

What is a Parent Council?



Parent Councils have been around for a long time now, but some parents - especially those whose children have recently started school – may be unaware of what the Parent Council is and what it can do for them. Hopefully this will help to answer some of the questions.

What is a Parent Council for?

The main job of a Parent Council is to represent the views of the parents at the school.

Your school's Parent Council should help to create an environment where all parents know that their views matter, and where they feel confident and comfortable putting them forward. This link between parents and the school can really help to ensure that these make a real difference to the work and life of the school.

Who can be in the Parent Council?

All parents and carers of children attending your school can come to one meeting a year, or all of them, or any number in between. There does not need to be a list to tick off of who attends and who does not – be happy that anyone has turned up to help you support the school (giving them cake often helps!). It is very useful to have a Staff Representative who can come to meetings, but parents must always be in the majority.



Someone does need to take charge of what happens with the Parent Council though – these are the Role Bearers:

- *Chairperson - this person MUST, by law, be a parent or carer of a child currently attending the school*
- *Vice-Chairperson to support the Chairperson and to take on their duties in their absence if needed*
- *Secretary or Clerk*
- *Treasurer*



All other parents and carers that attend any meeting should be made welcome and feel heard.

Some people without a child attending the school but with an interest in the well-being of the school as a whole, such as local councillors, or past parents who wish to continue to support the fundraising efforts of the Parent Council, or someone with knowledge useful to the group, can be voted in as a co-opted member.

What does a Parent Council do?



The duties of a Parent Council are not laid down in legislation, so it is up to the parents and carers at each school (their Parent Forum) to decide what they want their Parent Council to do.

The parents should nominate and vote for Office Bearers of the Parent Council to speak on its behalf. They can also decide on their constitution – the rules and regulations set by each Parent Council for how they want to run things. Both of these things should be done at an Annual General Meeting (again, offering coffee and a cake comes to the fore here?).

There are lots of things a Parent Council can get involved in, including:

- Supporting the work of the school, for example, by advising the school on its policies, contributing to the school's handbook and development plan
- Promoting contact between all parents and the rest of the school community
- Organising social and fundraising events
- Discussing anything that's of interest to parents
- Being involved in the appointment of senior staff

As a member of a Parent Council, you are also able to join the D&G Parent Council Forum (DGPCF). The DGPCF is a group trying to provide a voice for all Parent Councils across D & G. The aim of the group is to be proactive in helping shape education across our region, and members of this group are now parent representatives on the Council's Children Young People and Lifelong Learning Committee (formerly Education Committee), have joined local authority teams working on various policy and service reviews (looking at how to work within budgets constraints), and have been involved in shaping consultations, always with the aim of making these issues more accessible to parents who don't necessarily speak 'education' or 'finance'. The Forum has a Facebook page (Dumfries & Galloway Parent Council Forum) and meets once a term - new members are always welcome.

Dumfries & Galloway
Parent Council Forum

Do we have to have a Parent Council?

No, you don't. Although the majority of schools in Scotland do have a Parent Council, there are still a few which don't. Having said this, it is a brilliant way to form strong connections with your child's school and their own learning by being the first to hear about upcoming projects or events in the school, across Dumfries & Galloway or nationally, about the inner workings of the staff teams, etc.

Some schools decide to use another name for their Parent Council, for example Parent Partnerships, School Associations, Friends of...etc.



Parent Councils can also include a sub group for Fundraising if parents find it easier or more practical to keep everything together, or you could choose to have a separate Fundraising Group/PTA and Parent Council.

If you do have a Parent Council...



Make sure that the Education Authority has a note of your current contact email addresses. This is vital to ensure you receive communications from them, and from other groups that wish to communicate with all Parent Councils – such as the D&G Parent Council Forum and the National Parent Forum of Scotland – but do not have access to all contact details. There is a form sent out from the Education Authority bi-annually to take these details.

