



WORKING EFFECTIVELY AS A PARENT ASSOCIATION

Achieving Best Practice



Working effectively as a Parent Association

Achieving best practice

2010 Edition



National Parents Council Primary
12 Marlborough Court
Dublin 1

Using this book

These guidelines have been developed, in consultation with parents and Parent Associations throughout the country, in accordance with the Education Act 1998, and have been agreed with the Minister for Education and Science.

In this publication both new and experienced Parent Associations will find information and guidance to assist with the establishment and smooth running of their Parent Association. Parent Association members of National Parents Council Primary must conduct their business in accordance with these guidelines. This book may also be a useful guide to Principals and Boards of Management. Further information is available on the NPC website www.npc.ie

We recommend that Parent Association committees discuss these guidelines, so that they have a shared understanding of the important partnership role a Parent Association plays in the school.

National Parents Council Primary

First edition 2000

Second edition 2004

Third edition 2010

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Chapter I

Introduction

Chapter 1 - Introduction

What is a Parent Association?

The legal background

The Education Act of 1998 gives a legislative basis for the existence, recognition and purpose of a Parent Association. The Act states:

*The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school. **Education Act, 1998, 26.- (1)***

*A parents' association shall promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the board, Principal, teachers and students of a school and for that purpose may - (a) advise the Principal or the board on any matter relating to the school and the Principal or board, as the case may be, shall have regard to any such advice, and (b) adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school. **Education Act, 1998, Section 26.- (2)***

*The board shall promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a parents' association and to a parents' association when it is established. **Education Act, 1998, 26.- (3)***

From the Act we can then assert that:

- A Parent Association is the structure through which the parents* in a school can work together for the best possible education for their children.
- The Parent Association works with the Principal, staff and the Board of Management to build effective partnership between home and school

Membership of a Parent Association

*The parents of students of a recognised school may establish and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school. **Education Act 1998 26.- (1)***

All parents of children in the school are members of the Parent Association. These parents elect a committee to work on their behalf from one year to the next.

The role of the Parent Association

Although the Parent Association may organise many activities, these activities should all assist the association to achieve its two main roles within the school:

- To work in partnership with the Principal, Board of Management and the whole school community for the betterment of the children in the school
- To support and empower parents to be active in the best interests of their children's educational lives

* Parents throughout this book are as defined in Appendix I

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Chapter 2

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Working in partnership with the Principal, Board of Management, Pupils and Whole School Community

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Chapter 2 - Working in partnership with the Principal, Board of Management, Pupils and Whole School Community

Why is partnership between home and school important?

Partnership between home and school is important because with positive and active partnership the child gets the best that primary education can offer.

We know from research that:

- Children do better, behave better and are happier at school when parents and teachers work closely together and when parents are able to give their children support at home
- Teachers can do a better job when they are supported by and work closely with parents
- Parents can do a better job when they have the support of other parents

The Parent Association is the key mechanism in a school that can support the home/school partnership.

Partnership in action

Introduction

The school is a learning community. This community is made up of pupils, staff, the Board of Management and the parents of children in the school; they all have a strong interest in the school and are commonly known as stakeholders. The linkages and connections between all of these partners must be clear and effective, if they are to work well together for the benefit of the children.

It is important that collaborative work in the school occurs. Good relationships between the partners depend on good communication between them. Schools work best when everyone is working together.

The Parent Association committee, on behalf of parents, must ensure that it has good connections with all the other partners in the school community, so that there are:

- Shared goals and expectations for children and the school
- Shared understandings of one another's work and responsibilities

Partnership between the Parent Association and the Principal

The Principal has a central role in the school. S/he is responsible for the day to day management of the school and plays a key leadership role. The Principal is also likely to best know the needs of the school; s/he has responsibility for encouraging the involvement of parents of students in the school, in line with the Education Act, 1998.

It is imperative therefore that the Parent Association and Principal develop a good working relationship and develop a good system for communicating with each other.

When a system of communication has been planned it will be important to review it together from time to time to make sure that it is working for both parties.

Communication is, predominantly, between the committee of the Parent Association and the Principal

Ways the Parent Association may communicate with the Principal:

- Inviting the Principal to relevant meetings throughout the year to update the Principal on activities of the Parent Association and share information about school developments
- The Chairperson (and Secretary) of the Parent Association may meet with the Principal (and Deputy Principal) before and after each meeting that is not attended by the Principal
- The Principal attending an agreed relevant portion of the Parent Association meetings by invitation
- The Principal attending all of the Parent Association meetings by invitation from the Parent Association and in agreement with the Principal
- Giving written or verbal feedback of parents' views on aspects of school policy which the Parent Association committee has gathered for example, code of behaviour, anti-bullying, homework, school uniform
- Sharing information, such as the Parent Association calendar of events, with the Principal
- Joint working groups for particular projects, for example, sports days, Christmas fairs, sales of work
- Joint working groups for the development and review of particular school policies, for example: the code of behaviour, anti-bullying and relationships and sexuality education policies

Whether your school community uses any of the above mechanisms of communication and partnership or has an alternative method, it is vital that whatever method chosen works for both the parents and the Principal.

Partnership between the Parent Association and the Board of Management

Both the Parent Association and the Board of Management have a common interest in the running of the school. To fulfil their duties as set out in the Education Act, 1998, the Board of Management and the Parent Association need to have effective ways of communicating with one another.

Any activities undertaken by the Parent Association have to have the prior approval of the Board of Management

Ways of communicating between the Parent Association and the Board of Management may include:

- An annual meeting, early in each school year, with a jointly planned agenda, to discuss ideas for working together, to share information and to exchange views
- A social event where parents, teachers, and Board of Management members can meet and get to know one another
- The Parent Association's committee meeting agenda may include a report from the parents' representatives on the Board of Management. This works well if the Board of Management also includes a report from the parents' representatives about the parent association activities. Reports brought from the Parent Association committee to the Board and from the Board to the Parent Association committee, must be agreed reports which have the approval of all committee and board members respectively. Confidentiality must be maintained
- Meetings between the Chairperson of the Board of Management and the Chairperson of the Parent Association committee
- Through parents' representatives on the Board of Management (NPC advises that the parents' representatives should automatically be members of the Parent Association committee)

Partnership between the Parent Association and the Pupils

Children must have a voice in matters which affect them and their views should be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, in line with the National Children's Strategy 2000-2010.

The Parent Association should actively encourage a culture and practice of giving information to pupils and involving them in decisions that affect them e.g. school code of behaviour, anti-bullying policy.

At primary level some schools now have councils for their pupils which are an important mechanism for children to discuss and air their views. Primary school children may also have the opportunity to learn new skills from being members of such councils. Parents should support children in the setting up of pupil councils. Pupil councils give opportunities to parents and the rest of the school community to hear the voice of children in the school.

For information on pupil councils and student councils contact the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (see Sources of Information, Appendix 5).

The Parent Association, with the staff and Board of Management, need to plan together to give pupils real opportunities for involvement and need to involve the pupils themselves in this planning process.

The Parent Association plays a key role in promoting partnership within the whole school community

Partnership – school planning and policies

Parents are partners and stakeholders in the school. They can and should contribute to the school plan, school policies and pupils' curriculum experiences.

The School Plan

School development planning is about ensuring that children get the best possible learning opportunities in their school.

*A board shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, make arrangements for the preparation of a plan (in this section referred to as the "school plan") and shall ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated. **Education Act, 1998, 21. - (1)***

*A board shall make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school. **Education Act, 1998, 21. - (4)***

A school community needs to have an overall vision of what it wants to achieve for all the children in its care. School development planning involves the members of the school community discussing their hopes for the pupils and working out together how these hopes can become a reality.

School development planning enables the Principal and teaching staff to work as a team. It enables the Board of Management, parents and pupils to make a shared contribution to the success of the school.

Staff, parents and pupils should be actively involved in school planning. In practice the Principal and/or a team of teachers often lead the planning process and should consult with all the partners including parents in setting objectives for the school and in monitoring the achievement of those objectives.

School planning is a continuous process. It usually works in a cycle. In each school year some aspect of education in the school is reviewed to see how well the objectives for that part of the work are being met. If change is needed, the change is planned, and new objectives are set. At some later stage in the planning process this part of the work is reviewed again.

Examples of what may be reviewed are:

- How reading or maths are taught throughout the school and how well the children are achieving in relation to national standards
- How the overall curriculum in the school is being planned and delivered
- How provision for students with special needs is made and how well their needs are being met
- How important aspects of school policy are revised and updated

Parents should familiarise themselves with the school plan. The Board of Management should make the school plan available to all parents.

The school plan is a document that is in a process of review and refinement; responding to the patterns of change and of growth within the school. Close attention to refining the school plan helps schools to make sure that the educational needs of the children are met.

Whole School Evaluation (WSE)

Through Whole School Evaluation, the Inspector/s from the Department of Education and Science carry out an evaluation of the quality of education being provided by a particular school in accordance with the Education Act section 13.- (3) (i) (I-V), see Appendix I. The work of the whole school, as a unit, is looked at, and the WSE report provides an external view on the school's work.

