

EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

CABINET – 14 JANUARY 2009

UPDATE ON DIRECTORATE/PARENT, PUPIL AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS IN NOVEMBER 2008

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of recent consultations between the Educational Directorate team and parent, pupil and community representative groups.

2. BACKGROUND

Parents

- 2.1 The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 covers three levels of engagement with parents which include: learning at home; home/school partnership and parental representation.
- 2.2 The Act reinforces the role of parents in supporting children's learning and recognises that parents/carers are the most important influences on young people's lives. Parents who take an active and supportive role in their children's learning make a difference in improving attainment and achievement. It is therefore incumbent that the Department of Educational and Social Services (ESS) establishes its own programme, to supplement what already happens in schools, for parents to influence decision making in educational policy and practice in East Ayrshire and also to allow the ESS Department to be fully aware of the issues of most concern to parents and carers in the authority.
- 2.3 The ESS Department has put into place a range of communication and consultation mechanisms to ensure parents and other stakeholders have access to appropriate educational information using a wide range of channels, including the Parent Councils and the Council Web site. Summary leaflets and flyers related to educational matters are also circulated to all parents of children in East Ayrshire. A recent example of this was the flyer promoting the 'Curriculum for Excellence'. The lead spokespersons for Lifelong Learning formally launched this flyer at a photo call during the Parents' Open Family Morning in November 2008. (See 2.6)
- 2.4 A Parental Involvement Strategy Group was established in October 2006 and meets once a term. The remit of the group includes representing Parent Councils from all education sectors across the authority and acting as a consultative forum for Directorate/parent discussions on educational matters. The Head of Schools chairs the meetings and a Quality Improvement Officer, responsible for parental liaison, is also a member of the group. The Strategy group have discussed a wide range of issues. Some examples include: discussion on the Curriculum for Excellence; new HMle reporting programmes; school refurbishment programmes; transport issues and developing Parent Council websites. At the last meeting issues discussed included: the authority response to the national consultation on 'safeguarding our rural schools'; feedback on the family open day; school improvement planning and promoting positive behaviour in schools. The most recent Parent Strategy group minute (17 November 2008) is available in the elected member's portal to give fuller examples of the issues discussed at the meetings.

- 2.5 The Department of ESS hosts an annual 'open day' in the Grand Hall for families to give them opportunity to witness some of the good practice in East Ayrshire schools and establishments. The theme in November 2008 was 'health and well being'. All nine Learning Partnerships, Community Learning and Development and Onsite services took part and each managed a stall/s. There was a large turnout of parents, carers and young people, who were able to taste the quality food produced by Onsite, watch a dance display and enjoy a wide range of excellent examples, some inter-active, of how schools were linking the curriculum to the key health and well being themes. The feedback from all of those who attended was very positive and the model will run again next year.
- 2.6 The Executive Director and Head of Schools host regular 'Listening Suppers' which give interested parents/carers an opportunity to have an informal discussion about educational matters in a relaxed environment. The most recent event took place at St Joseph's Academy in November 2008. There was a healthy turnout of parents and extensive discussion took place on a range of issues of interest to parents. These covered a large number of topics including: the Curriculum for Excellence; selection and recruitment of promoted staff; careers advice in schools and alcohol, drugs and road safety advice in schools. The education estate management strategy for the Council was also discussed as was the provision available across the authority for children with additional support needs, including physical disabilities. A copy of the minute of the last meeting is available in the member's portal to give a more detailed summary of the topics raised. Informal feedback from parents/carers who attended was very positive and the model will continue in different geographical areas of the authority in 2009 to give all parents/carers an opportunity to attend and share their views with the Directorate team.
- 2.7 Pupils
The Executive Director and senior officers meet regularly with representatives from Pupil Councils. These meetings generate an opportunity for pupils to raise issues with the Executive Director and in addition allow the Education Directorate team to seek the views of pupils on matters of educational policy and practice. The most recent event took place at Cumnock academy on 5th November. At this meeting a wide variety of topics were discussed. These included school buildings; the curriculum and wider achievement agenda; personal and social development programmes, including anti bullying campaigns and careers advice. A copy of the minute of the meeting is available in the member's portal to give a more detailed account of the themes covered.
- 2.8 Staff
The Executive Director convenes 'listening lunches' to allow staff to meet in a relaxed atmosphere to discuss issues which relate to the wider department of Educational and Social Services. At the most recent listening lunch held on November 2008 a full range of topics were covered. These included discussion on the facilities available in the North West Area centre and the benefits of 'joined up' Council services to the community at large. The role and benefits of 'campus cops' and school nurses was also reviewed and there was discussion about the merits of good quality health and sex education in schools. The evaluation from those who attended was very positive and they welcomed an opportunity to learn more about the Department of Educational and Social Services and also to cover topics which were of interest to them. This model of communicating with the community will continue in 2009 in different areas of the authority to ensure that residents in all geographic areas of East Ayrshire have an opportunity to attend such an event.
- 2.9 Notes of the above meetings have been posted on the Members' Information Portal.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications in relation to this paper.

4. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications in this paper

5. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The paper supports the new community planning theme of 'promoting lifelong learning'

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Nil.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) approve the range of approaches taken by the Department of Educational and Social Services to communicate with parents/carers, pupils and the community across East Ayrshire, and
- (ii) otherwise, note the contents of this report

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Service
December 2008

List of Background Papers

Nil

Members wishing further information should contact Andrew Sutherland, Head of Service: Schools, Tel: (01563) 576126 or Muriel Reid, Quality Improvement Officer, Tel: (01563) 555650.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: ANDREW SUTHERLAND