

Parental Engagement Strategy 2018

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1.0 Introduction

Both globally and nationally it is recognised that parents are the most single most important influence on their children's development, learning and achievement.

The involvement and engagement of parents in their children's learning is recognised as a key element in raising attainment through support, help and encouragement given at home and whilst at school.

2.0 Purpose and Vision for Aberdeen City

Families, communities and schools learning and achieving together

Aberdeen City Council is committed to supporting and encouraging parents to be actively involved in their children's learning. Our aim is for children, families and Education and Children and Services to learn and work together to raise attainment and help narrow the achievement gap for all Aberdeen's children.

The Parental Engagement Strategy will communicate a clear plan of how services will work together to support all children, their families, schools and their community.

3.0 Guiding Principles

- Parents and families have the most influence on their child's attitudes, behaviour and achievement outcomes
- Parents, children and young people and staff are valued partners in learning; everyone has an important and different role to play
- True parental engagement can only take place when everyone commits to developing an ethos of mutual trust and respect
- Every parent should be encouraged to take an active role in their children's education and learning and given the appropriate information and support
- Parents, children and young people's views and opinions are valued and should be included and taken into account when making decisions that affect their family, school and community

4.0 Definitions

Parental Involvement and Parent Engagement

There are many ways to understand and define what is meant by parental involvement and engagement. Parents can be involved in school activities without actually being engaged in their child's learning. For clarity, the following terms are defined as below:

Involvement: occurs by **coming in** to school either informally by dropping off, picking up or attending formally through parent consultations, attending events and receiving reports and sharing information.

Engagement: occurs when parents are **actively** involved in supporting learning in the home, at school and in the community through a variety of different ways. This is through providing a supportive home environment for children to grow and develop, where parents have aspirations for achievement; and where parents participate in school life and communicate regularly and have a positive relationship between home and school. Harris et al 12: 2009.

Parent

Where we use the word parent in this document this refers to anyone with parental responsibilities, a carer and /or any person who is liable to maintain or has parental responsibilities (within the meaning of section 1(3) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) in relation to, or has care of a child or young person.

Child

A child means a young person under the age of 18.

Family

Family includes any person who has parental responsibility for the child and any other person with whom the child has been living.

Looked after Child

The legal status of a Looked After Child is determined by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. A child becomes Looked After, either as a result of appearing before a Children's Hearing or when a parent requests that the local authority provide care and accommodation for their child/young person.

Family learning

Family learning encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning. Scottish Family Learning Network, 2016

Corporate Parent

The formal and local partnership between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers. Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

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5.0 Links to Legislation, Policy and National Priorities

This section outlines the primary legislation which directly relates to supporting parents in their children's learning and the life of the school. It also includes related legislation and policies which inform practice.

Direct legislation and policy

- Parent Involvement Act 2006 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/8/contents>
- School Handbook Legislation - The Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2012/130/made>
- National Improvement Framework 17 <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/8072>
- Education Governance: Next Steps - Empowering our teachers, parents and communities to deliver excellence and equity for our children <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/06/2941>

Related legislation

- How Good is Our School 4th Edition <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/frwk2hgios>
- Delivering Excellence & Equity in Scottish Education <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/06/3853>
- Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000
- <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/6/contents>
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- The Equality Act 2010 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- Education (Scotland) Act 2016 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/8/enacted>
- Education(Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2009/7/pdfs/asp_20090007_en.pdf
- Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2011/1/part/1>
- Children (Scotland) Act 1995 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/36/contents>

Policies Local & National

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>
- Integrated Children's Services Aberdeen 2017-2020
- <http://www.aberdeengettingitright.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Aberdeen-City-Integrated-Childrens-Services-Plan-2017-2020.pdf>
- Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013 <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2013/03/7748>
- Review of Family learning – Supporting equity and excellence <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/review-of-family-learning>

6.0 Roles, Rights and Responsibilities

Parental engagement in supporting children's learning is everyone's responsibility. It involves a wide range of services and requires commitment by all staff across Education and Children Services. It is a team effort and requires everyone to play their part to deliver the best services for all children and their families.

What can parents do?

The more that parents engage in their child's learning, the more likely it is that they will help raise their child's attainment. What parents do with their children at home and throughout their education is much more significant than any other factor open to educational influence.

Desforges 2003

When parents are actively involved in their child's learning and work together with school and community, their children will do better. Parents can make a positive difference by:

- Encouraging their children to be positive about learning at home and school
- Making sure their children are attending school regularly
- Letting the school know about anything that is likely to impact on their children's progress, health and wellbeing or safety
- Asking for help when they need support with parenting and family life
- Supporting the values, rules and expectations of their children's school
- Encouraging their children to join after-school clubs or community activities
- Engaging in the life of the school in as many ways as possible
- Talking to them about their future and the kind of job they think they would enjoy
- Supporting the work of the Parent Council / Parent Voice group and Pupil Voice Groups

What can head teachers do?