It is strongly recommended that your Parent Council sets up a generic email address, such as HogwartsPrimarySchool@gmail.com. This ensures information is held in one place and can be passed very easily from one Chair to the new after elections (and also avoids having to give out your own email address for school business).

What happens at meetings?

Each Parent Council should have at least a Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer as role bearers, and these are formally elected at an AGM.

New Parent Councils will need to adopt a constitution at their first AGM (templates can be found through SPTC and the Council's website links), and any changes needing to be made to existing ones must be done at AGMs. All other parents that attend are members - some schools will have different parents at each meeting due to family/work commitments, some will have the same parents every time.



Parent Council meetings can be held as often as needed, but there should be at least one per term - fundraising groups can meet as needed throughout the year - and it is helpful for the Chair to meet with the Head Teacher (HT) beforehand to discuss agenda items the Parent Council want to set and give both time to prepare any additional information required. HTs are invited to attend every meeting, and it is normal practice to give them space on the agenda to report on issues/events in school.



*The **Chair** is the main link between the Parent Council and the HT/School; any correspondence from the Local Authority will usually come via the school secretary so make friends with yours so that emails are forwarded and envelopes passed on without too much delay! The Chair's job at meetings is to make sure all agenda items are dealt with effectively - i.e. to ensure meetings run smoothly, giving everyone a chance to speak and making sure discussions are appropriate for the forum, i.e. individual cases should be dealt with privately before deciding whether there is a matter for the Parent Council to take on board.*

*The **Secretary** to take notes at the meetings and to turn them into minutes (an official record of the meeting to allow everyone to be reminded of what was discussed at each meeting and the things they said they would do) and prepares them for circulation to members once they have been approved by the Chair. Parent Councils get a grant from the Local Authority that should cover photocopying/training/travel expenses if needed. Some schools produce an easier-to-read version of minutes in the form of a newsletter so that all parents are kept updated with what is being discussed and planned at meetings.*

The **Treasurer's** role is to be one of at least 2 signatories on the bank account(s) and to handle the money for the Parent Council's fundraising activities and the aforementioned grant from the Local Authority, and to keep financial records that can be audited at the end of the year. These can be as formal as you are comfortable with - some schools have computer spreadsheets and files, others use a notebook and pen with in & out columns; both are fine as long as you can provide a paper trail for spending and incoming monies, so keep all receipts and invoices safe. These records are then used to give a report at each meeting, with current balances and expected expenditure etc. to keep track of income and expenses for fundraising monies and the Parent Council funding that comes from the local authority.

Two weeks' notice should be given for meetings – be it through email, text, poster at school gate, item in school newsletter – and all parents and carers at the school have an open invitation to all meetings.

Agenda Items

These can vary from school to school but may include:

1. Present and Apologies
2. Approval of previous minutes
3. Matters arising (anything from the last meeting that needs follow up or further discussion)
4. Correspondence received by Parent Council
5. Fundraising & Events Calendar
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Head Teacher's Items
8. AOB
9. Date of next Parent Council meeting – it might suit you to set all meeting dates for the year ahead to give everyone maximum notice for childcare, work commitments, etc.



Useful Links

- D&G Parent Council Forum – DGPCF is there to support Parent Councils in all they are trying to achieve in their own schools, and across the region, by providing a link between Government/local authorities and parents dealing with everyday life at school.
Email: dandgparentforum@gmail.com Facebook page: [Dumfries & Galloway Parent Council Forum](#)
- The Parental Engagement page of the Dumfries & Galloway Council's website has several resources for Parent Councils too:
<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/article/17608/Parental-Involvement>
- Resources are available on all aspects of Parent Councils on the Connect website at <https://connect.scot> - take a few moments (or hours!) to visit their site for some brilliant resources and information.
- Also, have a look at the Education Scotland site: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/gettinginvolved/parentcouncils/index.asp>
- Or the National Parent Forum of Scotland site for Nutshells on many topics and other news and resources: <http://www.npfs.org.uk>