Inspectors evaluate the quality of:

- Teaching and learning
- School planning
- School management
- Supports for pupils

During the WSE the Inspector/s:

- Meet with the Principal and other teachers to discuss the work and management of the school
- Meet and consult with parents
- Visit classrooms and observe the teachers and the children at work
- Listen to the children's views and opinions about what they are learning
- Look at samples of the children's work
- Talk to teachers and discuss their teaching with them
- Look at school documents including the school plan and school policies

When meeting with parents before the evaluation the Inspectors will discuss areas such as:

- The work of the Parent Association
- How the Parent Association supports the work of the school
- How parents are involved in helping their children learn
- Parental involvement in the life of the school
- How parents support the Principal and teachers
- Parental involvement in school planning
- Communication between school and parents
- How provision for children with special needs is made and how well their needs are met

Parents and the Curriculum

It is widely recognised that significant educational, social and behavioural benefits accrue to the child as a result of effective partnership between parents and teachers. Close co-operation between the home and the school is essential if children are to receive the maximum benefit from the curriculum. **Primary School Curriculum 1999 - Introduction**

Parents and students should contribute to the review and evaluation process of the curriculum, and parents are active partners in planning for parental support. However, planning for the implementation of the curriculum is the professional responsibility of the teaching staff.

Parents can make a big contribution to the education of their children in school. This is why they have been given a distinct role in supporting the implementation of the curriculum. The school plan will identify ways in which parents can be involved in organisational planning for the curriculum. This might include arranging for a grandparent to come and talk to a class about his/her experience of the past as part of the history curriculum. It could also involve parents in helping to arrange and supervise out-of-school activities, like exploring the local environment. **Primary School Curriculum: Your Child's Learning, Guidelines for Parents** – Department of Education and Science publication.

Partnership on the curriculum between teachers, parents and pupils can work on many practical levels:

- Paired reading, paired mathematics, paired writing
- Projects to improve the school environment, for example painting murals or yard games
- Local history projects, gardening projects, sports

The Parent Association can organise after-school activities for pupils, which are an important way of:

- Widening children's experience
- Giving children opportunities for social development
- Enriching children's learning

Examples of after-school activities could include drama, dancing, sports, music, chess, arts and crafts and homework clubs.

School Policies

The Parent Association should work in partnership with the Principal and teachers in the development and review of school policies such as the anti-bullying policy, code of behaviour policy etc.

The Parent Association can help with school policy by:

- Creating opportunities for parents to discuss aspects of policy with each other and with the Principal and Board of Management
- Gathering views about aspects of school policy from parents
- Giving information to parents on how they can contribute to school planning and policymaking
- Channelling parents' views into the policy making process

Examples of school policy issues where parents can make an essential contribution include:

- Home school partnership
- Homework
- Relationships and sexuality education
- Code of behaviour
- Parent teacher meetings
- Information and communication technology
- Special educational needs
- Enrolment
- Child protection
- Health and safety
- Anti-bullying

To promote an ethos of equality throughout the school it is essential that all parents are given the opportunity to give their views (see Appendix 3). Parent Associations must be approachable and open to all parents.

The Parent Association can advise the school Principal/Board of Management about ongoing issues and incidents that may require a review of school policy, for example:

- Safety at the school gate
- Behaviour on the school bus
- Provision for children during wet/cold weather
- Provision for children who arrive by school transport before official school opening time
- Incidents of bullying or behaviour problems
- The schedule of school events and closures during the year

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Chapter 3

Supporting and Empowering Parents

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Chapter 3 - Supporting and Empowering Parents

The Parent Association should be a structure that actively supports parents to ensure the best interests of their children. Parents value opportunities to meet other parents and share experiences about bringing up children and helping them to learn.

The Parent Association will be stronger and will help networking if it fully represents all parents. Therefore efforts should be made to:

- Produce materials using straightforward and simple language, that is, avoid abbreviations and the use of jargon and make all communication respectful, unambiguous and clear
- Choose times for meetings that will suit the majority of parents
- Ensure where possible that Parent Association meetings are always held in accessible locations
- Specifically reach out to under-represented parents of children in the school, for example parents from the Traveller and migrant communities, and invite them to become involved with the Parent Association committee

It can be useful to contact relevant local/national organisations when trying to engage with parents from under represented groups. These organisations often have a trusted relationship already established with members of their community and can approach the parents on behalf of the parent association and highlight the benefits of becoming involved to ensure their voices are heard regarding their child's education (see Sources of Information, Appendix 5).

The Parent Association can actively support the involvement of parents by:

- Arranging opportunities for parents to meet informally
- Running a social event (such as a coffee morning) for parents of a particular school class*
- Getting together with parents from neighbouring schools for an occasional event such as a talk or workshop
- Helping to run a parents' room, where this is available, where parents can meet and information can be displayed
- Having a parents' page on the school website
- Welcoming new parents and making sure to include parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds
- Providing a Parent Association notice board in the school
- Linking with local organisations to promote positive communication and parental partnership, for example, health boards, county councils
- Organising after-school activities with the agreement of the Board of Management, such as dance classes, sports activities, social events etc.
- Finding out what information parents would like or need
- Preparing a newsletter or contributing to the school newsletter
- Helping teachers set up an information meeting for parents of particular class groups

* If a Parent Association committee is organising an event at which food/drink is being provided they must notify the relevant appropriate authority (local HSE office) before the event; contact details of local offices are available from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland advice-line 1890 33 66 77. Whether food/drink is being provided free of charge or is available for sale, the appropriate authority must be notified. Failure to do so is an offence.

- Contributing to the preparation of a school handbook in cooperation with staff
- Providing access for parents to leaflets and books on topics of interest
- Bringing Department of Education and Science circulars to the attention of parents (these are sent to the Board of Management for all partners in the school and are available on the Department of Education and Science website www.education.ie)
- Identifying parents who have certain skills for curricular and after-school activities e.g. painting, Information and Communications Technology, music
- Providing information for parents about how to help their child/ren
- Providing opportunities for parents to network
- Inviting speakers to address the parents on issues which are topical or relevant e.g. homework or the curriculum
- Informing parents about educational courses and training programmes being offered by organisations such as NPC

Supporting and empowering parents to deal with an issue relating to their child

It is important to note that a Parent Association is not a forum for complaint against an individual teacher, parent or child, nor does it have a role in pursuing individual complaints.

However, it may be appropriate for a Parent Association to have an involvement in complaints in two ways:

1) Where a complaint raises a whole-school issue such as a school policy

For example, a parent may have a concern about a child's experience of bullying. The parent should be advised to bring their concern through the proper channels (see below). However, the Parent Association might want to consider whether there is a need to raise the question of the school's anti-bullying policy with the Principal or the Board of Management. Is there a policy in place? How is it working? Does it need to be revised and updated? If a policy is reviewed this should be done without reference to any individual complaint.

2) In supporting and empowering parents

In the situation of a parental complaint regarding a specific issue the Parent Association can:

- Help a parent to find good ways of approaching a teacher about a problem with a view to having the problem sorted out
- Let a parent know that if they need to make a formal complaint there is a complaints procedure available through the school and encourage the parent to use the procedure. A brief guide to the complaints procedure is available on the NPC website www.npc.ie entitled "I have a complaint, what should I do?" This is also available from NPC in leaflet form.
- Give parents the NPC Information/ Helpline telephone number 01 8874477 or email address helpline@npc.ie where they can get information in relation to managing a complaint

Parent Associations need to be non discriminatory in the way they deal with issues of concern from parents and treat all concerns objectively and equally. A Parent Association must treat all parents with respect and dignity and provide all parents with the same guidelines and advice.

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Chapter 4 **Establishing** **a Parent Association**

Chapter 4 – Establishing a Parent Association

Introduction

Legislation gives us the framework for the setting up of a Parent Association, the legislation states that:

*The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school. **Education Act, 1998 26.- (1)***

*The board shall promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a parents' association and to a parents' association when it is established. **Education Act, 1998, 26.- (3)***

A step by step approach

Step 1: Where to begin

There are three main ways to establish a Parent Association in your child's school;

- A group of parents with an interest in setting up a Parent Association can hold a meeting at which they can do some initial planning with the support of the Principal/Board of Management
- The Principal and/or the Chairperson of the Board of Management might write to parents asking for volunteers to establish a working group to organise a meeting of all parents
- The Principal, the Chairperson of the Board of Management or the parents' representatives on the Board of Management may invite all parents of children in the school to a meeting

Step 2: Establishing a Planning Group

Through one of the above activities a planning group should be established which then organises a meeting to which all parents are invited. At this meeting a parent association committee is elected. For this meeting a Chairperson needs to be chosen; this could be a parent, the Chairperson of the Board of Management, one of the parents' representatives on the Board of Management or the Principal.

Step 3: Establishing a Parent Association committee

While all parents are members of the Parent Association, not all can, or need to, be involved in the day-to-day business of organising the work. It is for this reason that parents in a school elect a committee.

The committee is the team of people who manage the tasks of the Parent Association on behalf of all the parents. The Parent Association committee needs to work as a team in order to be effective.

In establishing or electing the Parent Association committee it is vital that all members of the Parent Association understand the role and work of the committee.

The role of the Parent Association committee

The committee manages the business of the Parent Association in accordance with the rules (constitution) of the Parent Association from one AGM (see chapter 8) to the next.

