to participate in parent/carer council meetings and the parent/carer forum.

This strategy is based on current legislation and will be subject to change and review.

The Highland Council's existing overall aims in relation to Parental Engagement are consistent with legislative requirements and are in line with recommendations for good practice.

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 applies across all sectors, including early learning and childcare (ELC), primary, secondary, special schools and childminders. The Act covers parent/carers of children attending ELC provided in public primary schools and they are members of the school's parent forum and may join the Parent Council. The Act does not apply to parent/carers of children in 'free-standing' local authority nurseries or those attending ELC provided by funded partner settings. However, we work collaboratively with our private, voluntary and independent (PVI) ELC partner providers to support parental involvement and engagement in all settings.

Effective Parental Engagement

Parent/carer involvement and engagement is one of the key drivers for educational change, which has been identified by a range of educational research over many years. Janet Goodall in 'Leading for parental engagement: working towards partnership' (2018) identifies that parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning. The National Improvement Framework (NIF) references the importance of parental and family engagement in supporting children's learning and parent/carer voice in school improvement processes.

It is, therefore, important to identify strategies that are effective in supporting parental engagement, particularly for those parent/carers who are not currently involved in their children's education. There should be clear links between the community, school, family and child, with each one impacting positively on the others.

Engaging parent/carers in their children's learning is complex and must be developed with each individual context, utilising skills and opportunities to best support families from specific settings. We should seek to move from a drive to involve parents/carers in their child's school to engaging parent/carers in their children's learning.

Legislation and Policy Underpinning Strategy

This strategy is a requirement of The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. It is aligned with Education Scotland's Empowerment Agenda (2019), How Good is Our School 4 (HGIOS4) and How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare (HGIOELC). It is in line with the legislative requirements of the Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act, 2014. In Highland Council there are a number of key drivers to improve partnership working and positive outcomes for

children, young people and their families, for example the Early Years Framework and the Integrated Children's Service Plan. A range of additional guidance documents and legislation that have shaped this strategy are listed in **Appendix 1**.

The 2006 Act highlights a number of duties that schools, and local authorities must respond to. The three main aspects identified in the act are:

- **Home-school Partnerships:** Schools should encourage the involvement of parent/carers in their work and provide information that helps parent/carers engage with the school and their child's education.
- **Learning at home:** Schools should encourage parent/carers to support their child's learning at home, in the community and at school.
- **Parent/Carer representation:** Parents/carers are automatically regarded as members of the Parent Forum and have the right to have their views considered and reflected through a representative Parent Council for the school.

Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and Pupil Equity Funding (PEF)

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) and the allocation of Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) directly to schools, provide opportunities for schools to further strengthen involvement with parents/carers, in partnership with other stakeholders and in providing new resources.

To achieve these aims, Highland schools and Early Learning Centres are encouraged to revisit and review their understanding of each of the three key aspects above and to ensure that the legislative duties contained in the Scottish Schools Parental Involvement Act 2006 are also maintained.

Working Terms and Definitions

Community Learning and Development (CLD)

CLD is a field of professional practice which includes youth work, community-based adult learning, family learning and community development. It empowers people to work individually or collectively to make positive changes in their lives and in their communities, through learning, personal development and active citizenship. The programmes and activities are developed in partnership with communities and participants. For more detail see High Life Highland (HLH) *Purposes and Objectives*.

Family Learning

'Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage' (Scottish Family Learning Network, 2016).

Family learning encourages family members to learn together as a family and within the family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be designed to enable parents/carers to learn how to support their children's learning.

Family learning is about using creative approaches to engage meaningfully with families in learning that has an impact on the whole family. Schools should be responsive to need and encourage families to participate in relevant family/adult learning programmes, which promote equity, wellbeing and positive attitudes to learning. Family Learning is also about schools working in partnership with others in their community, to support families to secure better outcomes, through programmes which enable them to improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. This should be built on a foundation of trusting relationships with families, so that schools can offer help, support and advice as needed.

Learning at Home

Learning at Home is learning which happens in the home, outdoors or in the community. This can be everyday activities or organised, active learning activities. A good home learning environment has a strong impact on attainment and wellbeing. It encourages positive attitudes to learning and develops curiosity and confidence. It encompasses everything within the home and the time that a child spends engaging outside of the school day.

Parents/Carers, Child and Family

- Parents/carers refers to people with parent/carer responsibilities and others who care for or look after children/young people. A person with 'parental responsibilities' refers to someone with the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child.
- Child means a person under the age of 18 years.
- Family includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom the child has been living.

