# NPFS Focus Groups with Primary Parents

**St Roch’s Primary and Golfhill Primary 17 Nov 2016**

**Total of 10 parents**

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# Key Messages

Teachers’ attitudes and demeanour are crucial in ensuring parents feel supported

Parents appreciated the support provided when teachers **listened**, **responded**, kept parents **informed** and ensured any appropriate response was **sustained** for an appropriate period of time. When this behaviour was in place, schools felt open and approachable. The manner in which teachers approach issues involving the child is important;

*‘…not stern, they have to be calm and caring.’*

This is accompanied by the effort on behalf of teachers to be **approachable**, and actively make themselves **available** at times when parents are nearby. Parents mentioned teachers and headteachers being around after school in the foyer or playground and seeking to speak with parents to address problems or offer feedback. This is additional to making a short appointment.

*‘…our headteacher is present, not tucked away in an office.’*

Parents are impressed with changing and flexible local curriculums and practices

In one case, parents had seen the school change and grow. Part of this was in terms of the facilities which had improved and become **safer**. They also found the work the school did with their children to be **flexible**, and **changing** all the time.

Parents saw teachers constantly **learning**, **developing** and **trying** new things and saw this as a good thing. Parents want the school to be able to adapt to meet the needs of their children. For example, they supported new initiatives to improve pupil behaviour involving school ‘houses’ scoring points which encouraged collaborative efforts. They appreciate more innovative ideas around discipline and praise like ‘golden time,’ and other rewards and recognition programmes.

Parents look favourably at school trips, extra-curricular activities, and outings

For all parents the curriculum could have more, and make the most of current trips, extra-curricular activities like sport, and formal educational outings. They looked favourably at the sporting activities which were often done in 6-week blocks to schools. This same enthusiasm was shown for the example of teachers being able to send children outside on an ad hoc basis and play more interesting games than sitting in a classroom all day. One parent recommended the ‘daily mile’ as a regular walking activity which runs on restless energy. Others made more of formal trips and outings outside of school which were valuable for learning more about the world and which they knew their children appreciated greatly. This was true for those parents who were not themselves born in Scotland but who hoped their children could learn more about how the world works, about citizenship, the hospital, farms and food production through trips. Their impression is that **empowering** teachers will make this difference along with **increased funding**.

Parents did not always have enough advance information to plan to help their child learn

 Some parents reported that they were aware of the broad topics covered by their children currently. Where this was a specialist topic like ‘space’ this was less of a problem. Other parents raised the issue, that despite welcoming flexibility and change in the curriculum, they lacked the textbook, or course guide, and structured guidance which they expected could walk them through their child’s learning step by step.

Parents found they could gain regular updates on the progress of pupils work through jotters which did allow **some forward planning**, but a **yearly prospect was felt to be helpful and they did not feel they has access to this**.

Valuable support for parents with English as an additional language

Parents for whom English was a **second language** found additional support and outreach around language invaluable. For some this took the form of successful English as an Additional Language **home visits** where additional support was offered linking home-life with work done at school. For others they attended afterschool clubs which offered language support to groups of around 5. They noted the value of interpreters being present at parents’ nights.

Unique challenges for parents with English as an additional language

Those parents for whom English was an additional language were sending their children to additional schooling provided in other languages. There were differences noted between the work offered at such schools and those of mainstream school. They found these schools had a different system of exams and workbooks to support coursework. This meant their extra-curricular work clashed somewhat and felt more substantial than their children’s’ mainstream schooling.

Parents identified measures which they believe would help overcome some of the challenges they faced around language. They noted that the school handbook was only in English which meant they were unsure about the processes of the school, and what was required of them when first sending their child to school. They noted how their children’s language skills often surpass their own and that, like the other children, they are also required to be messengers between the school and home. On these occasions, and when learning in general, they thought the school could make more effort to ensure that they fully understood the messages. They noted how their additional schooling teachers’ broach the language divide using an increased numbers of pictures, numbers and concepts which can be grasped without knowledge of a language. Their idea was that this would be hugely beneficial in the first 3 years of school in particular but could then be phased out.

Valuable support for all parents

As well as informal contact with teachers, parents noted the value of more organised activity. There was emphasis placed on organised support offered more frequently than biannual parents evenings.

**Open afternoons** **and joint afterschool clubs** increased the capacity of parents to support and understand their child’s needs. One such club, ‘Families in Partnership’ offered a short weekly curriculum explaining the means of teaching maths and literacy which were taking place at school. This typically involved a series of stations with different creative means of learning using take-home activities and props. Parents were given a pack to accompany the club and this was noted as having been taken up and used by parents. At these events, parents gained an understanding of teaching, and the practical tools and skills to assist at home. Such home-help was also personalised to the ways it was being taught in the specific classrooms of their children which parents would not have known otherwise.

Open afternoons or assemblies encouraged parents to attend with teacher and child in the class altogether. The emphasis here was on bringing parents into the classrooms as part of a more **continuous process of communication**. They thought such events were notable too for the organised activities for the child which typically involved **presenting** ideas to the assembled group. Such activity was widely thought to be beneficial for the child’s **development** and **maturity**.

Use of the internet and social media has increased awareness of school activity

Parents found that schools were more able to publish information in an appropriate and effective manner using social media than before this was used. Despite some concern over their own computer literacy, parents suggested that phones are commonly used to access this information.

*‘…there is more contact with the school; years ago you used to just send them off and you had to visit face to face.’*

The types of online posts allowed **achievements** to be publicised, the increased sharing of **photographs** related to school activity, and increased school opportunities to distribute **event** **information** and **reminders**. In both schools, the school handbook was felt to be a useful guide (despite language barriers) to much of what parents wanted to know, and this was on the website of both schools. This online information increased awareness across all levels of the school activity. It therefore helped parents understand what to expect in coming years for their child, and what to expect from the school generally.