The Parent Association must:

- Communicate with the entire parent body
- Represent the entire parent body

The work of the committee/team

The team has shared responsibility for:

- Planning for the future and developing a vision for the Parent Association
- Planning and managing the annual programme of activities for the Parent Association
- Communicating, consulting with and involving as many parents as possible in the activities of the Parent Association
- Communicating and consulting with the Principal and Board of Management
- Planning agendas and keeping records of meetings
- Managing the Parent Association finances
- Drawing up the rules (constitution) by which the Parent Association operates in collaboration with the entire parent body (see Parent Association Constitution, Chapter 7)
- Communicating with National Parents Council Primary (NPC)
- Valuing diversity and interculturalism and making sure parents who might find it hard to get involved are encouraged and supported to do so

Remember - there may be many parents who do not want to be on a committee but who may want to help with particular activities. It is important to gather this information; this can be done at the annual general meeting or by sending out a questionnaire to parents.

Subcommittees can be created for specific activities or events, members of subcommittees may be sought from the local community to avail of various skills and expertise. It is important to note, however, that subcommittees may not make decisions, they remain at all times accountable to the main committee. The Terms of Reference of any subcommittee should be clearly stated in writing and agreed by the Parent Association committee.

Step 4: Electing the Parent Association committee

If electing a committee for the first time the planning group, as established under step 2, are usually the group that organise the election. It is important that these elections are run fairly and efficiently.

With an established Parent Association, the committee is elected at the Annual General Meeting, to which all parents of children in the school are invited. It is the responsibility of the outgoing committee to ensure that the elections are run efficiently and in line with the provisions in the Parent Association rules (constitution).

In both situations it is good practice to ask an independent third party to chair the election.

Taking nominations

A committee is elected by asking for nominations from those present; nominations may also be requested, in advance of the meeting, by post. When forming a committee those involved need to promote inclusivity of all parents and be reflective of the entire parent body. Society has changed

dramatically over the last number of years and the Parent Association committee should be mindful of being inclusive and this should be reflected in the makeup of the committee.

A number of different models can be followed to promote equality of representation when parents are being nominated to the Parent Association committee, for example:

Model 1: **Class representatives** where parents of children from each of the school class levels are nominated

Model 2: **Area representatives** where parents from the different housing areas/districts are nominated

Model 3: **Junior and senior class representatives** where parents of children from the senior classes and from the junior classes are nominated

Whether the Parent Association uses one of the models above or other models, it is vital that whatever method is chosen is inclusive of all parents of children in the school.

The Parent Association must ensure that all parents know that they have the right to nominate and be nominated and should positively encourage membership that reflects the school population and shows an awareness of different traditions that are operating within the school community.

Anyone who is a parent of a child in the school can be nominated to be on the Parent Association committee as long as this is with their knowledge and consent. The Parent Association must ensure that all parents understand what it means to be a committee member.

Size of the committee

The size of the committee should suit the size of the school and the amount of work to be done. It should be noted, however, that with a very large committee it may be difficult to work effectively. Each Parent Association needs to decide what will work best in their case.

NPC advises that the parents' representatives on the Board of Management should automatically be members of the committee of the Parent Association.

NPC also advises, however, that the parents' representatives should not hold officer positions on the Parent Association committee. This is to avoid any potential conflict of interest with their role as Board of Management members. The primary responsibility of the parents' representatives is to the Board of Management; if an issue arises between the Parent Association and the Board of Management the parents' representatives' responsibility lies ultimately with the Board of Management.

Voting system

Most Parent Associations will use a simple voting system, based on who gets the highest number of votes. When a class representative is being elected, only the parents of children in that class vote. If an area representative is being elected, only parents living in that area vote.

Participation and the right of all parent voices to be heard are fundamental to the running of a democratic structure like a Parent Association. All parents must have access to and be given the opportunity to vote. By establishing a tradition of transparency and democratic process it is more likely then that parents will expect similar consultation in other aspects of school life.

Counting the Votes

Two people at the meeting should be nominated as tellers to count the votes. Votes should always be counted in public. It is good practice for the committee to retain the votes until the next election.

Term of office of the committee

Usually, the committee serves for one year, that is from one AGM to the next. In order to make sure that there are new as well as experienced members on the committee the rules (constitution) should provide for a number of places for new members each year. It is good practice to have a combination of experienced and new members.

At the AGM all committee members step down, but they can be re-elected as long as they continue to be a parent of a child in the school.

NPC advises that the members of the Parent Association committee should not hold the same officer position for more than three consecutive years; this is to ensure that parents are represented by an evolving and developing committee.

Step 5: Electing the Officers of the Parent Association committee

The committee at its first meeting should elect from its members the officers of the committee

Before parents are elected as officers of the committee the roles of the officers should be clarified.

The Chairperson

The role of the Chairperson of the Parent Association committee depends on the committee structure; some committees prefer to have a more flexible approach to working together. This role may be shared/rotated among the members which allows for committee members to gain experience of different roles and responsibilities. Other committees however have a more formal structure, where each officer serves for a full year and has a very defined role and set of responsibilities.

The Chairperson should:

- Lead and guide the committee in planning and delivering on their activities. This should involve:
 - Chairing meetings
 - Helping the committee to have a clear vision and clear goals
 - Keeping the work of the Parent Association to agreed targets
 - Ensuring all members are respected, listened to and are encouraged to have their say
 - Facilitating people to work well together ensuring that the work of the committee is shared
 - Reviewing the work of the committee
- Ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of their roles within the committee
- Delegate the work of the committee to ensure all work is not the responsibility of one or two people
- Work closely with the Secretary to plan the agendas and meetings
- Ensure that the minutes are signed, dated and kept safely
- Encourage the committee members to be prepared for the meetings
- Ensure meetings start and finish at the agreed times
- Make sure that, as each item is finished, the group is clear about what has been decided

- Ensure that all decisions are taken democratically and with respect for everyone's opinions
- Check on responsibilities taken on by members of the committee and make sure they have been clearly understood and allocated
- Summarise all decisions at the end of the meeting
- Ensure that at the end of term of office all relevant documentation is passed on to the incoming Chairperson

The Secretary

The role of the Secretary of the Parent Association committee is to:

- Take minutes at each meeting
- File all correspondence and minutes safely
 - Minutes should be brief and should be a record of decisions made and actions to be taken; they may also record a brief outline of issues discussed
- Agree the agenda for committee meetings with the Chairperson. It is important that all committee members have a right to have items included on the agenda, therefore they must be given adequate time to pass these items on to the Secretary
- Make sure all committee members have the agenda prior to the meetings so they can be adequately prepared
- Make sure all committee members receive a copy of the minutes of meetings, including committee members who had been unable to attend
- Appropriately administer incoming and outgoing correspondence
- Ensure the minutes are approved at each meeting. It is important at committee meetings that the minutes are agreed by those that attended to be a true and accurate record of what happened. Once this has been agreed by the committee the Chairperson should sign the minutes for the committee's records. This process is especially useful if there is any confusion in the future regarding any decisions made.
- Assist the Chairperson with clarification of decisions made at meetings
- Ensure that at the end of term of office all relevant documentation is passed on to the incoming Secretary

The Treasurer

The role of the Treasurer of the Parent Association committee is to:

- Lodge and record all financial transactions
- Manage and maintain books/record of income and expenditure
- Give monthly reports on the Parent Association finances to the Parent Association committee
- Issue receipts for all financial transactions
- Ensure that the committee has the necessary information to understand the Parent Association's financial needs
- Advise on how the resources can best be used to fulfil the aims and work plan of the committee
- Liaise with a bank or other financial institutions on behalf of the Parent Association

- Present a full account of the year's income and expenditure at the Parent Association AGM. National Parents Council Primary (NPC) recommends that a copy of these records should also be submitted to the Board of Management for their information
- Ensure that at the end of term of office all relevant documentation is passed on to the incoming Treasurer

To safeguard all members of the Parent Association NPC recommends that two people should be responsible for signing cheques i.e. there should be two signatures required on each cheque. The signatories are normally the Treasurer with either the Chairperson or Secretary.

The Treasurer must complete and submit a form to the bank to validate the names of those who are entitled to sign cheques; customarily, this must be done each year when there is a change of personnel on the committee.

Step 6: Training for new committees

- It can be useful for new Parent Association committees to avail of the training programme provided by National Parents Council Primary. The training will help the committee to:
 - Explore the role and potential of a Parent Association
 - Identify the aims and objectives of their Parent Association
 - Develop the skills, knowledge and practices that they need to work effectively as a committee
 - Understand the importance of good working relationships between all the partners in the school
 - Assist the Parent Association committee in drawing up their rules (constitution)

For further information see the NPC website www.npc.ie or contact the Training and Development Programme Tel: 01 887 4475, email: training@npc.ie

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Chapter 5

The Parent Association Committee and how it functions

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Chapter 5 - The Parent Association Committee and how it functions

The committee and communication

The Parent Association committee needs to make their communication respectful, unambiguous and clear. It is important to choose times for meetings that will suit the majority of parents.

The Parent Association committee can communicate with the parents in a number of different ways for example by means of:

- A formal meeting e.g. an AGM
- An informal social gathering to welcome and involve new parents
- A meeting of parents of children of a particular class group to discuss a topic that concerns the parents of that class, for example, transition to post primary school, homework etc.
- A newsletter
- A notice Board
- The school website or the Parent Association page on the school website

The committee and representation

It is essential that the Parent Association committee offers the opportunity to all parents of children in the school to have their views represented.