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is about parents/carers meaningfully engaging in their child's learning. Where it takes place is not important. The important thing is the quality of the parent/carer's engagement with their child's learning, the positive impact that it has and the mutual development that occurs as a result. When we refer to Parental Engagement within this document, we are also talking about Family Learning and Learning at Home. We acknowledge that what happens outwith a school or early learning and childcare setting has a huge impact on a child's learning and a holistic approach is required. This document seeks to promote the fact that parents/carers are responsible for making decisions or suggestions about their child's health, wellbeing and education and should lead on this, with the support of school staff and other professionals.

Parent Forum and Parent Council

All parents and carers who have a child enrolled in school are automatically members of the Parent Forum for that school. The Parent Forum is encouraged to set up a Parent Council to represent all parents/carers, to make their views known and to work in partnership with the school. The Parent Council must report back to the Parent Forum on its activity at least once a year and should encourage links between the school, parents/carers, pupils, pre-school groups and the wider

community. The Parent Council has a role in the appointment of Headteachers and Depute Headteachers and will provide support during school inspections.

Parental Involvement

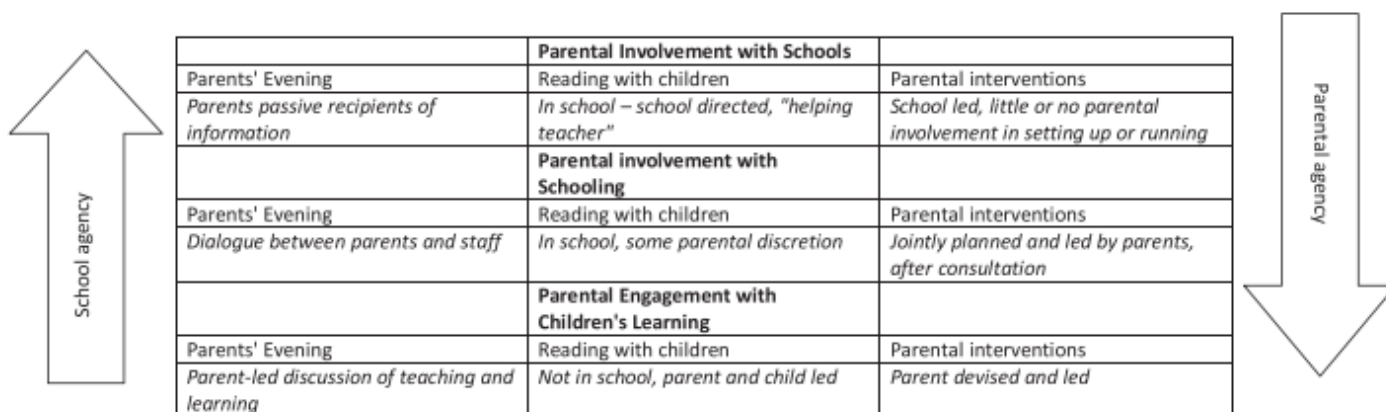
Parental Involvement describes ways parents/carers can be involved in the life and work of schools and early learning and childcare settings. This includes activities such as parental representation in the development of policies and improvement plans, often via involvement in Parent Councils. It can include involvement in the life and work of the school/setting, for instance through volunteering opportunities. Parental Involvement can also include help with homework or keeping track of children’s work and on-going, two-way communication between home and school/setting.

Third Sector

The third sector includes charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups which deliver essential services, help to improve people’s wellbeing and contribute to economic growth. Third sector organisations offer specialist expertise, the ability to engage with families in a meaningful way, including vulnerable groups and offer different, flexible and innovative approaches to working with families. The third sector works in partnership to achieve their goals and often support families in their engagement with schools and other public services.

Parental Involvement

Parent Involvement is a key component of the Scottish education system. It recognises the critical role parents/carers and families play in supporting their children's learning and development. The Scottish Government has implemented various policies and initiatives to foster strong partnerships between schools and families, including the establishment of parent forums, parent councils and promoting family engagement and learning. There is a progressive continuum between parental involvement and parental engagement as shown in Figure 1 below. The movement between the two represents:



“a shift in emphasise, away from the relationship between parent/carers and schools, to a focus on the relationship between parent/carers and their children’s learning.”

Figure 1: from Goodall. J. & Montgomery, C. (2014)¹ p.399

¹ Goodall. J. & Montgomery, C. (2014) Parental involvement to parental engagement: a continuum, *Educational Review*, 66:4, 399-410, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2013.781576

Home-school Partnerships (Parental Engagement)

Local Authorities and schools should encourage the involvement of parents/carers in their work and provide information that helps parents/carers to engage with school and their child's education. The following are examples of good practice in this area:

- Feeling welcome and knowing who to speak to for help with any queries.
- Good communication, accessible to all parents/carers. For example, newsletters, weekly updates, information evenings, pupil events and exhibitions.
- Feeling able to contribute to discussions and developments in the school and knowing suggestions will be appropriately considered.
- Opportunities to contribute to the life of the school. For example, helping in the classroom, on school trips or at school events; sharing useful skills; connecting the school with other individuals and groups who may have something to share with the school; suggesting ideas for the curriculum and other activities.
- Being signposted to access advice and support from partners, who may be able to help with a child's particular needs.

