



National Parents Council (Primary)



Irish Primary Principals' Network



# Supporting **Each Other**

a guide to best practice for the  
effective partnership between  
Principals and Parent Associations



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# Introduction

The purpose of this document is to establish a framework for the effective partnership between the Parent Association and the school in line with the Education Act 1998. This framework has been jointly developed by the National Parents' Council - Primary (NPC-P) and the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN). The document supports an ethos of transparency and openness between all members of the school community.

Where effective partnership exists between home and school, the benefits are clear:

- children learn more, behave better and are happier at school
- teachers are more effective when they are supported by parents.

In addition, where there is an effective Parent Association in the school:

- parents can enjoy the support of other parents
- parents are enabled to meaningfully support the aims of the school.

IPPN and NPC-P hope that this publication will support both Parents and Principals as they work together to ensure that their school, provides the best possible education for all of the children that pass through its door

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# Parents as Partners

The Irish Constitution lays down the fundamental rights and responsibilities regarding the family and education in Article 42:

*“The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children”*

The Education Act (1998) recognises parents as partners within the education process. However, the level of involvement of parents varies widely. Many schools have fully-functioning Parent Associations affiliated to the NPC-P. Other schools have unaffiliated Parent Associations while many other schools have no formal structures for parental interaction with schools.

Parents rightly want the best for their children, as do teachers for their pupils. However, there are still some barriers to good home-school communication. When misunderstandings occur it is rarely through lack of goodwill from either party but, more likely, because of different perspectives from which both view the child:

- the parent sees the child in a small group in the home environment. The teacher sees the child in the context of a larger group in the school environment
- the parent knows the child’s personal history intimately. The teacher has a limited knowledge of the child’s background
- the parent is concerned with all of their child’s needs. The teacher, although concerned with all of the child’s needs, is primarily focused on the child’s educational needs.

# Parental Involvement in Schools

## 3.1 Parents and Boards of Management

Two parents – one mother and one father – of children in the school are elected to the Board of Management either by postal ballot or at a specially-convened meeting. The two elected parents are then the ‘representatives’ of the Parent Body on the Board of Management. As is the case with the one elected staff representative and the two co-opted community representatives, the two elected parents are now part of a ‘Body Corporate’ i.e. the Board of Management, whose function it is to manage the school. The two parent representatives contribute to and uphold the decisions and policies of the Board of Management. This means that, other than the agreed report from each Boards of Management meeting, all other matters must remain confidential.

They have no function in bringing individual parental complaints or the Parent Association’s issues to the Board. Such issues can be dealt with the agreed complaints procedure or brought to the Board of Management either through the Principal or by letter to the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

The two parent representatives on the Board of Management are entitled to be members of the committee of the Parent Association, and indeed that helps the representatives remain in touch with the constituents they represent. The NPC-P and IPPN recommend, however, that the parent representatives should not hold officer roles on the committee of the Parent Association, in order to avoid any possible conflict of interest with their role as members of the Board of Management.

# 3

## 3.2 Establishing a Parent Association

According to the Education Act 1998 (Section 26), the Board of Management is obliged to “give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a Parent Association and to a Parent Association when it is established”.

*“The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school”*

The Board of Management can assist the establishment of a Parent Association by supporting one of the following three activities:

- The Principal, the Chairperson of the Board of Management or the parent representatives on the Board might invite all parents/guardians of children in the school to a meeting.
- The Principal might write to parents asking for volunteers to establish a working group to organise a meeting of all parents
- A group of parents with an interest in setting up a Parent Association might hold a meeting at which they can do some initial planning with the support of the Principal/Board of Management.

In deciding to establish a Parent Association, consideration should be given as to its purpose and rationale. Aims and objectives need to be carefully considered so that there is no ambivalence about what the Parent Association is attempting to achieve.



Through one of these methods, a planning group is established, which then organises a meeting to which all parents are invited. At this meeting, a Parent Association Committee is elected.

*Education Act 1998 (Section 26) states:*

*“A Parent Association shall promote the interests of all the students in a school in cooperation with the Board, Principal, teachers and students of a school and for that purpose may:*

- *advise the Principal or Board on any matter relating to the school and the Principal or Board, as the case may be, shall have regard to any such advice and*
- *adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school”.*

In deciding to establish a Parent Association, consideration should be given as to its purpose and rationale. Aims and objectives need to be carefully considered so that there is no ambivalence about what the Parent Association is attempting to achieve. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly established from the outset so as to minimise confusion or conflict between the Parent Association, Board of Management, Principal and teachers.