Ways of ensuring all parents' views are represented by the committee:

- Structured communication to ensure valid representation, for example gathering views on policy issues such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) or the school's code of behaviour. This structured communication can be in the form of meetings, questionnaires, online surveys etc.
- Hold parent association meetings as necessary to consult with all the parents of children in the school
- Give good notice of meetings so that parents can plan to attend and meet members of the committee
- Send out names of committee members and suggest ways of contacting them
- Have a suggestion box for parents in the school

Running committee meetings

Agenda

The agenda is the list of items that will be discussed at a meeting. A focused agenda is essential to having a productive meeting.

The Chairperson and Secretary set the agenda together. At the end of each meeting the Chairperson should ask the committee if they have any item they would like on the next agenda.

It is a good idea to specify the time allocated for each item on the agenda.

The agenda should be sent out to all members of the committee a week in advance of the meeting where possible (again it is important to note that NPC advises that the committee should include the parents' representatives on the Board of Management). This gives all members of the committee an opportunity to prepare for the meeting and to inform the Chair or the Secretary of any items they would like added to the agenda.

Sample agenda for first committee meeting of the year

Agenda item

1. Welcome
2. Election of Officers
3. Plan of work for the year
 - a. Review school policies
 - b. Plan events for school year, for example:
 - Coffee morning for new parents
 - Reception after First Holy Communion*
 - School open day
 - Talk/speaker for parents
 - AGM
 - Newsletter
4. Financial plan for the year
 - a. Fundraising for running of the Parent Association
 - b. Discuss needs of the school (wish list) with the Board of Management/Principal
 - c. Fundraising in general
5. Dates for Parent Association committee meetings
6. Dates for your diary
7. AOB**
8. Close

Sample agenda for committee meetings

Agenda item

1. Welcome
2. Minutes of previous meeting
3. Matters arising
4. Correspondence
5. Treasurer's report
6. Review year plan
7. Planning of upcoming events
8. Evaluation/review of the ongoing work of the Parent Association
9. AOB**
10. Close

* If a Parent Association committee is organising an event at which food/drink is being provided they must notify the relevant appropriate authority (local HSE office) before the event; contact details of local offices are available from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland advice-line 1890 33 66 77. Whether food/drink is being provided free of charge or is available for sale, the competent authority must be notified. Failure to do so is an offence.

** Optional, as all committee members should have the opportunity to include items on the agenda before the meeting.

Minutes

Minutes should list those who attended the meeting and any apologies received. Minutes cover the topics discussed, decisions taken and who will do what and when. Minutes should not include comments made by individuals.

It is always a good idea to write the minutes just after the meeting. Remember – minutes of the committee meetings are for committee members only.

At the next meeting these minutes are signed and dated by the Chairperson after the committee agrees that they are a true and accurate record of the meeting and decisions taken.

Communication and confidentiality

The committee should communicate openly with parents in the school. Occasionally matters may arise that should be kept confidential, it is very important that this confidentiality is explicitly stated to committee members and is respected.

When and where meetings should be held

Meetings are usually held once a month during term time. Giving committee members advance notice of meetings will ensure better attendance. NPC recommends that meetings should be held in the school where possible.

Length of committee meetings

Knowing the length of the meeting helps people stay focussed and encourages a good use of time.

Evaluating

It is a good idea for the committee to develop the practice of reviewing their work. This enables the group to be effective and to value the work they do. A brief informal evaluation can take place at the end of a meeting; however, an overall review of the work of the committee should be done at the end of each school year.

Training and support

To be effective, a committee needs to have skills such as decision making, team working and planning. The committee should consider looking for training and support to develop their skills. For information regarding NPC Parent Association training programmes see www.npc.ie or contact the Training and Development Programme Tel: 01 887 4475, email: training@npc.ie

How to be a good committee member

It is important as a committee member to act effectively as an individual but it is also essential to work collectively as part of the committee team.

Take time at the start of the year to help newcomers to feel welcome and get actively involved.

Remember it is hard for new people to join an already established group.

Ways to make new members feel welcome:

- All committee members should introduce themselves
- Existing members should pair up with someone new

- Take time to hear why people have become involved
- Organise a social occasion to help people to get to know each other
- Use straightforward language in meetings and explain for example acronyms and jargon being used
- As historical items arise on the agenda give a brief background on the item for new members
- Answer any questions newcomers may have regarding the aims and work of the Parent Association

If you are a newcomer don't be afraid to ask, you won't be expected to know everything.

Prepare well

Read the minutes and any other information sent out before the meeting. Be clear about the purpose of the meeting. Prepare any points that you are going to raise.

Participate fully

Listen carefully and think about what is being said. Feel free to speak when you have something to contribute. Make your point at the appropriate time.

Be aware of feelings

It is important to be aware of people's feelings, this will help everyone hear and understand better.

Listen to other views

Be reasonable and open to changing your mind – one of the purposes of the meeting is to exchange information and ideas, to learn from each other and to listen to other views on issues.

Support others to participate

Build on what others have said. Draw in someone who is left out or hasn't yet contributed. It is important that people feel valued and by having one person speaking at a time it ensures that everyone is listened to and that people have a clear understanding of what is happening at the meeting. Committee members should be aware of the different traditions which exist within the committee and be respectful and inclusive of all members.

Communicate honestly and openly

It is important that people should give their opinions at the meeting and that these are appropriate and relate to the agenda items. This can be difficult at times, but it is more constructive than making comments outside the meeting, which can sometimes happen if views are not properly aired.

Support the Chairperson

Be supportive of the Chairperson. Give constructive feedback. Give ideas on ways to proceed. Remember it is important that the committee works as a team.

Be reliable

If you agree to take on a task be sure to carry it out. Then be ready to report back at the next meeting.

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Chapter 6

Parent Association Finances

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Chapter 6 - Parent Association Finances

The legal background

A Parent Association is entitled to raise funds for the administration and activities of the association and is entitled to open an account in the name of the Parent Association.

To safeguard all members of the Parent Association, NPC recommends that two members of the Parent Association committee should be responsible for signing cheques i.e. there should be two signatures required on each cheque. The signatories are normally the Treasurer with either the Chairperson or Secretary.

The Parent Association must complete and submit a form to the bank to validate the names of those who are entitled to sign cheques; normally, this is done each year when there is a change of personnel on the committee.

All transactions (income and expenditure) must be accounted for and a report given at each committee meeting by the Treasurer.

Full accounts must be maintained and presented at the Parent Association Annual General Meeting, in accordance with the rules (constitution) of the association.

National Parents Council Primary advises that Parent Associations send a copy of the annual report of income and expenditure to the Board of Management for information purposes.

Fundraising

Primary school education in Ireland is free, and Parent Associations must be careful not to put pressure on parents to raise funds for the association or the school.

At the beginning of the school year, the Parent Association committee should meet with the Principal, who is a member of the Board of Management and together they will decide what will be of most benefit to the school. The Principal may draw up a wish list from which the Parent Association committee can choose. The approval of the Board of Management is needed prior to any funds being raised.

The expenditure of the funds raised is by the Board of Management, in consultation with the Parent Association. Receipts should be given to the Parent Association from the Board of Management/Principal for all items/services purchased with funds received from the Parent Association.

Any funds must be used for the purpose/s for which the money was collected. Money raised for example for sports equipment must be spent on sports equipment. If, in exceptional circumstances, it becomes unnecessary for the Board of Management to use all the funds raised for the purpose specified, the Board of Management will communicate this to the Parent Association and, where appropriate, the local community. In any event, the funds must be used for the school. The Board of Management in consultation with the Parent Association committee will decide the change of purpose for which the funds are used.

The Board of Management prepares a total account of income and expenditure at the end of each school year and this should be made available to all parents of children in the school. This will reflect the general income and expenditure activities of the school, including the contributions from the Parent Association.

The information regarding the financial accountability between the Parent Association and the Board of Management in a school is also published in the NPC publication "The Board of Management in Your Primary School – A Guide for Parents", available online at www.npc.ie or from the NPC office Tel: 01 887 4034.

Fundraising ideas

Art exhibition	Fancy dress competition	Raffle
Auction	Fashion show	Second hand book sale
Bag packing	Home produce fair	Sponsored silence
Barn dance/ceílí	Jumble sale	Sponsored walk
Cake sale	Non uniform day	Toy fair
Christmas fair	Quiz night	Voluntary contribution
Coffee morning	Race night	Wine and cheese evening

Voluntary contributions

Not all schools operate a voluntary contribution and in those that do the voluntary contribution can mean different things. The voluntary contribution can be administered by the Parent Association on behalf of the Board of Management or by the Board of Management/Principal in others.

If a voluntary contribution is organised, it should be exactly that, voluntary!
No child or parent should be identified in any way for either contributing or not contributing.

Insurance for a Parent Association

National Parents Council Primary advises Parent Associations to take out their own insurance policy to cover their members in the event of claims.

The insurance should provide cover for events such as fundraising, meetings, sports days, sales of work etc.

Insurance policies are also available for summer schools/camps run by Parent Associations.

The Parent Association committee should make sure that all activities of the Parent Association comply with health and safety regulations.

Parent Associations need to discuss their insurance requirements with an insurance broker.

