

PARENT COUNCILS - Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who can serve on a Parent Council?

Any parent, guardian or carer of a pupil at a particular school can become a parent member of the School Parent Council for that school. Teachers on the staff can serve on a Parent Council as staff members.

Persons may be co-opted onto the Parent Council (co-opted member) provided they are not eligible to serve as a parent or staff member.

People who are eligible to serve on the Parent Council may do so as long as there is no legal reason which might otherwise restrict them from doing so.

2. What is the role of the head teacher in relation to the Parent Council?

The head teacher cannot be a member of the Parent Council but does have a right and a duty to be present and to speak at Parent Council meetings, to provide the Parent Council with information, and to act in an advisory capacity on any matter that falls within the Parent Council's remit.

3. Can a classroom assistant/auxiliary/nursery nurse with children in the same school stand for selection/election as a Parent Council member?

Yes, they can stand as a parent member or a staff member.

4. Can a teacher at a school where their child is a pupil be a parent member?

All parents are eligible to be a parent member.

5. Can a staff member or a co-opted member serve as Chair?

No. The Chair can only be a parent member of the Parent Council.

6. What does co-opted mean and who can be co-opted?

A co-opted person is someone who has been appointed to the Parent Council by the existing Parent Council members. A person who is eligible for selection/election to a Parent Council (as parent or staff member) is not eligible to be a co-opted member of that Parent Council.

There is a duty for Parent Councils to co-opt members who are neither parent or staff members in order to bring expertise or experience, such as a community representative or senior secondary pupil, to the Parent Council.

7. Can you sit on more than one Parent Council at the same time?

Yes. There are no limits to the number of Parent Councils a person can be a member of providing they meet the membership criteria

8. Can a husband and wife sit on the same Parent Council at the same time?

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Yes.

9. Who can attend meetings?

The head teacher, local Councillor and an officer of the education authority have the right to attend and to speak at Parent Council meetings.

Members of the public can attend Parent Council meetings as they are open meetings. However, there are times when a Parent Council may exclude the public from attending when the Parent Council is discussing any confidential issue. The Clerk to the Parent Council, when this is other than a Parent Council member, can attend and so can any other person invited by the Parent Council.

10. What can a Parent Council do if a member does not attend meetings?

A Parent Council can remove a member whom they are satisfied is unable or unfit to carry out his/her duties because of illness or incapacity. A member can also be removed by the

Parent Council where the Parent Council is satisfied that the member failed without good cause to attend meetings for a continuous period of at least 6 months, provided that he/she has also failed without good cause to attend 3 consecutive meetings. However, Parent Councils have no power to remove a disruptive member simply for their behavior.

11. How long does a parent member serve?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

12. How long does a co-opted member from the community serve?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

13. How long does a staff member serve on the Parent Council?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

14. If a Parent Council member no longer has a child at the school do they have to stand down?

Once their child leaves the school they are no longer eligible to be a parent member.

15. Can a parent be re-selected/re-elected for a further term of office?

Yes.

16. Can a Parent Council appoint a parent or staff member without holding a formal election?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

17. Who invites a co-opted member onto the Parent Council?

All Parent Council members should be involved in any discussion and/or decision regarding who should be invited to be co-opted onto the Parent Council. Where there is a division of opinion in relation to the appointment of a co-opted member, the decision shall be by vote.

18. What is a quorum?

A quorum is the least number of Parent Council members that must be present to make a meeting valid.

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

19. How many meetings are Parent Councils expected to have?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

20. What does the Parent Council deal with?

Parent Councils have certain formal duties, powers and rights, but it is up to each Parent Council to decide how active they wish to be. They must, however, carry out their functions with a view to raising the standard of education in their school.

A Parent Council, for example;

- may make representations to the education authority about the capitation allowance (the budget for books, other teaching materials and other purposes.)
- should receive information and have discussion about the head teacher's spending plans
- can request from time to time information from the education authority relating to the Parent Council's school and the provision of education in the authority's area.
- may comment on financial information, statements and reports on school policies relating to the curriculum, assessment of pupils, discipline, rules and uniform.
- can comment on the head teacher's annual report to the Parent Council and on any other reports or information concerning the school.
- must report to parents every 12 months on the activities of the Parent Council
- has a duty to promote contact between the school, parents of pupils in attendance at the school and the local community, encourage the formation of parent-teacher or parents' associations.
- takes part in appointment committees to consider candidates for head teacher and deputy head teacher posts.