### **3.3 Aims of the Parent Association**

- 1** To enable parents to play a meaningful role in supporting the aims & objectives of the school
- 2** To ensure parents are meaningfully consulted in the development of relevant school policies
- 3** To ensure that parents, Board of Management, Principal & staff work together to ensure the smooth operation of the school by adhering to agreed policies and procedures
- 4** To enable parents to contribute to an enhanced learning environment for pupils
- 5** To ensure that the work of the whole school community is at all times focused on the collective needs of all the children in the school
- 6** To identify and make available the skills and talents of individual parents that may be valuable to the school.

# 4 Rights and Responsibilities

Both the Parent Association and the school need to be aware of their own and each other's rights and responsibilities. This sets the framework for collaboration and an understanding of expectations.

## 4.1 Parents have the right to:

- expect that their child(ren) will be safe in school
- be treated with courtesy and respect
- have access to information about their children's performance and the educational programs and opportunities available to their children
- be actively involved in the education of their children
- have access to a complaints and appeals procedure.

## 4.2 Parents are responsible for:

- sending their children to school ready to learn
- ensuring that their children attend school regularly and arrive on time
- being aware of their children's work and progress
- keeping in touch with their children's teachers and Principal
- responding to communications from the school
- attending important school meetings and events
- complying with official school policies
- working in partnership with the school on matters relating to their children's school lives.

## 4.3 Principals & Teachers have the right to:

- be treated with courtesy and respect
- a private existence in their community
- due process and fairness in relation to any complaints from parents / guardians.

#### 4.4 Principals & Teachers are responsible for:

- ensuring the safety of the children in their care
- teaching their pupils to the best of their ability
- teaching the curriculum as prescribed
- complying with official school policies
- using appropriate teaching methods, allowing for differentiation depending on pupil needs and abilities
- evaluating and recording children's learning at regular intervals
- reporting children's progress to parents at regular intervals
- promoting partnership within the whole school community
- promoting communication with parents and the community.



# 5 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The following questions refer to issues that sometimes cause confusion. The clarification provided by these FAQs should lead to a common understanding among the members of the school community and therefore enhance communication and partnership.

## **5.1 In what areas of school life may a Parent Association be involved?**

A Parent Association may, as the Education Act states, promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the Board, Principal, teachers and students of a school and for that purpose may:

*“advise the Principal or the Board on any matter relating to the school and the Principal or Board, as the case may be, shall have regard to any such advice, and adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school”.*

SECTION 26, EDUCATION ACT 1998

There is no limit to what a Parent Association can do to support the Principal and teachers in achieving the aims of the school. However, the Parent Association plays a supporting role and must not hinder the professional role of the Principal and teachers.

## **5.2 Who sets the boundaries?**

It is very important that a Parent Association has a written constitution. A good constitution will ensure that all parents are included and that the Parent Association is open and transparent in the way it elects its officers and conducts its business. The constitution should also clarify the parameters of its involvement with the school. For example, the Parent Association should not involve itself in the professional work of a teacher within the classroom. The Principal, the Department of Education Inspectorate and the Board of Management have responsibility for teaching and learning. The Parent Association should refer individual parents to

follow the agreed procedures in the event of an issue relating to their own child. These procedures are set out in the *Board of Management Handbook* pp 318-319. All schools have specific policies designed to support overall development of the child. Such policies should be clearly communicated to all parents by the school.

### **5.3 Should the Principal or a designated teacher attend Parent Association meetings?**

The Principal has a central role in the school. He/she is responsible for the day to day management of the school and plays an important leadership role. The Principal is also likely to best know the needs of the school and to know whether or not a proposal is practical.

It is imperative therefore that the Parent Association and Principal develop a good working relationship and have a good system for communicating with each other with inbuilt review procedures.

This system may involve:

- the Principal / Deputy Principal being invited to attend all Parent Association meetings
- the Principal being invited to attend an agreed portion of Parent Association meetings
- the Chairperson (and Secretary) of the Parent Association meeting with the Principal/Deputy Principal before and after each meeting that is not attended by the them.

The key point is that frequent and open communication is essential to good relationships.