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Chapter 7

Parent Association Constitution

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Chapter 7 - Parent Association Constitution

What is a Parent Association constitution?

Every association should have ground rules to guide its work and define how it operates. These rules are usually brought together in the constitution of the Association.

It is important that any new Parent Association gives thought to the way the parents want their association to work. Established Parent Associations should also review their constitution to ensure the Parent Association is operating effectively.

It is worth putting time into developing a constitution which is specific to the needs of your Parent Association. Each Parent Association is unique therefore it is inadvisable to copy another constitution.

A check list of important questions:

- What is the aim of the Parent Association?
- How many people are needed on the committee? Remember NPC advises that the two parents' representatives on the Board of Management should be included in your committee
- How would the committee be structured? For example, would you have class representatives, area representatives, or any person who is willing to go forward for election?
- How many members of the committee need to be present for the group to make a decision (would a quorum of the members be 50% + 1)?
- Would sub-committees be needed? How would a subcommittee be set up? What would it do? How would it report back to the committee?
- How would you make sure the committee is inclusive and doesn't exclude any parents of children in the school?
- Will the Parent Association raise funds for the school?
- How would funds be raised to run the association? How would these funds be managed?
- How would the constitution be changed if this became necessary?
- Will the committee make provision for membership of National Parents Council Primary?

Drafting the constitution

Writing the Constitution can seem a daunting task, one way to begin is for a small group to work on the above check list. Other parents, the Principal and the Chairperson of the Board of Management may have ideas to offer. NPC will also be able to offer support.

When the small group has done some initial preparatory work, it should prepare a draft constitution, and circulate this to all parents. Parents' views should be collected at a meeting, or in writing. The draft constitution may be revised at this point

The final version of the constitution should be presented at a meeting (most Parent Associations do this at the AGM) to which all parents should be invited and the constitution can then be adopted by a simple majority vote.

Changes to the constitution can usually be made at the AGM, however, if an urgent need arises a special meeting called an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) can be held. Proposals to change the constitution should be submitted in writing to the Parent Association committee. The Parent

Association committee should then circulate these proposals to all the parents prior to the AGM/EGM. All parents of children in the school at the meeting are eligible to vote on the proposals.

Sample constitution

This sample constitution is for guidance purposes only, each Parent Association must prepare its own constitution or set of rules to ensure it works efficiently and effectively.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PARENT ASSOCIATION OF “_____ NATIONAL SCHOOL”

The Purpose of the Parent Association

The purpose of the Parent Association is to provide a structure through which the parents/guardians of children attending _____ National School can work together for the best possible education for their children. The Parent Association will work with the Principal, staff and Board of Management to build effective partnership between home and school.

Under the Education Act, 1998

Section 26. – (1) The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents’ association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school.

(2) A parents’ association shall promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the board, Principal, teachers and students of the school and for that purpose may

- (a) advise the Principal or the board on any matter relating to the school and the Principal or board, as the case may be, who shall have regard to any such advice, and
- (b) adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school.

(4)

- (a) A parents’ association shall, following consultation with its members, make rules governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs.
- (b) Where a parents’ association is affiliated to a national association of parents, the rules referred to in paragraph (a) shall be in accordance with guidelines issued by that national association of parents with the concurrence of the Minister.

The Aim of the Parent Association

The aim of the Parent Association is to enable parents to play their part in ensuring provision of the best possible education for their children and that this is achieved through the Association’s programme of activities.

The Parent Association will promote the interests of the students in co-operation with the Board of Management, Principal, teachers and students, in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, 1998.

The Work of the Parent Association

The Parent Association will undertake a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents and which will support pupils, parents and school staff. In planning its activities, the Parent Association will consult with the school Principal.

The Membership of the Parent Association

All parents or guardians of children attending _____ National School will be deemed to be members of the Parent Association.

The committee of the Parent Association

The members of the Parent Association will elect a committee with a maximum of ____ (insert number) and a minimum of ____ (insert number). This committee will have responsibility for representing the parents of _____ National School and managing the activities of the Parent Association.

Subcommittees

Subcommittees can be set up for particular tasks. The subcommittees may also co-opt people to assist in their work. The subcommittees may not make decisions; they remain at all times accountable to the main committee.

The Election of the Parent Association committee

The members of the committee will be elected each year at the AGM of the Parent Association.

Each member will be elected for one year. At the AGM all committee members step down, but they can be re-elected as long as they continue to be eligible to serve, that is as long as they continue to be a parent or guardian of a child in the school.

The committee will ensure _____ (insert number) places are available for new members each year.

Parents' representatives elected to the Board of Management are automatically members of the committee, but will not hold an officer position on the Parent Association committee.

No member of the committee will hold the same officer position for more than three consecutive years.

The Work of the committee of the Parent Association

The Parent Association committee will be responsible for ensuring that all parents are consulted on issues which are pertinent to the entire parent body. The Parent Association committee may advise the Principal and Board of Management on any matters relating to the school in accordance with the Education Act, 1998, 26.- (2)(a).

The committee is the team that will manage the tasks of the association on behalf of the parent body (the members).

The committee will draw up a plan for the activities of the association, in consultation with parents and in accordance with their wishes.

The committee will be responsible for seeing that activities are run in an efficient and effective way.

The committee will consult with the school Principal and Board of Management when planning the programme of activities for any particular year.

The committee will arrange with the Principal and Board of Management a system for ongoing communication.

At the annual general meeting (AGM) the committee will report to the parent body (the members) about its work.

The committee will manage and account for any funds collected or expended by the Parent Association.

Finance

The Parent Association committee will finance the activities of the Parent Association through fundraising.

A Treasurer will be appointed from among the committee members and will be responsible for keeping account of the income and expenditure of the Parent Association finances. The Treasurer will give a statement of income and expenditure at each committee meeting.

A written statement of income and expenditure will be given at the AGM and a copy will be forwarded to the Board of Management for their information.

The Parent Association will keep a bank account in its name. Each cheque issued requires two signatures. The Treasurer and at least one other assigned member of the committee must sign all cheques drawn on the account.

Fundraising for the School

Fundraising for the school by the Parent Association will be done with the prior agreement of the Board of Management. The Parent Association committee will agree with the Board of Management as to the specific purposes for which funds are to be raised by the Parent Association.

Membership of National Parents Council Primary

The Parent Association will maintain membership of National Parents Council Primary by annual subscription.

Changing the Constitution

Changes to the constitution can be made at the AGM or, if for an urgent reason, an EGM can be called for that specific purpose.

Proposals to change the constitution must be submitted in writing to the Parent Association committee. The Parent Association committee will then circulate these proposals to all parents before the AGM/EGM. All parents of children in the school at the meeting are eligible to vote on the proposals.

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Chapter 8

The Annual General Meeting (AGM)

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Chapter 8 - The Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The Annual General Meeting is important as it ensures openness and accountability and it is essential that all parents of children in the school are invited and welcomed. Invitations should be extended to the Principal and Board of Management. At the AGM the Parent Association committee, to ensure openness and transparency, must:

- Account for the work of the past year
- Account for money received and spent
- Hold elections for the Parent Association committee

Planning the AGM

The AGM can be held at anytime during the school year, many Parent Associations hold their AGM in September/October. At least 10 working days written notice of the AGM should be given to all parents of children in the school; this notice should include the agenda.

It is important to encourage parents to attend, therefore there needs to be items on the agenda of interest to parents. These could include having a speaker, opportunities to meet others from the school community and exhibitions of the children's work.

Accounting for the work

This is done through the following:

- Minutes of previous AGM
- Chairperson's report on the work of the Parent Association
- Update on NPC activities
- Report from subcommittees e.g. Social committee, Fundraising committee, After-school Events committee

Accounting for the money

The Treasurer must make a financial report of the Parent Association's financial activity at the AGM. This will include a report of the income and expenditure of the Parent Association for the year.

Holding the Parent Association Elections

At every AGM the Parent Association committee for the previous year steps down and a new committee is elected. It is important to acknowledge and thank outgoing committee members. The procedure for electing committee members can be found in Chapter 4, step 4.

Other business which may take place at the AGM includes:

Welcoming new parents

- Having an opportunity at the AGM for parents to meet each other
- Getting feedback on events planned for the year
- Asking parents what activities would be useful to them
- Arranging a talk on a topic of interest to parents
- Offering opportunities to parents to discuss and ask questions about the work of the Parent Association

- Encouraging parents to become active members of the Parent Association
- Celebrating the work of the past year
- Inviting the Principal and/or Chairperson of the Board of Management to speak to the members of the association.

It is important to keep the agenda precise and to the point so that people don't get bored. Start the meeting on time and don't let it go on for too long.

Sample agenda for an AGM

(This is a sample agenda therefore please note times given here are suggested times only)

8pm – 9.40pm

Agenda item	Time
1. Welcome	
2. Minutes of the last AGM	5 minutes
3. Chairperson's report	10 minutes
4. Financial report	10 minutes
5. Report from the subcommittees	10 minutes
6. NPC news and update	5 minutes
7. Principal/Board of Management address	10 minutes
8. Election of new Parent Association committee	15 minutes
9. Guest speaker	30 minutes
10. Close	5 minutes
Tea & Coffee	

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Chapter 9

National Parents Council Primary

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Chapter 9 - National Parents Council Primary

Introduction

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the representative organisation for parents of children in primary or early education. This education can take place in a setting of parental choice. Some parents choose to educate their children in a variety of school or preschool settings while others may choose to educate their children at home.

