Review of Part 1 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and creation of a Family Justice Modernisation Strategy - A Consultation

The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) is a volunteer led organisation. We work in partnership with national and local government and other organisations involved in education and child wellbeing issues to ensure that parents play a full and equal role in education. When parents are involved in their children’s learning, it benefits children, families and schools: children do better. We welcome the opportunity to comment on this question regarding the involvement of non-resident parent in education decisions and provision of information to non-resident parent about their children’s learning

In 2016 NPFS were commissioned by Scottish Government to conduct a review of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. Overall, parents were fairly satisfied with the relationship they have with their child’s school. While there were some issues, communication was thought to be good and they felt they had ample opportunity to get involved with school life. The main concern for most parents was one of time and having the flexibility to get involved around their other work and family commitments. However, it was recognised that this overarching viewpoint hides the key issue that this does not apply to all parents equally, while schools are effectively involving some parents in their child’s school life and learning there are certain groups such as non-resident parents that are not being included to the same extent. Independent research to inform the review found that parents (including non-resident parents) are not always aware of or provided with information about the opportunities available to them. It is right that Scottish Government seek to change this and action is certainly required. However, changes to enrolment and update forms are not enough. At present the majority of schools use SEEMiS for information management. Even in those authorities where they have gathered the addresses of both parents, schools must be encouraged to actually send information to both contacts and not just the one marked as the main contact. Similar processes for Groupcall need to be rolled out. For these reasons we would suggest that guidance would be most appropriate and would suggest that the forthcoming changes to be made to the Statutory Guidance that accompanies the Parental Involvement Act would be a suitable place for inclusion. Guidance should also cover the issue of surnames as suggested in the consultation document.

It was noted in the Review that the key limitation to current parental representation arrangements is that parent Councils could do a better job of representing the views of all parents. This was particularly in relation to non-resident parents, those with lower levels of literacy and those with English as an additional language. The most effective parent councils seek to ensure high-quality two-way communications with all members of the wider parent forum, including non-resident parents. Parent Councils throughout the process, and regular feedback from our local authority volunteers tell us that parent councils often face barriers within schools to communicate with their parents. We would ask that whichever option is deemed most suitable (a standard Scottish Government form or guidance for local authorities) that consideration is also given for provision on enrolment forms to allow email addresses of both parents to be shared with the Parent Council.