Learning at home (Family Learning)

Local Authorities and schools should encourage parents/carers to help their child's learning at home, in the community and at school. Schools will keep parents/carers informed of what their child is learning in school, so that it can be discussed at home, if they choose. Parents/carers and staff will address areas of difficulty and concern together, in partnership. Some of the ways this can be achieved are listed below:

- Schools will provide feedback on learning for parents/carers. This can be feedback on individual pieces of work, formal reports, parents/carers' evenings and individual discussions, as required.
- Information regarding the curriculum and topics can be shared via a school handbook, information evenings, newsletters, parent council, class teacher updates.
- Parents/carers can support their child's learning by helping with homework, project work and making links with other areas of schoolwork. Parents/carers should feel comfortable talking to their child's teachers about their learning.
- Adult Family Learning opportunities are available in the community and designed to meet local needs and interests. This could include topics such as mental health awareness and support, digital safety and online harms, child protection, literacy and numeracy.

Parental Representation

Parents/carers are automatically members of the Parent Forum at their child's school and have the right to have their views considered and reflected, through a representative Parent Council. Parent Councils are statutory bodies that represent parents/carers in schools. They work collaboratively with the school, local authority and other partners, to support and promote parental involvement and

contribute to decision-making processes. Parent Councils play an important role in shaping educational policy and strategy at the school level.

Examples of good practice are:

- Regular meetings of the Parent Council, with representative parents/carers attending. They would usually meet with members of the school's senior management team, as well as a teacher representatives. Other partners/groups may also be in attendance, as required.
- The Parent Council communicates with all members of the Parent Forum in a variety of ways, such as social media, email, attendance at school events, local newspapers and newsletters.
- Parent Councils (or representatives) should have involvement in drafting the School Improvement Plan and gathering views from the Parent Forum regarding developments within the school, to assist senior managers in their planning.
- Parent Council (or representatives) should be involved in the interview process for Headteachers and Deputes for their school.
- Parent Council should encourage setting up short-life working groups to support with fundraising, skill sharing, pupil voice and participation and the development of aspects of school policy.

Involvement in the Appointment of Senior Staff in Schools

Highland Council involve representatives of the Parent Council in the appointment of permanent Headteachers and Depute Headteachers and provide advice and training to support them.

Review and Evaluation Process

Highland Council and individual schools and settings gather parent/carer opinions and views in a variety of ways. These include parent/carer meetings and discussion groups, participation in surveys and questionnaires, parent/carer involvement in working groups, Parent Council meetings and parent/carer involvement in school inspections and school reviews. We will continue to evaluate on a regular basis, with a summary of the key messages being included in future reports.

A summary of the feedback received is below.

1. Parental Involvement

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint commitment from Highland Council and parent/carers. • Greater communication leading to increased parent/carer confidence and knowledge. • Ongoing survey/consultations with a range of parent/carers to shape services. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation on parent/carer Councils not always representative of the school's parent/carer body. • The range of parent/carers involved in school improvement planning is variable. • Limited involvement of parent/carers in PEF planning and other relevant decision-making.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify roles and responsibilities of school and Highland Council staff to parent/carer Councils. • Share examples of good practice across schools and parent/carer Councils. • Involve parent/carers more in school improvement and other relevant planning and decision-making. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and other pressures on parent/carers and families are barriers to their involvement in school life and affect some groups of parents/carers more than others. • Lack of parent/carer participation and engagement may negatively impact pupil attainment and achievement.

2. Parental Engagement

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of digital communications. • Schools/ELCs are aware of and sensitive to, family circumstances, challenges, barriers to engagement and involvement and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland-wide data from all parent/carers on what they want and how they would like to be involved and supported is limited. • Percentage of parent/carers who know about and are confident in accessing support to become more involved is low.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase effective use of communications, IT, social media and school websites. • Wider use of partnership and community communication routes and resources. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/carers lack of access to appropriate information, resources and support to enable their involvement. • Expectations regarding nature and frequency of communication can lead to misunderstandings between parents/carers and schools.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop professional learning opportunities and resources for staff, with parent/carer-friendly versions available for families. 	
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3. Family Learning

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of diversity of families. • Family learning improves outcomes for children & young people. • Increases in pupils' engagement as a result of family learning. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A centrally co-ordinated programme of learning and resources are not yet available. • Support for families where English is not their first language is limited. This includes Gaelic.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for all families to come together and engage with their children's health and wellbeing, play, learning and school community. • Ensure all parent/carers and carers feel confident in their ability to meet the daily demands of their parenting role. • Offer training and support for families. • Recognise and celebrate the efforts and contributions of volunteers. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parental participation and engagement can negatively impact pupil attainment and achievement.