Head teachers have a clear role in leading the parental engagement agenda through developing positive partnerships with all parents. They can do this by:

- Ensuring the school offers a warm welcome to all families
- Communicating clearly, without jargon to the parent forum about all aspects of school life in a way they understand
- Taking account of parents' differing needs and circumstances of families including language, culture and social context
- Building parental engagement opportunities into curriculum activities
- Creating a range of opportunities for parents to get involved in their children's learning
- Having flexible arrangements to encourage involvement in the wider aspects of the school
- Involving parents in decisions affecting their children's education
- Ensuring they have a close working relationship with key workers and team managers in Children's homes where appropriate
- Encouraging evaluation and feedback to shape the school improvement plan, learning and teaching policies so that parents are fully engaged in their children's learning
- Ensuring meetings and processes are delivered in a family friendly way
- Having an active parent council / voice group

Families, schools and communities learning and achieving together.

- Encouraging parent groups to work and support Pupil Voice Groups

What will Aberdeen City Council do?

Aberdeen City Council is required under the Scottish Schools (Parent Involvement) Act 2006 to have a strategy in place that promotes the involvement of parents in their children's learning. The introduction of the National Improvement Framework requires an annual report on our work relating to parental engagement.

We will actively promote and support the following:

- Our communication will be clear using plain English, ensuring our consultations are timely with our documents readily accessible with non-jargonised educational language.
- We will share the Parental Engagement Strategy with all parents, schools and services and explain the role they play
- Report on all our parent engagement activities related to our action plan
- Provide support, training and information for parents, staff and parent councils
- Ensure our schools provide increased opportunities for parents to become more involved in their child's learning
- Continue to improve all aspects of parental engagement by sharing good practice
- Ensure our processes and protocols for multi-agency meetings are parent friendly
- Actively involve parents in the appointment of Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teacher posts
- Consult and implement feedback from parents to improve services that directly affect children and families
- Create opportunities for dialogue and sharing information between Parent Councils and Aberdeen City Council
- Support the work of Aberdeen Parent Forum Council
- Implement the recommendations of the Parent Involvement Act 2006 review

Our Corporate Parenting Role

As a Corporate Parent Aberdeen City Council wants the same outcomes for our looked after children as any good parent would want for their own children. We will accept responsibility for them and make their needs a priority.

We believe that Corporate Parenting is not just a responsibility. It is also a real opportunity to improve the futures of looked after children. Success will rely on many different organisations working together to make a vital contribution to support every child in our care.

The Virtual School in Aberdeen City was set up to support the educational achievement of the children it looks after, regardless of where they are placed. The role of the Virtual School Head Teacher is to support improvements in the educational progress and attainment / achievement of all children looked after by the authority, including those that have been placed in schools in other authorities. Children who are part of the Virtual School remain the responsibility of the school at which they are enrolled.

7.0 Overcoming barriers to support families participating in children's learning

This strategy recognises that every parent want the best for their child. However not all parents will find it easy to become involved in their child's education - even so we must continue to build relationships with all parents, using creative and engaging ways to connect. It is important to understand why this might be the case and ensure we do our best to engage all parents.

8.0 How will we increase Parent Engagement in Aberdeen?

The evidence is convincing; families have a major influence on children's achievement in school and though life. When schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to better in school, stay in school longer and like school more.
Henderson and Mapp 2002:16

Research, policy and legislation all point to improved outcomes for children and young people when families are engaged and fully involved in their children's learning.

Dr Joyce Epstein's research identifies six areas where schools can work together with families and communities to increase attainment in learning and participation. We have adapted and added another theme to account for our needs in Aberdeen. We will define the key areas where we will aim to improve so that families, staff, schools and communities make an impact on children's learning and achievement.

1. Communication
2. Supporting Parenting
3. Sharing Learning
4. Volunteering
5. Decision making
6. Collaboration with the Community
7. Staff training

Theme 1- Communication

What do we mean by Communication?

“Communication between home and school has to be regular, two way and meaningful. Effective communication requires school initiated contact with parents and parent invited contact with school, where both parties provide vital information about a child’s strengths, challenges and wider achievements. To communicate effectively everyone must be aware of, and address issues such as cultural diversity, language differences and any additional needs and barriers that need to be overcome.”

Harris et al 2009

What could this look like in practice?