National Parents Council Primary was set up in 1985, under the programme for Government, as the representative organisation for parents of children attending primary school, and received statutory recognition in the 1998 (see Education Act section 2.- (1) “national association of parents”, Appendix I).

NPC has charitable status and is a company limited by guarantee. It has a board of directors and employs a chief executive and staff.

NPC mission statement

‘National Parents Council Primary is established to contribute to the advancement of the early education and primary education of all children, in order to improve and enrich the education of each child and to support the involvement of parents in all stages of education.’

NPC structure

Members

There are two categories of membership within NPC. Full members of NPC are all Parent Associations who apply for membership and are entered on to the NPC members’ register. These members can avail of all membership benefits including voting rights within the organisation. NPC also has Associate members; this membership includes individuals or groups that support the aims of NPC but are not Parent Associations. Associate members are not full members and do not have voting rights within NPC although they are able to avail of other membership benefits. All members pay an annual membership fee.

County Branches

The NPC County Branch is a structure through which parents and Parent Associations in a county can come together and work together for the best possible education for their children. Parent Associations who are members of NPC may attend meetings of their County Branch. At county level parents exchange ideas about children’s education, share experiences, develop partnerships between children, teachers and parents, and discuss educational issues of local and national importance. The counties channel the views, ideas and concerns of the local parents to the national level through their elected Assembly members.

Combined County Parents’ Association Group

Parent Association members or full members of NPC from counties which do not have a county branch may become members of the Combined County Parents’ Association Group. This group may nominate parents to the NPC Assembly to represent their views. Through this group parents exchange ideas about children’s education, share experiences and discuss educational issues of importance. The group channels the views, ideas and concerns of the parents to the national level

through their elected Assembly members. Members of this group can also be supported by NPC to establish county branches in their area.

The Assembly

The Assembly is the body concerned primarily with developing NPC education policy and each County Branch may elect two representatives to sit on the Assembly. The Assembly has members from the NPC Special Interest Groups and the Combined County Parents' Association Group may also elect representatives to the Assembly. The Assembly meets at least three times a year and as NPC's education policy developing body, it is important that the Assembly is widely representative of all demographics of parental opinion. The Assembly also has other functions, one of which is to submit from its membership nominees for election to the NPC Board as required. The Board members are then voted for by the members of NPC.

Special Interest Groups

NPC has Special Interest groups that represent parents of children:

- a) from the traveller community
- b) from the migrant community
- c) with special education needs who attend integrated schools
- d) with special education needs who attend special schools
- e) attending Irish-medium schools
- f) belonging to a religious minority

These groups may be added to from time to time where a need arises and when agreed by the NPC Board.

Each of the Special Interest groups can elect a representative to the NPC Assembly facilitating their views to be represented at national level.

Board of Directors

The NPC Board of Directors is nominated from the membership of the Assembly and is elected by the members of NPC at a General meeting. The Board is responsible for the governance of all NPC business.

NPC services

NPC services are aimed at empowering parents so that they can support their children in all aspects of their early and primary education.

Information/Helpline

The NPC Information/Helpline is a national confidential service for parents. The helpline staff listen and give information and support to parents to help them make the best possible decisions for and with their children. The helpline is open from 10am -3.30pm Monday to Friday. If you have a query on any aspect of your child's education please contact the Information/Helpline on Tel: 01-8874477 email: helpline@npc.ie. There are also answers to frequently asked questions on the NPC website www.npc.ie

The type of issues which the Information/ Helpline Officers often deal with include:

- Setting up Parent Associations
- Supervision and safety at school
- Bullying
- School transport
- Homework
- Insurance
- Uniforms
- School policies
- Complaints Procedure
- Whole School Evaluation

Training and Development Programme

The NPC Training and Development programme is a national programme of training, development and support for parents. The purpose is to empower parents to play an active part in their child's education. The Parent Association training helps Parent Associations work effectively within the school community. Other NPC training programmes enable parents to support their children throughout their primary education.

Further information is available on our website www.npc.ie or by contacting us on 01-8874475 or email training@npc.ie

Website

The NPC's website www.npc.ie aims to provide parents with information regarding primary education. The website:

- Keeps parents up to date with issues in education through news feeds
- Provides answers to frequently asked questions
- Gives parents the opportunity to give NPC their views regarding primary education issues
- Provides up to date information regarding NPC training programmes
- Makes available NPC publications which can be downloaded or purchased
- Provides information for migrant parents in five languages; Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Urdu

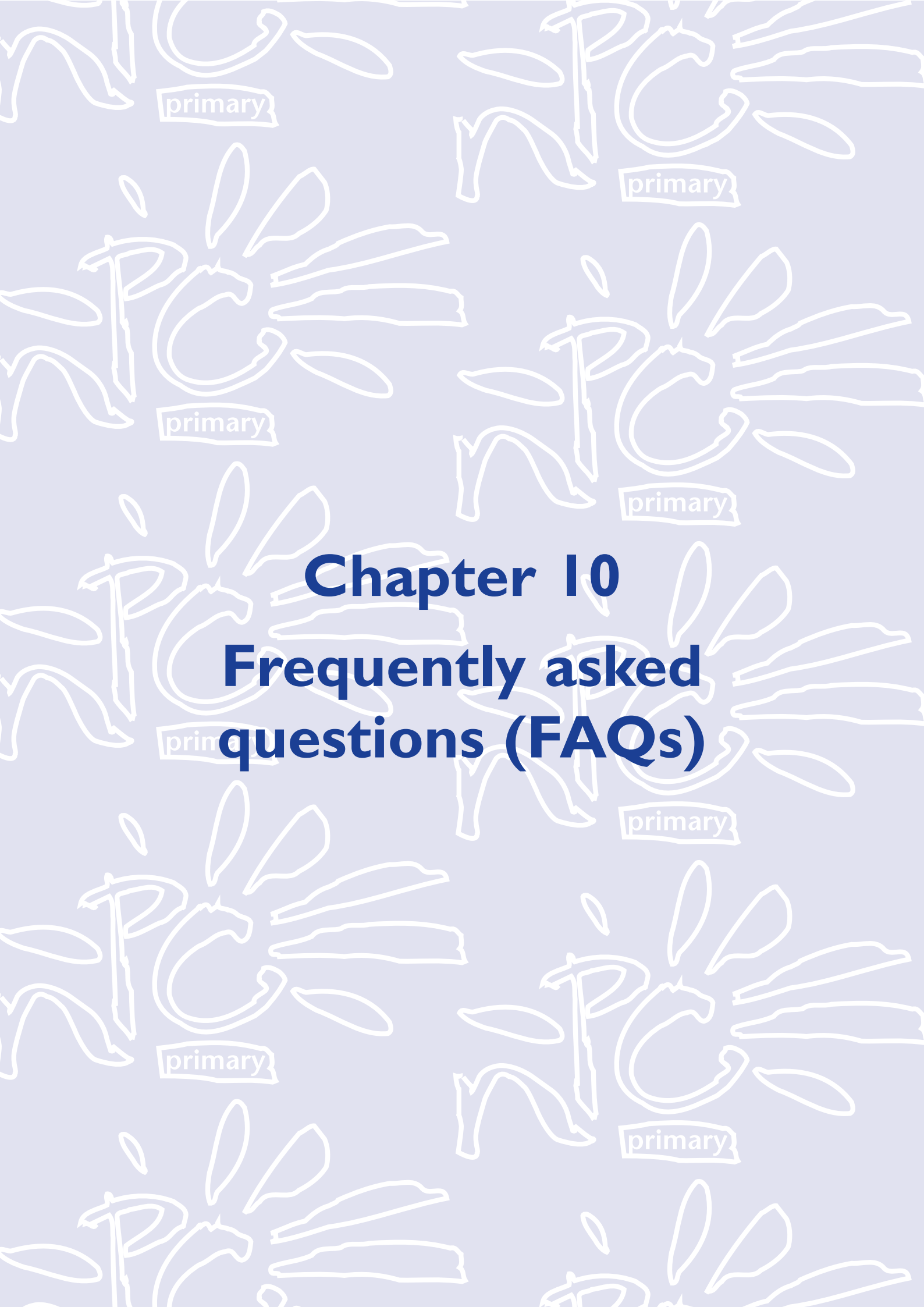
As well as the three service areas above NPC are active in:

Advocating for and representing parents

NPC consults with parents and brings their voices to the education debate.

Facilitating and supporting the development of Parent Associations

NPC facilitates and supports parents to develop Parent Associations in their schools and supports the organisation of county level support networks for parents.



Chapter 10
Frequently asked
questions (FAQs)

Chapter 10 - Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

The following questions refer to issues that sometimes cause confusion.

Q. What is the Board of Management?

A. The Board of Management manages the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of pupils. Its job is to make sure that the school is run efficiently and provides all students with a good education.

The Board of Management includes representatives of parents, teachers, trustees or patron, the Principal and the community. You can read more about the Board of Management in the NPC publication “The Board of Management in Your Primary School – A Guide for Parents” available on www.npc.ie or from the NPC office Tel: 01 887 4034.