4. Learning at Home

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/carer contribution to supporting education is recognised and valued. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family circumstances impact on the ability of children to learn at home. • Poverty and disadvantage can act as barrier to engaging in family learning in some families and communities.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about home learning activities and opportunities, including supporting play experiences. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parent/carer participation and engagement may negatively impact pupil attainment and achievement.

Highland Council follows government guidelines regarding consultation with parent/carers. This includes items such as timings of the school day, school catchment areas, placing request processes, school estate rebuilding/refurbishment and ELC settings.

Improvements in use of and access to social media and the use of online communications have enabled schools and Highland Council to widen and strengthen consultation processes.

Parental involvement, Family Learning and Parental Engagement Questionnaire

A questionnaire was trialled, to gather the views of a range of parents/carers. It has been agreed with the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP) that a similar questionnaire will be used more widely, to gather views from parents/carers across Highland.

The initial sample included 64 schools, including primary, secondary and 3-18 and those delivering Gaelic Medium Education, with pupil rolls ranging from 5 to 880, in urban, rural and remote rural areas.

Feedback has influenced and informed the draft strategy, which provides advice on the expectations of a strengthened partnership between schools and parents/carers. Future versions of the strategy will include examples of good practice to support effective parental engagement between home, school and the wider community and link to relevant sections of the council's recently approved Operational Delivery Plan (add link to council paper).

Information and Support

- Most parents/carers feel school keeps them informed about their child's progress in a way that they can understand.
- The majority of parents/carers believe school provides useful information about how their child can learn at home.
- Most parents/carers are satisfied with general communications from school. e.g., Newsletter, Social Media posts etc.
- Parents/carers welcome general information about the school, about what their child is learning, how their child is progressing, and how they can support learning at home.
- The majority of parents/carers feel that school keeps them well-informed about the range of support available for their child.
- Most feel that contact regarding general information is enough.
- The majority of respondents said they would benefit from information about what their child is learning/going to learn, the progress being made and how they can better support learning at home.

Post-School Transition

- Some parents/carers said they would like more information about careers and post-school pathways and opportunities.

Parents/carers welcomed being asked to get involved in the life of their child's school.

- Most parents/carers feel that school staff are approachable.
- 25% of respondents were members of their Parent Council.
- The majority of parents/carers were not aware of information about the role of Parent Councils and how to get involved.
- The most common themes related to improving visibility and communication about Parent Councils and providing more information about them.
- Approximately 20% of parents/carers are involved in activities with their school.
- The most common areas in where parent/carers are involved are:
 - Fundraising
 - Volunteering
 - Parent/carer Council Activities
 - Gardening/outdoor learning
 - After-school activities
 - Sports Coaching
- 40% of parents/carers would like to be more involved in the life of their school.
- The main barriers to parents/carers being more involved in the life of their school were work commitments, family commitments and health issues.

Family Learning

- The majority of parents/carers feel that school keeps them well informed about the range of support available for their child.
- The majority of parents/carers indicated that they have not participated in opportunities for families to learn together.
- Parents/carers are interested in attending sessions/training/workshops on supporting learning and mental health and wellbeing.

Parental Representation

- Almost every school has a Parent Council.
- 25% of respondents were Parent Council members.
- The majority of parents/carers are aware of their school's Parent Council.
- The majority of Parent Councils are in touch with their school's wider parent forum.
- There are differences in how Parent Councils operate and communicate and parents/carers would like to see clearer guidance on how they should operate.

Ongoing Framework for Support

The Highland Council will continue to support in the following ways:

Parent Councils

- Encouraging Parent Councils to review, in partnership with Council Officers, the identification, prioritisation and development of Parent Council information and

communication.

- Encouraging Parent Councils to review, in partnership with Council Officers, their constitutions and how they engage with, and are representative of, their wider parent forum.
- Develop training and resources to support the above.