- All communication is clear and in plain English, translated if relevant to the school context. It is readily accessible with non-jargonised educational language
- Information is timely, with advance notice for school events, celebrations and assemblies
- The school’s vision, values and aims, handbook and policies are clear and help parents, pupils and staff work together. Everyone is clear about their role and responsibilities.
- Have regular opportunities to find out what help parents need to support their child’s learning
- Families know about school life and special events and have opportunities to get involved in learning, volunteering and how to access support for their children and themselves
- Technology is used to share information: Groupcall, emails, Google classroom, Twitter; drop in sessions, website, classroom and school blogs and other social media apps
- Flexibility with interview times for parent consultations particularly if other siblings attend the school.
- Focus groups for school improvement such as tea /talk sessions, Head teacher /parent weekly drop in sessions
- Increased flow of communication between home and school relating to learning, sharing valuable and relevant information about a child in good and difficult times
- Increased awareness and understanding of the important role that pupils, parents and schools have in supporting learning and achievement
- Enables parents and teachers to monitor their child’s progress and support their learning at every stage at home, school and community
- Positive relationships with families so that support can be offered/asked for at the right time
- Everyone has a shared understanding of the values and ethos of school

Theme 2- Supporting Parenting

To be most effective, parental engagement needs to be rooted in the home, in an attitude that fosters learning in the home, as this has been shown to be most positively related to children's achievement. Desforges and Abouchar 2003; Sylva et al. 2003

What do we mean by supporting parenting?

Family plays a key role in a child's learning and development. Helping and supporting families to establish a positive home setting helps children people do better, achieve more when their parents encourage them and have aspirations to support their learning and development at home.

What could this look like in practice?

- Families feel supported, valued and feel they are able to contribute to their child's learning and development
- Families feel confident in asking for help and know where to get information and resources
- Families will be increasingly engaged, understand and value all aspects of learning at the home, wider community and at school
- Parents feel enabled to support others by setting up or using positive parent networks
- Parental confidence and engagement will increase when supported, and given information about their child's learning
- Families have access to parenting programmes, learning workshops and family support workers to help build confidence to increase their skills

Programmes used include:

- Family Learning Team approaches: e.g. Family Storytime, Confidence and Assertiveness, Family literacy and numeracy, Budgeting, Chef Up
- Family support workers
- Community Learning – e.g. Adult learning Digital literacy, learning English,
- PEEP Parent as Early Educators
- Bookbug and Bookbag sessions in library and school
- St Machar Pupil Support
- Barnardos
- Home Start support
- Aberlour Trust working with families who have learning disabilities
- Bridge the Gap - Kinship carers support group
- Educational Psychologists: Support / advice to parents, Emotion Coaching, ADHD for parents,
- Parent Support Groups - ASN
- Libraries Storytime sessions
- Dads Only events
- Family Nurse Partnership work with teenage mums

Theme 3 - Sharing Learning – home, school and community

“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)

What do we mean by this?

Recognising and valuing learning at home and community, emphasises the important role parent’s play in supporting children to learn. When schools intentionally share, celebrate and actively involve families in their children’s learning experiences everyone benefits. There are a number of ways to engage parents with learning:

Information to support learning, where schools and services connect parents to classroom learning through a variety of tips, resources, information evenings and digital technology.

Family Learning activities - encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children’s learning

Through learning – where schools and / or partners provide opportunities for parents to be learners; creating adult learning opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding through their own experiences to support learning

Sharing about learning – where parents and staff come together to learn about the processes of learning and understand methods to improve children’s attainment and achievement.

What could this look like in practice?

- Develop resources which help families support their children at home
- Developing digital workshops to support Google classroom, Text help etc.
- Provide meaningful home activities that parents can do with their child at home, e.g. home learning tasks based on practical literacy and numeracy or personal skill activities that involve their families
- Increase opportunities to stay and play, share celebrations, or hold open events where children and parents learn together
- Host events that value and celebrate the language and culture of families
- Create opportunities for parents to learn and understand the following: stages of child and adolescent development, positive behaviour techniques, support health & wellbeing in children, developing language skills
- Sharing events to help understanding the process of learning, learning styles and strategies to help at home with attainment and achievement
- Providing adult learning approaches and opportunities to support digital, language, literacy and numeracy skills in conjunction with other Adult Learning Services
- Providing parents with useful information about where their children are in their learning, what progress they have made over time, and what they might do to support their child’s learning
- Providing parent/teacher workshops targeting areas of need or interest such as child resilience, growth mind-set, literacy and numeracy and other health and wellbeing areas
- Involve families in setting goals for their children’s learning and build the practice of involving parents into target setting and career planning discussions with their children
- Develop local strategies to support transitions between early childhood education and care, primary school and secondary school, higher education and developing workforce links

Theme 4 - Decision Making - Parent Voice / Council

What do we mean by decision making?