Q. Should the Principal or a designated teacher attend Parent Association meetings?

A. The Parent Association are entitled to invite anyone to their meetings, who may give added value to the work of the Parent Association in the school community. The Principal has a central role in the school. S/he is responsible for the day to day management of the school and plays an important leadership role. The Principal is also likely to best know the needs of the school and to know whether or not a proposal is practical.

It is imperative therefore that the Parent Association and Principal develop a good working relationship and have a good system for communicating with each other with inbuilt review procedures.

This system may involve:

- Inviting the Principal to relevant meetings throughout the year to update the Principal on activities of the Parent Association and to share information about school developments.
- The Chairperson (and Secretary) of the Parent Association could meet with the Principal (and Deputy Principal) before and after each meeting that is not attended by the Principal.
- The Principal attending an agreed relevant portion of the Parent Association meetings by invitation
- The Principal attending all of the Parent Association meetings by invitation from the Parent Association and in agreement with the Principal
- Giving written or verbal feedback on parents’ views on aspects of school policy which the Parent Association committee has gathered for example, code of behaviour, anti-bullying, homework, school uniform

The key point is that frequent and open communication is essential to good relationships.

Q. If a Principal/teacher has children in the school, is s/he entitled to be a member of the Parent Association committee?

A. Yes. It is important to note, however, that all members of the Parent Association committee who are staff members and are also parents, recognise that their involvement in the Parent Association committee is exclusively in their capacity as a parent and not as a staff member. This should also be acknowledged and respected by the rest of the members of the Parent Association committee.

Q. Where should Parent Association meetings take place?

A. All Parent Association meetings should take place in the school and this should be adequately facilitated for by the Board of Management. Provisions should be made to ensure that there is no disruption to normal school business. Appropriate measures should be put in place to ensure the security of the school.

Q. Should a Parent Association be involved in the drawing up of school policies?

A. It is important that parents are consulted when school policies are being developed. Parents should be centrally involved in developing any school policy that directly affects the children or themselves such as the Code of Behaviour, healthy eating, bullying prevention, use of mobile phones, homework etc. All policies should be made available to parents.

Q. Does this include curriculum policies?

A. It is important to be aware that the curriculum is prescribed by the Department of Education and Science, not by the school, and the school's curricular policies refer to how the school will implement the curriculum. The teaching staff take a central role in the drawing up of curricular policies for the school. The Board of Management members, including its parents' representatives can and often contribute to the whole-school curriculum planning process. The Primary School Curriculum 1999 makes provision for parents to play an important role in their children's learning.

Parents and students should contribute to the review and evaluation process of the curriculum, and parents should be active partners in planning for parental support.

“Parents can make a big contribution to the education of their children in school. This is why they have been given a distinct role in supporting the implementation of the curriculum. The school plan will identify ways in which parents can be involved in organisational planning for the curriculum. This might include arranging for a grandparent to come and talk to a class about his/her experience of the past as part of the history curriculum. It could also involve parents in helping to arrange supervise out-of-school activities, like exploring the local environment.” **Primary School Curriculum - Your child's learning, Guidelines for Parents (1999)**

Q. How can new members of the Parent Association committee be encouraged to become officers?

A. Allowing roles to be shared may help a broad range of committee members to become involved. To give new committee members experience and confidence, shadow or assistant positions for example Vice Chairperson, Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer can be created.

Q. What is a school's Code of Behaviour?

A. This is a document required by law which outlines the behaviour expected from all members of the school community.

Under section 23 of the *Education (Welfare) Act 2000* (see Appendix 2), the Board of Management of each school must prepare and make available a code of behaviour for its students. The Act requires that the school code of behaviour is prepared in accordance with Guidelines issued by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). The Code of Behaviour helps the school community to promote the school ethos, relationships, policies, procedures and practices that encourage good behaviour and prevent unacceptable behaviour. The Code of Behaviour helps teachers, other members of staff, students and parents to work together for a happy, effective and safe school.

The Code of Behaviour should be prepared in consultation with all members of the school community including the pupils and parents. Every parent of a child in the school should receive a copy of the Code of Behaviour, which they may be asked to sign when their child starts school.

Q. Are there any guidelines for a Parent Association to follow when engaging a speaker?

A. The aim of organising a speaker should be to support parents throughout their children's primary education. In identifying a speaker it is important to ensure they are competent in their area of expertise. It can often be useful to contact national organisations in identifying relevant local speakers, see Appendix 5 for a list of organisations. It is important to ensure that you are not commercially influencing the parents that attend. The Parent Association committee should agree the rate of any payment in advance with the speaker. It should also be indicated to the speaker ahead of time what it is hoped will be achieved by the talk, for example, in a talk on the curriculum that parents will:

- Gain insights into the primary school curriculum which their child is following
- Learn how best to support their children in all aspects of their learning

The committee should make arrangements for meeting and greeting the speaker before the talk. Make sure that the Chairperson for the talk knows the speaker's name and how they should be introduced.

Ensure the speaker is made aware of the time allocated for the presentation. Stress to him/her that a proportion of the time should be made available for discussion and questions.

Indicate if you would like the speaker to provide the key points in written form for participants.



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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Extracts from the Education Act, 1998

Parents

2. - (1) “parent” includes a foster parent, a guardian appointed under the Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997, or other person acting in *loco parentis* who has a child in his or her care subject to any statutory power or order of a court and, in the case of a child who has been adopted under the Adoption Acts, 1952 to 1998, or, where the child has been adopted outside the State, means the adopter or adopters or the surviving adopter;

National Association of Parents

2. - (1) “national association of parents” means an association or other body of persons established by parents with objects which include representing the views and interests of parents with regard to education and assisting parents in exercising their rights and role in the process of the education of their children, that is -

- (a) established and organised on a national basis and has a membership distributed over a substantial part of the State, and
- (b) for the time being recognised by the Minister for the purposes of this Act, including the National Parents Council - Primary and the National Parents Council (Post Primary) Limited, being bodies for the time being so recognised;

Parent Associations

26. - (1) The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents’ association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school.

(2) A parents’ association shall promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the board, Principal, teachers and students of a school and for that purpose may –

- (a) advise the Principal or the board on any matter relating to the school and the Principal or board, as the case may be, shall have regard to any such advice, and
- (b) adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school.

(3) The board shall promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a parents’ association and to a parents’ association when it is established.

(4) (a) A parents’ association shall, following consultation with its members, make rules governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs.

- (b) Where a parents’ association is affiliated to a national association of parents, the rules referred to in paragraph (a) shall be in accordance with guidelines issued by that national association of parents with the concurrence of the Minister.

The Principal

23. - (2) In addition to the functions of a Principal provided for in *section 22*, the Principal shall –
- (a) be responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school, and be accountable to the board for that management,
 - (b) provide leadership to the teachers and other staff and the students of the school,
 - (c) be responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers,
 - (d) under the direction of the board and, in consultation with the teachers, the parents and, to the extent appropriate to their age and experience, the students, set objectives for the school and monitor the achievement of those objectives, and
 - (e) encourage the involvement of parents of students in the school in the education of those students and in the achievement of the objectives of the school.

The Inspectorate

13. - (1) The Minister shall appoint a Chief Inspector and such and so many Inspectors as the Minister considers appropriate and the Chief Inspector and Inspectors collectively shall be known and are referred to in this Act as the “Inspectorate”.

(2) The Minister shall include amongst those he or she appoints as Inspectors under subsection (1) persons who hold qualifications as psychologists or who have other expertise, including expertise in the education of students with special educational needs.

(3) The functions of an Inspector shall be:

- (a) to support and advise recognised schools, centres for education and teachers on matters relating to the provision of education and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, an Inspector –
 - (i) shall visit recognised schools and centres for education on the initiative of the Inspectorate, and, following consultation with the board, patron, parents of students and teachers, as appropriate, do any or all of the following:
 - (I) evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers;
 - (II) evaluate the education standards in such schools and centres;
 - (III) assess the implementation and effectiveness of any programmes of education which have been devised in respect of individual students who have a disability or other special educational needs;
 - (IV) assess the implementation of regulations made by the Minister, and
 - (II) report to the Minister, or to the board, patron, parents of students and teachers, as appropriate, and as prescribed, on these matters or on any other matter relating to the activities of those schools or centres and the needs of students attending those schools or centres,

Boards of Management

21. - (1) A board shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, make arrangements for the preparation of a plan (in this section referred to as the “school plan”) and shall ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated.

(2) The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures, which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including equality of access to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs.

(3) The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans.

(4) A board shall make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school.

Appendix 2 - Extract from the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

Section 23 (2)

A code of behaviour shall specify—

- (a) the standards of behaviour that shall be observed by each student attending the school;
- (b) the measures that may be taken when a student fails or refuses to observe those standards;
- (c) the procedures to be followed before a student may be suspended or expelled from the school concerned;
- (d) the grounds for removing a suspension imposed in relation to a student; and
- (e) the procedures to be followed relating to notification of a child's absence from school.

In order to comply with these requirements, and in order to have the best chance of achieving its objectives, the code of behaviour should address:

- the standards of behaviour expected in the school
- the plan for promoting good behaviour
- the ways in which the school responds to unacceptable behaviour
- the plan for implementing the code of behaviour
- school procedures for the use of suspension and expulsion.