Family Engagement and Learning

- Highland Council will work in partnership with parents/carers, children & young people, schools, third sector, community and voluntary organisations to develop resources to promote and support Parental Engagement and Family Learning.
- Highland Council will work in partnership with parents/carers, children & young people, schools, third sector, community and voluntary organisations to identify needs and specific learning opportunities, that will impact positively on achievement, attainment, wellbeing and positive destinations.
- Highland Council will continue to support learning at home and access to information on individual pupil progress, through staff training, parent/carer workshops and the development of digital approaches, in partnership with parents/carers, children & young people, schools, third sector, community and voluntary organisations.
- Highland Council will encourage Parent Councils to review, in partnership with Council Officers, the identification, prioritisation and development of online training and workshops for parents/carers.
- Highland Council will continue to deliver training to school staff, trainee teachers and probationers to support and strengthen parental involvement, engagement, family learning and learning at home.
- Highland Council will engage with officers, school leaders, school staff and Parent Councils on how to involve parents/carers in school improvement and other planning and improvement processes.

Parental Participation in school activities

- Highland Council will work in partnership with parents/carers, children & young people, schools, third sector, community and voluntary organisations to identify and address barriers to parent/carer participation in the life of the school.

Examples of approaches which may be considered:

1. Providing opportunities for parents/carers to meet staff at a venue which is accessible to parents/carers with a disability.
2. Ensuring that communication continues to meet the needs of all parents/carers.
3. Alternative methods for the provision of Parents' Evenings are being explored, one option being online appointments.
4. Providing access to secure and up-to-date school websites.
5. Ensuring language used when communicating with parents/carers is user-friendly.
6. Offering courses to support parents/carers in general and on specific topics, as required.
7. Welcoming families into activities and events.

8. Providing an increased range of family learning opportunities throughout the year, in partnership with parents/carers, children & young people, schools, third sector, community and voluntary organisations.
9. Offering opportunities for parents/carers to meet with staff, in response to specific work and other commitments that are a barrier to engagement and involvement.
10. Providing information in a variety of formats, to improve communication and engagement.
11. Encouraging volunteering.
12. Recognising and celebrating parents/carers engagement in supporting their child's learning.
13. Providing support, where possible, at Parents' Evenings for those with communication and/or other difficulties.
14. Working with partners to support and advise families with specific issues and concerns.

Supporting parents/carers with children in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

Although current legislation does not necessitate the formation of a Parent Council for ELC standalone establishments, the Highland Council will continue to ensure that parent/carers are involved in their child's education and learning. We recognise the many examples of strong parent/carer partnerships which have been established in ELC settings and will continue to support the engagement opportunities and learning at home approaches being used.

Many of the virtual approaches developed during the COVID pandemic will continue to be offered and developed to meet the needs of parents/carers and families.

Gaelic Medium Education (Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig)

Highland Council is committed to supporting and developing Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner Education in ELC settings, primary schools and secondary schools.

Gaelic Medium Education gives children an opportunity to learn Gaelic through immersion, where the language is absorbed through the contexts of learning. For further information, contact the Highland Council Gaelic Team gaelic@highland.gov.uk

General information on Gaelic Medium Education can be found on the Education Scotland website, [Gaelic Medium Education \(Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig\) | Gaelic Medium Education | Choosing a school | My school | Parent/carerzone Scotland | Parent/carerzone Scotland](#)

Supporting Families who have Children with Additional Support Needs

Highland Council is committed to supporting and involving parent/carers. Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2009, parent/carers of a child with additional support needs can request assessment(s) of and information about their child's needs and how these will be met. Highland Council is committed to supporting and involving parent/carers in these processes and schools and settings will ensure that parents/carers receive an appropriate response to any such requests.

A Support for Learners website ([Schools - additional support needs | The Highland Council](#)) contains some information that may be helpful to families with children who have additional support needs. The Enquire website ([Enquire - The Scottish advice service for additional support for learning](#)) contains a summary of legislation and advice, in a range of easily accessible documents and web pages. Thriving Families ([Thriving Families - Improving the lives of families in the Highlands](#)) provide an independent, rights-based, information, advice and support service for anyone involved in the care of children and young people (up to age 25). In addition, they offer specialist support, advice and training in partnership with the National Autistic Society and NHS Highland, relevant to a range of additional support needs.

Direct engagement with parents/carers is a general feature of the child's planning process for those children and young people with significant additional learning needs. However, parent/carers are also involved in wider consultation on government policy and changes within Highland that relate to children with additional support needs. Gathering views through ASN reviews or the reviews of specific services that support children and young people with ASN, is common practice and helps shape service policy and delivery.

Parents/carers have a pivotal role if care-experienced children are to have the same opportunity to succeed as their peers. Highland Council will continue to work with parents/carers of care-experienced children, foster carers, kinship carers, staff in children's homes and others with parental responsibilities, to encourage them to support their children's education. As a normal part of these processes, the authority will also ensure that all relevant information relating to the child is provided to both parent and carer, unless the Child's Plan specifically states otherwise.

In keeping with legislative expectations derived from the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004 and as amended 2009) parents/carers play a key role in transitions for children and young people. In legislation, transition planning from an early years environment, for a child with additional support needs, must take place at least six months prior to transition. From the primary to secondary sector and secondary to post-school, transition planning must start at least twelve months prior to transition.