Parents will be actively supported in having a stronger role in the life of the school; such as school improvement, policies, identifying and communicating priorities for supporting families with learning. Parents views will be sought and actively involved in Aberdeen City Council consultations, strategy and policy development about matters that directly affect their children, school and community.

Education Governance 2017

What could this look like in practice?

- Schools will have an active Parent Council with fair parental representation. e.g. ethnic, faith, gender and Additional Support Needs
- Parent Councils who fully understand their role and responsibility and use this to support and impact on school improvement
- Effective communication of parents' views and ideas to support school and community
- Deliver specific support to parents around supporting child's learning needs
- School seeks guidance on how best to involve families in the life of school
- Active involvement of parents in school's self-evaluation
- Children and parents are on decision-making groups e.g. Rights Respecting Schools
- PTA/PCs are active in supporting school community and applying for grants or fund raising for resources or specific projects
- Parents are involved in genuine consultation on issues such as Poverty Proofing, Pupil Equity Funding, School Improvement Planning

Theme 5 -Volunteering

What do we mean by this?

People volunteer for a variety of reasons, for some it offers the chance to give something back to school and community or make a difference to the people around them. While for others it provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge. Family volunteers support and enrich their children's learning by giving time, skills, and resources during the school day, after school and the wider community.

What could look like in practice?

- Volunteer induction sessions delivered to help parents work safely and effectively within school so parent skills are matched within classes/school
- Trips and visits for classes are supported by parents
- The Curriculum is enhanced by parents sharing skills, talents and interests e.g. developing young workforce, business opportunities, mentoring and sharing knowledge
- Class and group activities are regularly supported by parents who know the children
- Extracurricular clubs and activities are supported or developed e.g. Coding clubs, Duke of Edinburgh Award, sport and arts
- School libraries are supported and developed
- Children gain knowledge and insight into the world of work through parents' input
- Volunteers facilitate events that help fundraise for equipment, trips and resources
- Parents are more confident, develop new skills and move on further learning opportunities

and wider achievement

Theme 6 – Collaboration with Community

What do we mean by this?

We want to identify, coordinate resources and people to work together to strengthen and enrich the opportunities for social, educational, recreational and cultural experiences for all children, families and their school community.

What could it look like?

- Learning experiences for children are enriched by community resources and expertise
- Families are able to access programmes in their local community e.g. health, cultural, recreational and social support
- Families connect with community programs for their children such as mentoring, tutoring, and business partnerships
- Services work together to create community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for children and young people
- Increased partnerships with schools to provide for local needs of children and families e.g. counselling, art, cultural, health, social opportunities.
- Community benefits from the contribution of children's families, and schools working together (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities).
- Applications for funding is targeted by local people to meet local need
- Ensure equal opportunities for children and families to access activities and opportunities
- Families, school and community work together on multicultural events and activities

Theme 7 - Staff Training

Our training will improve staff awareness and effectiveness when working with children and their families.

What will it look like in practice?

- Staff will have an increased understanding of their role in relation to national policies, legislation and professional responsibilities when supporting children and families in learning.
- Staff are effective and confident in listening and supporting families within the community context
- Staff are more effective in supporting EAL using translation / interpretation services
- Staff will have increased knowledge and understanding of autism and other conditions which enable staff to better support families
- Staff effectively use technology and resources available to share learning with families
- Effective collaboration with other services who can support and work alongside families to support parenting
- Staff understand adult and family learning approaches when planning activities that engage parents
- Schools have effective family friendly multi-agency meetings
- Staff will recognise adult numeracy and literacy concerns, be able to respond and signpost appropriately

9.0 Addressing Concerns and Complaints

Aberdeen City Council recognises the vital role that parents play in supporting their children's learning and is committed to fostering positive relationships with parents. No matter how strong partnerships are, or how good our policies are sometimes things can still go wrong and there may be occasions when parents wish to express unhappiness or dissatisfaction with Council services, policies or staff behaviour.

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/complaints>

When a complaint is made it must be handled in accordance with the Complaints Handling Procedure which provides two opportunities to resolve issues internally. In order to maintain positive relationships, it is usually better for all, if parental concerns or complaints can be resolved at school level and as quickly as possible.

If a concern or complaint cannot be resolved at the frontline resolution stage then it will progress to 'Investigation' stage and a detailed investigation into the matter will be carried out. Complaints that are complex, serious or high risk and require detailed, lengthy investigation may be dealt with at the 'Investigation' stage from the outset.

Once the two internal stages of the complaints handling procedure have been exhausted, the complainant must be directed to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to carry out an independent external review of the matter. The SPSO is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

Once the SPSO reaches a decision they may contact the council with recommendations for improvement and will provide dates by which the recommendations must be implemented. The council is required to report back to the SPSO and evidence that the required action has been taken.