21. Does a Parent Council deal with complaints?

A Parent Council may not accept or investigate complaints about a particular school, its pupils, staff or parents. Complaints should always be referred to the head teacher in the first instance. All education authorities have procedures for dealing with such matters. Please contact your school or education authority for more information.

22. Are parents involved in appointment procedures

The Parent Council may nominate members to sit on an appointment committee for the purpose of considering leeting of candidates, the long leet, and the short leet of candidates. and for making recommendations to the authority for the appointment of persons to fill head teacher and depute head teacher posts.

The Parent Council has no role in dismissing staff, which is a matter for the education authority.

23. What is the difference between a Parent Council and a PTA/PA?

A Parent Council is a statutory body that has duties, rights and responsibilities assigned to it in legislation. On the other hand, PTAs/PAs are voluntary bodies.

24. What is the relationship between the Parent Council and PTA/PA?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

25. Does the Parent Council receive a budget?

Parent Councils receive a budget from the education authority to meet administrative expenses.

This includes the costs for the services of a Clerk to the Parent Council, where he/she is not a Parent Council member, and the expenses of training Parent Council members. The education authority has a discretionary power to pay travelling and subsistence allowances to Parent Council members for attending Parent Council meetings or for doing any approved things connected to the discharge of the Parent Council's functions

26. What happens to any surplus funds at the end of the financial year?

The education authority will make any surplus funds available to the Parent Council at the end of the financial year. Any surplus funds must be used for the benefit of the school and spent once any views of the head teacher of the school have been taken into account.

Surplus funds might be used to buy additional books or classroom equipment, for example.

27. How long should the Chair be in post?

There is no prescribed length of time a Chair should be in post since a Parent Council has the power to regulate its own proceedings.

28. Does the Clerk get paid for their services?

Yes, provided the Clerk is not a member of the Parent Council. Please contact East Dunbartonshire Council on rates and payment.

29. Can non-teaching members of staff such as janitors, school secretaries, be co-opted members of a Parent Council?

Yes, provided they are not eligible to be parent members.

30. Can a Parent Council function without a staff member?

Yes, a Parent Council can exist without a staff member. However, in order to develop partnership between the school and the parent council it would be best practice to ensure that wherever possible, a staff member position is filled

31. What is the position of a nursery unit within a primary school?

Staff and parents of children attending a nursery unit within a primary school are included as members of the school parent forum and as such are eligible to be selected/elected as members of the Parent Council.

32. Do co-opted members have to come from the local community?

No, but it is advised that co-opted members are from the local community to ensure they have a genuine interest in the school.

33. Does the head teacher have to attend every meeting of the Parent Council?

The head teacher has a right and a duty to attend Parent Council meetings. If they are unable to attend then they should send a representative.

34. Has the head teacher any say in the approval of the minutes of Parent Council meetings?

Responsibility for approving the minutes lies with the Chairperson. However, the Head teacher may be involved in, for example, checking the minutes for accuracy and assisting in clarifying terminology before the Chairperson approves them.

35. What is the role of the Parent Council Chair?

- The positions of Parent Council Chairperson must be held by a parent. The role of the Chairperson has a significant effect on how a Parent Council operates.
- Before a Parent Council meeting the Chairperson should, together with the Clerk, draw up an agenda for the meeting. The head teacher should also be included in this process as they may suggest appropriate/relevant matters for discussion. The Chairperson has final say on what appears on the agenda.
- The Chairperson should ensure arrangements are in place for the agenda to be sent out to the head teacher, all Parent Council members, the local council and the Head of Education (or representative) where appropriate, at least a week in advance of the Parent Council meeting. The agenda should also be made publicly available in the school.
- During the Parent Council meeting the Chairperson should allocate an appropriate amount of time to each item to ensure that all agenda items are covered and that the discussion is focused on the subject at hand.
- Where there is disagreement the Chairperson should consider when to ask for a motion to be proposed. The Chairperson has a second or casting vote where an equality of votes arises at any meeting of the Parent Council surrounding any matter *except* in relation to the appointment of a co-opted member or to the appointment to any particular office or committee.