Any queries regarding additional support for learning can be directed in the first instance to the child's school and thereafter to the Area Officer in the geographic Area in which the child attends school.

Supporting Post-School Transition

The qualifications on offer and the employment landscape are ever-changing. There are a wide variety of qualifications and pathways available, in school and in partnership with other providers and this will continue to evolve. Routes into employment are varied and go beyond leaving school to go into training, employment, college or university.

We will engage with parents/carers, children and young people, schools, third sector, community and voluntary organisations to better understand the information needed to support post-school transition to a positive and sustained destination. School guidance staff, developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Coordinators and Skills Development Scotland Coordinators (SDS) play a key role in engaging with schools and families to better understand what information is needed. We will work in partnership to develop and share resources about employment and other opportunities and

the variety of routes into the labour market. We will also improve the information and support around pathways available to young people with Additional Support Needs, who are vulnerable or who are at risk of not achieving a positive destination.

Equal Opportunities

Highland Council has policies in place to ensure that no parent/carer is discriminated against on grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/belief or sex. We are committed to making sure that:

- People are and feel, free to live their lives without harassment and discrimination, and can take part in community life.
- People benefit from public services in a fair way and are able to have their say about them.
- There is an organisational culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Wherever possible, the authority will put in place positive measures to remove any discrimination, either direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional. Further information can be found on The Highland Council's Equal Opportunities webpage ([Equal opportunities | Equal opportunities | The Highland Council](#)).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

In Highland Council we believe that children, young people, staff, family members and the community should be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. The Council's Equality and Diversity policy is underpinned by the Equality Act (2010), through having due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- foster good relationships between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

We will integrate the Equality Act (2010, The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act (2024) into the curriculum of our schools to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attributes set out in the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Schools follow Highland Council's guidance on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Further information can be found on The Highland Council's webpage. ([School policies and guidance - child wellbeing and safety | Include - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guidance and Self-evaluation for Educational Settings \(highland.gov.uk\)](#)).

Queries/Concerns/Complaints Resolution

Schools operating with high levels of parent/carer involvement will be engaging with queries and concerns on a regular basis, as part of strong partnership working. Most of these will be routine and part of the day-to-day work of good schools. Good practice includes:

- Parents/carers should know and be able to easily connect with, the most appropriate person for their query/concern and schools should make clear how they choose to facilitate this. Highland Council Schools' Information about this process is included in the School Handbook.
- The basis for all interactions should be strong partnership working, with an understanding that everyone is seeking the best for the child's learning.
- Complex concerns may require meetings online or in school with Senior Leaders/ Teachers/ other partners/ other parents/carers.
- The purpose of these meetings will be to explore the query/concern in a solution-focused way, that helps the child's learning proceed in the best way possible.
- Where the staged approach outlined above does not resolve the matter satisfactorily, it may be necessary to move to the local authority for resolution (see complaints procedure below)

Complaints Procedure

Highland Council has a clearly defined process for responding to complaints which can be viewed on the council's How to Make a Complaint webpage ([How to make a complaint | How to make a complaint | The Highland Council](#)).

Highland Council recognises that there may be occasions when parents/carers wish to indicate concerns about the level and quality of the education service provided. Many of these concerns or complaints can be dealt with at school/setting level and parents/carers are encouraged to contact the school/setting in the first instance, to try to resolve their concerns.

If the issue is not resolved or if a parent/carer contacts the Council directly, the processes indicated on the Council's website will be followed and the parent/carer will be contacted by an officer of the Council. In some instances, a complaint may be referred back to the school/setting to investigate, as they may better understand the issues of concern.

The volume, nature and frequency of complaints are monitored by the Council and the information gathered is used to improve the service.

Ongoing Parental Engagement Strategy

Highland Council Education & Learning Service is committed to working with partners to strengthen support for families. A range of universal and targeted support has been developed over many years. The authority recognises the importance of these activities continuing to be developed and expanded.

The Policy Officer supporting Parental Representation

To encourage and support parent/carer representation, Highland Council Education & Learning Service employs a Policy Officer (PO), who has responsibility for parental engagement. The Policy Officer can be contacted at CALStaffing.Parent/careralEngagement@highland.gov.uk .

Officers meet with office bearers of the Highland Parent Council Partnership (HPCP) to discuss

matters of mutual interest, including education plans and developments. The HPCP is regarded as the parent/carer consultative group for the Education & Learning Service.

The Policy Officer will continue to promote effective parental engagement and provide support for Parent Councils. The Policy Officer will also ensure that ongoing parent/carer surveys are carried out, to ensure that their views are reflected in the development of future policies.