### **5.4 If a Principal/teacher has children in the school, is he/she entitled to be a member of the Parent Association?**


Yes. It is important that all members of the Parent Association, including staff members who are also parents, recognise that when involved in the Parent Association, they are acting exclusively in their capacity as a parent and not as a staff member.

### **5.5 Where should Parent Association meetings take place?**

All Parent Association meetings should take place in the school. Provision should be made to ensure that there is no disruption to normal school business. Appropriate measures should be put in place for caretaking, security etc.

### **5.6 Should a Parent Association be involved in the drawing up of school policies?**

It is important that parents are consulted when school policies are being developed. However, not all school policies require input from parents e.g. the school's plan for



the teaching of mathematics. Parents should be centrally involved in developing any school policy that directly affects the children or themselves such as the Code of Behaviour, Healthy Eating, Bullying Prevention, Use of Mobile Phones etc. Depending on school size, different approaches can be used to involve the Parent Association and parents in this process. All of these policies should be made available to parents.

### **5.7 Does this include curriculum policies?**

It is important to be aware that the curriculum is prescribed by the DES, not by the school. The teaching staff play a central role in drawing up curricular policies, which refer to how the school will implement the curriculum. The Board of Management members, including its parents' representatives can and often contribute to the whole-school curriculum planning process. The Primary School Curriculum 1999 makes provision for parents to play an important role in their children's learning.

*'Parents can make a big contribution to the education of their children in school. This is why they have been given a distinct role in supporting the implementation of the curriculum. A parent will be encouraged to become involved in a number of ways. The school plan will identify ways in which parents can be involved in organisational planning for the curriculum. This might include arranging for a grandparent to come and talk to a class about his/her experience of the past as part of the history curriculum. It could also involve parents in helping to arrange or supervise out-of-service activities, like exploring the local environment'* PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM - YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING, GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS (1999)

### **5.8 Are there rules regarding the finances of the Parent Association?**

Parent Association and Board of Management finances require both openness and accountability. The rules governing both Board of Management and Parent Association finances are clearly laid out in the *Board of Management Information Manual 2007* (pg. 35) as issued by the Department of Education and Science.

Regarding the Parent Association finances the Information Manual stipulates that:

- a Parent Association is entitled to raise funds for the administration and activities of the Association
- full accounts must be maintained and presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Parent Association
- the Parent Association should consult with the Board about fundraising for the school or school projects
- the approval of the Board is needed prior to the raising of such funds
- the expenditure of these funds is by the Board of Management in consultation with the Parent Association
- the Board prepares a total account of income and expenditure at the end of each year and this is available to parents

- any funds raised must be used for the purpose(s) for which the money was collected
- if, in exceptional circumstances, it is not necessary for the Board to use all of the funds collected for the purpose specified, the Board will communicate this to the Parent Association and, where appropriate, the local community.

### **5.9 What are the most common activities that a Parent Association might undertake?**

Every Parent Association will be different, depending on the context and needs of their school. Typical activities might include some of the following:

- providing opportunities for parents to meet informally and learn from each other's experiences
- organising events where parents, teachers and board members can meet and get to know one another
- organising guest speakers to address parents, this can be done jointly with parents from neighbouring schools
- working in partnership with the principal and teachers in the development and review of school policies, such as the anti-bullying policy, code of behaviour etc.
- supporting the school with the organisation of special events e.g. to include people from the local community in celebrating an anniversary or a multi-cultural event
- helping to run a parents' room where this is available
- maintaining a parents' page on the school website
- circulating a Parent Association newsletter
- maintaining a Parent Association notice board in the school
- maintaining an area of the school library or parents' room dedicated to parent information
- welcoming new parents both to the locality and the school
- linking with local organisations such as health boards and county councils to promote positive communication and partnership
- organising new and second-hand textbook sales
- organising new and second-hand uniform sales
- fundraising, in consultation with the Principal and Board of Management
- supporting the Principal and staff with school events such as sports day, school trips, liturgical and other ceremonies
- supporting the Principal and staff with projects such as the *Green Schools* and *Digital School* initiatives
- supporting the Principal and staff with specific schemes such as shared reading
- supporting school projects that require local knowledge e.g. local history, a grandparent / parent sharing their story of life in earlier times
- providing practical assistance when requested at certain times of the school year e.g. changing classroom furniture, updating inventories of library books, school plays, educational tours etc.

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