- At the end of discussion of each agenda item the Chairperson should summarise any decision(s) the Parent Council has taken on the subject concerned. This will also assist the Clerk who has to write up the minutes of the meeting. Where any further action is required on an item, the Chairperson should make clear what has to be done, by whom and by when.
- Discussion of any item which is not on the agenda should be at the discretion of the Chairperson.
- After the meeting the Chairperson should check the accuracy of the draft minutes as prepared by the Clerk. Responsibility for approving the draft minutes before they are issued to the Parent Council lies with the Chairperson.

36. Does the Parent Council have any say in how the School budget is spent?

The Parent Council should receive information about, and have an opportunity to discuss the head teacher's plans for spending the budget for books and equipment allocated to a school by the education authority. All areas of the budget are administered by the head teacher under the terms of the scheme of devolved school management.

A Parent Council is also entitled to make representations to the education authority concerning the financial statements of the authority for the previous financial year in respect of the running costs of the school and capital expenditure related to that school.

37. How do Parent Councils effectively communicate with parents?

Parent Councils communicate with their parent body through a variety of means such as:-

- publicising the Parent Council meeting agenda and minutes (statutory obligation)
- through an annual report (statutory obligation)
- letters/newsletters
- personal contact
- attendance at school events, e.g., parents' evening
- putting information on the school website.

38. Will I receive any training?

Training courses are available to Parent Council members through East Dunbartonshire Council.

39. Do Parent Council members have to undertake any training?

There is no statutory requirement for Parent Council members to undertake training. However, members are actively encouraged to attend training courses which will assist them in undertaking their roles and responsibilities effectively.

40. Do all Parent Councils have the same role and remit?

Yes, all Parent Councils have the same statutory rights and obligations which are found in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 and the regulations made under that Act.

41. What is the position of a parent member who becomes a member of the teaching staff at the school?

The person can remain as a parent member of the Parent Council or would be eligible to become a staff member of the Parent Council

42. Is a parent member whose child leaves the school eligible to be co-opted onto the Parent Council?

Yes. However, if the parent member is a member of the Parent Council, they can be co-opted but they cannot remain as a parent member.

43. Do I require any qualifications to be a Parent Council member?

No, you do not need any professional qualifications or expert knowledge of education to be a Parent Council member.

44. What does the Parent Council do if the Clerk resigns?

Advise the education authority immediately of the Clerk's resignation and then advertise the post around the school, support staff, PTA and parents. If there is no response, widen the search by advertising locally.

45. If a staff member resigns part way through their term of office, is there a timescale within which the parent Council must make arrangements to fill that vacancy?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

46. When is the regular selection/election period?

Please refer to the constitution for your school.

47. Can a parent member, who is a teacher at another school, sit on an appointment committee?

Yes – an employee of an education authority is not precluded from being a member of an appointment committee. That member would require to be nominated either by the Parent Council or the authority.

48. Are education authorities required to establish Parent Councils for special schools and for special units for children permanently excluded from secondary school?

Education authorities have a statutory obligation to establish a Parent Council for each school in their area. "School" is defined as a public school, other than a nursery school. It therefore includes education authority managed special schools.

49. Is there a period of time after disestablishment that a Parent Council must wait before requesting re-establishment?

FAQs

There is nothing in legislation that specifies a period between disestablishment and requesting re-establishment. The Parent Council can be re-established when either the minimum number of parent members required for the Parent Council request it.

DISCLAIMER: - These Frequently Asked Questions offer assistance in understanding the rules and obligations on Parent Councils as set out in the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. The answers to these questions cannot give a definitive interpretation of the law. Any Parent Council or other person seeking advice on the meaning of the legislation is strongly advised to consult the Act itself and take professional legal advice. Parent Councils can receive free legal advice from the Govan Law Centre.