Appendix 2 - Highland Council Parental Engagement Strategy Improvement Plan (DRAFT)

Priority 1 - Strengthen parental representation in the life and work of early years and childcare settings, primary and secondary schools.			
Actions	Who	Measure	Impact
All parents/carers will be encouraged and supported to become involved in their school's Parent Council, to ensure a wide variety of views are represented.	Policy Officer/Schools/ Family Learning Team	Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Improved engagement with parent/carers and carers supports the identification and planning for areas for improvement.
Parent Councils consider how to support engagement with families living in the most deprived circumstances.	Policy Officer/Schools/ Family Learning Team	Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Greater and more effective involvement and engagement of parent/carers. Parent/carer and carer views are valued.
Parent/carers feel confident in their role in the recruitment of Headteacher and Depute Headteachers in line with LNCT 23.	Area E&L Managers /Policy Officer	Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Parents/carers are involved in the recruitment and appointment process, can represent the views of parents/carers and communicate with the parent forum around recruitment and appointment processes.
Priority 2 - Expand opportunities for all parents/carers to collaborate at all levels of the education system.			
Actions	Who	Measures	Impact
Sharing information to support Parent Councils to fulfil their role, including council officers meeting with the HPCP on a regular basis.	Policy Officer/Senior E&L Officers	Meeting notes, training plans/delivery, Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Improved communication, improved effectiveness in role
Communicate and distribute information from the National Parent Forum of Scotland on Parental Leadership.	Senior Officers/Policy Officer	Delivery of information. Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Parent/carers have an improved understanding of local and national information relevant to their roles.

The Highland Council will use the Annual Family Learning Survey and the National Parental Involvement and Engagement Census to inform improvements in parental involvement and engagement.	Policy Officer/Senior E&L Officers	Feedback on Self Evaluation tool, analysis of responses	Parent/carers' views are valued and responded to shape future services.
Priority 3 - Improve communication with parent/carers and families.			
Actions	Who	Measures	Impact
School handbooks will be developed in consultation with the Parent Council and Highland Council. Handbooks will be available in a range of formats.	Policy Officer/Headteachers/ Parent Council members	Review of school websites and handbooks	School handbooks are informative and user friendly.
Community Learning and Development/Community Planning Partnerships will share information about their own locality.	CLD officers and CPP, including 3 rd Sector	Delivery of information. parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Increased awareness of local youth, adult and community support and provision.
Develop a parent/carer leaflet summarising the Parental Involvement and Engagement Strategy	Family Learning Team/Policy Officer	Leaflet available in variety of formats and used by parent/carers	Improving parental knowledge and understanding of the strategy and action plan.
Parent/carers will be given clear information about who to contact about their children and how to raise a concern/complaint.	Schools/Policy Officer/ Family Learning Team	Parents/carers report that they know who to contact and how	Improved communication between parents/carers and school/early years settings.
Priority 4 - Support early learning and childcare settings, schools and parent/carers to utilise digital technology and online platforms to improve parental involvement and engagement			
Actions	Who	Measures	Impact
The Highland Council and schools will consult with parent/carers to identify the best ways to communicate digitally with parent/carers e.g. social media, texts, apps.	IT Team/Family Learning Team/Policy Officer	Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Increased number and wider range of parent/carers communicating and accessing information digitally.
The Highland Council will support Parent Councils with training and support, including on digital safety.	IT Team/Family Learning Team/Policy Officer	Training delivered. Training take up.	Increased parental knowledge, awareness, use and confidence of digital technology and digital safety.

		Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	
School documentation will be available to read or download digitally.	Schools	Track documentation availability and access by parent/carers. Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Parent/carers access and understand documentation and are more informed.

Priority 5 - Improve support to parent/carers and families to help them engage with their child's learning and development

Actions	Who	Measures	Impact
<p>Provide support and information for parents/carers to engage with their child's learning in and outwith school: This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping parents/carers to understand how their child learns from the early years. • What is being assessed and how. • how parents/carers can support their child's learning. • helping parent/carers to be actively involved in their children's learning, including discussion on next steps (including transitions). 	Family Learning Team and specialist services, as required	<p>Feedback from parents/carers on the effectiveness of the information provided.</p> <p>Uptake of Family Learning programmes</p>	<p>Parent/carers gain an increased knowledge and confidence in how their child learns in school to how to support their learning at home.</p> <p>Parent/carers know how to support and prepare their child for transitions e.g. home/early years/primary/secondary/work/study.</p> <p>Partnerships with schools and Community Learning and Development/Community Planning Partnerships will be strengthened and families will be connected locally with a range of opportunities.</p>