Appendix 3 - Equality legislation

Equal Status legislation

The *Equal Status Act 2000*, amended by the *Equality Act 2004*, applies to primary and post-primary schools. The acts:

- Promote equality of opportunity
- Prohibit discrimination subject to exemptions on nine specified grounds
- Prohibit sexual harassment and harassment on the discriminatory grounds
- Require the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities and
- Allow for a wide range of positive actions

The Acts relate to discrimination based on the following **9 grounds**: Gender, Marital Status, Family Status, Age, Race, Religion, Disability, Sexual Orientation, and Membership of the Traveller community.

The Acts allow for a broad range of positive action measures. The Acts also prohibit victimisation of any person who makes a complaint about discrimination, who opposes any acts that are unlawful under the equal status legislation, or who gives evidence in proceedings under the *Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004*, or who gives notice that they intend to do any of these.

Appendix 4 - Useful acronyms

NPC recommends that Parent Associations avoid the use of acronyms and abbreviations and produce materials using straightforward language, making all communication respectful, unambiguous and clear. It should be noted, however, that in the education community acronyms are frequently used therefore we have included a list of these for your information.

BOM	Board of Management
COGG	Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta
CPSMA	Catholic Primary School Managers Association
DES	Department of Education and Science
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
NABMSE	National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NCTE	National Centre for Technology in Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
NPC	National Parents Council Primary
NPC PP	National Parents Council Post Primary
NPSA	National Parents and Siblings Alliance
PA	Parent Association

Appendix 5 - Sources of information

Management Bodies

Catholic Primary School Managers Association (CPSMA)

New House, St. Patrick's College,
Maynooth, Co. Kildare.
Tel: 01 629 2462 or Freephone: 1850 407 200
Fax: 01 629 2654
Email: info@cpsma.ie
Website: www.cpsma.ie

Church of Ireland Board of Education

Church of Ireland House, Church Avenue,
Rathmines, Dublin 6.
Tel: 01 497 8422

Educate Together

(Multidenominational schools)
H8a Centrepont,
Oak Drive, Dublin 12.
Tel: 01 429 2500
Fax: 01 429 2502
Email: info@educatetogether.ie
Website: www.educatetogether.ie

Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán Ghaeilge

92 Bóthar Seannaigh, Rath Éanaigh,
Baile Átha Cliath 5.
Fón/Facs: 01 831 4487
Ríomhphost: foraspatrunachta@hotmail.com
Website: www.foras.ie

Islamic Foundation of Ireland

163 South Circular Road, Dublin 8.
Tel: 01 453 3242 or 01 473 8276
Fax: 01 453 2785
Website: www.islaminireland.com

National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE)

Kildare Education Centre,
Friary Road, Kildare Town.
Tel: 045 533753
Fax: 045 533681
Email: nabmse1@eircom.net
Website: www.nabmse.org/index.html

Further sources of information (in alphabetical order)

Anti-bullying Centre

Department of Teacher Education,
Room 4048/4049, Arts Building,
Trinity College, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 896 2573 / 896 3488
Email: Imcguire@tcd.ie
Website: www.abc.tcd.ie

Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland, (ARASI)

Promoting positive inter-cultural relations and to support integration for persons with refugee status
213 North Circular Road, Dublin 7.
Tel: 01 838 1142
Fax: 01 838 1143
Email: arasi@eircom.net
Website: www.arasi.org

Citizens Information

The Citizens Information Phone Service operates **Monday-Friday, 9am-9pm** (excluding public holidays). All calls from landlines **within Ireland** are charged at local rates. Calls from mobile phones may incur additional charges.
LoCall number: 1890 777 121
Email: information@citizensinformation.ie
Website: www.citizensinformation.ie

Citizens Information Board

Ground Floor, George's Quay House,
43 Townsend St, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 605 9000
Fax: 01 605 9099
Website: www.citizensinformationboard.ie

Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta, An

22 Plás Mhic Liam,
Baile Átha Cliath 2
Tel: 01 634 0831
Fax: 01 634 1002
Email: eolas@cogg.ie
Website: www.cogg.ie

Comhluadar

7 Sráid Lombard Thoir, Baile Átha Cliath 2
Tel: 01 671 5116
Fax: 01 671 0477
Email: eolas@comhluadar.ie
Website: www.comhluadar.ie

Department of Education and Science

Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.

Tel: 01 889 6400

Email: info@education.gov.ie

Website: www.education.ie

Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta Teo

Baile Bhuirne, Maigh Chromtha, Co. Chorcaí

Tel: 026 65885

Fax: 026 65809

Email: eolas@esg.ie

Equality Authority, The

2 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2

Tel: 01 417 3336

Fax: 01 417 3331

Email: info@equality.ie

Website: www.equality.ie

Gaelscoileanna Teo

Halla Naomh Phádraig, Institiúid Oideachais Marino,

Ascaill Uí Ghríofa, Baile Átha Cliath 9.

Fón: 01 853 5195

Facs: 01 853 5119

Ríomhphost: oifig@gaelscoileanna.ie

Website: www.gaelscoileanna.ie

Health & Safety Authority

Head Office, The Metropolitan Building,

James Joyce Street, Dublin 1.

Locall: 1890 289 389 (between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Tel: 1 614 7000

Fax: 01 614 7020

Email: wcu@hsa.ie

Website: <http://www.hsa.ie/eng/>

Immigrant Council of Ireland

2 St Andrew Street, Dublin 2.

Tel: 01 674 0202

Email: admin@immigrantcouncil.ie

Website: www.immigrantcouncil.ie

Indian Punjabi Society of Ireland

C/o Simi Sim Communications

38 Aungier Street, Dublin 2.

Tel: 01 475 9792

Contact: Dr J.S Puri (mob): 086-2465919 or Mr Chaddha (086-8239947)

Irish National Teachers Organisation

INTO, 35 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

Locall: 1850 70 87 08

Tel: 01 804 7700

Fax: 01 872 2462

Email: info@into.ie

Website: www.into.ie

Irish Traveller Movement

4/5 Eustace Street, Dublin 2.

Tel: 01 679 6577

Fax: 01 679 6578

Email: itmtrav@indigo.ie

Website: www.itmtrav.ie

Jesuit Refugee Service Ireland

13 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1.

Tel: 01 814 8644

Fax: 01 873 4680

Website: www.jrs.ie

National Adult Literacy Agency

76 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1

Tel: 01 855 4332

Fax: 01 855 5475

Email: admin@nala.ie

Website: www.nala.ie

National Centre for Technology in Education

Dublin City University,

Glasnevin, Dublin 9.

Tel: 01 700 8200

Fax: 01 700 8210

Email: info@ncte.ie

Website: www.ncte.ie (National Centre for Technology in Education)

www.scoilnet.ie (Network for Irish schools)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.

Tel: 01 661 7177

Fax: 01 661 7180

Email: info@ncca.ie

Website: www.ncca.ie

National Council for Special Education

1-2 Mill Street, Trim, Co. Meath.

Tel: 046 948 6400

Fax: 046 948 6404

Email: info@ncse.ie

Website: www.ncse.ie

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Frederick Court, 24 - 27 North Frederick Street,

Dublin 1.

Tel: 01 889 2700

Fax: 01 889 2755

Email: neps@neps.gov.ie

National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)

16 - 22 Green Street, Dublin 7.

Tel: 01 873 8700

Education Helpline: 1890 36 36 66

Fax: 01 873 8799

Email: info@newb.ie

Website: www.newb.ie

National Parents and Siblings Alliance

31, Magenta Hall

Santry, Dublin 9.

Tel: 01 862 4100,

Email: npsa@eircom.net

Website: www.npsa.ie

National Parents Council – Post Primary

Unit 5 Glasnevin Business Centre,

Ballyboggan Road, Dublin 11.

Tel: 01 830 2740/47

Fax: 01 830 2752

Email: npcpp@eircom.net

Website: www.npcpp.ie

Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Hawkins House, Dublin 2.

Tel: 01 635 4000

Fax: 01 674 3223

Email: omcya@health.gov.ie

Website: www.omcya.ie

For information on **Student Councils** Tel: 01 674 3219

Ombudsman for Children

Ombudsman for Children's Office,
Millennium House,
52-56 Great Strand Street,
Dublin 1.
Tel: 01 865 6800 or Free-phone 1800 20 20 40
Email: oco@oco.ie
Website: www.oco.ie

Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS)

14 Joyce Way, Park West Business Park,
Nangor Road, Dublin 12.
Tel: 01 435 8587
Fax: 01 435 8596
E-mail: eolas@ppds.ie
Website: www.ppds.ie

Relationship and Sexuality Education Support Service

Education Centre, Drumcondra,
Dublin 9.
Tel: 01 857 6422
Email: info@ecdumcondra.ie

Teaching Council, The

Block A, Maynooth Business Campus,
Maynooth,
Co. Kildare.
LoCall: 1890 224 224
Tel: 01 651 7900
Fax: 01 651 7901
Email: info@teachingcouncil.ie
Website: www.teachingcouncil.ie



Co-financed by the European Commission, the Department of Education and Science and supported by the Office of the Minister for Integration and Pobal.

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12 Marlborough Court, Dublin 1
Tel: (01) 887 4034 Fax: (01) 887 4489
Email: info@npc.ie Website: www.npc.ie

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Tel: (01) 887 4477 Email: helpline@npc.ie

ISBN 978-0-9517459-5-3