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**6th August 2018**

**Parental Responsibilities and Rights**

**Should the Scottish Government do more to encourage schools to involve non-resident parents in education decisions?**

Yes. 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 the question regarding the involvement of non-resident parents in education decisions and provision of information to non-resident parents about their children’s learning.

In 2016, the NPFS was 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 seeks 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 local authorities where the addresses of both parents have been obtained, 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. Guidance for this would be most appropriate; therefore, we suggest this is included in the forthcoming changes to the Statutory Guidance that accompanies the Parental Involvement Act. Guidance should also cover the issue of surnames, as suggested in the consultation document.

It was also 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 communication with all members of the wider parent forum, including non-resident parents. According to parent councils responding to the Review, and feedback from our local authority volunteers, parent councils often face barriers within schools to communicate with their parents. We ask that whichever option is deemed most suitable (a standard Scottish Government form or guidance for local authorities), consideration is also given for provision on enrolment forms to allow email addresses of both parents to be shared with parent councils.