Priority 6 - Increase the opportunities for families to access family learning opportunities and programmes			
Actions	Who	Measures	Impact
Highland Council will work with partners to support and promote high quality Family Learning and share best practice across the partnership.	Officers and partner organisations	Families participate in high quality family learning experiences. Parent/carer consultation and survey feedback	Families are more involved in their school and community through attending a range of family learning opportunities. Parents/carers have an increased understanding of how to support their child's learning, development and emotional needs. Developments in the Family Learning offer support raising attainment and achievement.
Priority 7 - How Good is Our Strategy?			
Actions	Who	Measures	Impact
Ensure that parental involvement and engagement is reflected in strategic policies, improvement activity and inspection process.	Policy Officer Family Learning Team	Inspection reports. Improvement Plans Policy documents	Parental engagement and family learning opportunities increase and quality improves.
Use self-evaluation tools, including 'Learning Together' and 'How Good is our School', 'How good is our CLD' to support and improve Parental involvement, engagement and Family Learning.	Senior officers, schools, partner organisations	Use of tools to self-evaluate provision. Self-evaluation informs future planning	Accurate understanding of quality and impact of provision Self-evaluation results in continuous improvement
Support and challenge schools and partners to evidence parental involvement, engagement and family learning and share good practice.	Senior officers, schools, partner organisations, Policy Officer	Annual update on parent/carer Engagement, Involvement and Family Learning.	The annual update will inform future developments and the Action Plan.

Appendix 3 - Legislation, Guidance, Support and Advice

This guidance is based on the recommendations from various Scottish Government and Education Scotland documents. It is also compliant with the requirements of key legislation that is pertinent to this area of work with parent/carers/carers. Examples of the key documents are listed below:

- Building the Ambition: National Practice Guidance on Early Learning and Childcare and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Realising the Ambition: Being Me (2020)
- Pre-Birth to Three: Positive Outcomes for Scotland's Children and Families
- How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare?
- Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework for education
- Statutory guidance (2007) on the Scottish Schools (Parent/careral Involvement) Act 2006
- Scottish Government (2012) School Handbook Guidance Education Scotland's Family Learning Framework
- Review of Family Learning Education Scotland's Engaging Parent/carers and Families toolkit Education Scotland – What is Parent Involvement and Parent/carer Engagement?
- Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit
- 'Leading for parent/carer engagement: working towards partnership' Janet Goodall (2018)
- How Good is Our School? (fourth edition)
- How Dad Friendly is Our School (Fathers Network Scotland)

Some additional research studies to support practice is listed below:

- Aston, H. and Grayson, H (2013), Teacher Guide: Parent/careral Engagement and Narrowing the Gap in Attainment for Disadvantaged Children
- 'Good practice with fathers in children and family services', pp. 1-16, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), 30 08 June.
- Desforges, C. and Abouchar, A. (2003), The Impact of Parent/carer Involvement, Parent/carer Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review. National Numeracy Review. Research report RR433.
- Education Endowment Foundation (2016), Parent/carer Engagement – Toolkit <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/school-themes/parent/careral-engagement/>
- Ellis, S. and Sosu, E. (2014), Closing the Attainment Gap in Scottish Education. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

There are also a range of websites and guidance documents available to directly support parent/carers and wider family members that may be helpful in supporting the recommendations and aims of this document:

- [Helping Children Learn](#) - Involving non-resident parent/carers in their children's education (Children in Scotland and Families Need Fathers)
- [Advice and support for parent/carers and families Connect](#) (formally known as the Scottish Parent/carer Teacher Council) – advice on Parent/carer Councils.
- [Enquire](#) - Scotland's advice service for additional support for learning.
- [Thriving Families](#) - independent, rights-based, information, advice and support service for anyone involved in the care of children and young people, up to age 25.
- [My World of Work](#), Parent/carer advice – Advice and support to parent/carers when their child is making decisions about their career
- [National Parent/carer Forum of Scotland](#) – website includes a wide range of "Nutshell" advice guides on Scottish education, qualifications and reform programmes
- [Parentzone Scotland](#) - website for parent/carers and carers in Scotland, from early years to beyond school providing information about learning in Scotland, and practical advice and ideas to support children's learning at home in literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and science
- [Parent/carer Club](#) - practical advice for parent/carers covering a range of themes including, hints and tips on engaging with your child's learning from 0-5
- [Parenting Across Scotland](#) offers support to children and families in Scotland
- [Read, Write, Count](#) – for parent/carers of children in P1 – P3, providing practical advice to support your child's literacy and numeracy skills.
- Scottish Government (2009) [Guide to Parent/carers About School Attendance.](#)
- Scottish Government (2016) [A guide for parent/carers on choosing a school and the placing request system.](#)
- Scottish Qualifications Authority, [Advice to Parent/carers](#)