



PARENTS AS PARTNERS - GOOD PRACTICE NEWSLETTER

June 2009



Director of Education

As we approach the end of the school session and look forward to a good summer break, it is important to reflect back on our successes so we can develop further the great work staff, pupils and parents are carrying out in our schools, communities and at home to improve pupil achievements.

It is equally important to look at the challenges we have faced and prepare strategies to tackle those in the coming year. Curriculum for Excellence is uppermost in our thoughts as we make preparations to implement this in our schools. You will know that schools have been given some extra in-

service preparation days to get themselves ready for this new way of working.

It is evident how much work has been done already - our very successful parents conference showcased all the work being done in schools around literacy - a major cross cutting theme - and you can read the report below. If you were able to come to the conference, I hope you had as enjoyable a day as I had, if not, I hope to see you next year.

Parents' Conference at Victoria Primary School, Saturday 16th May 2009

The focus of this year's conference was 'Literacy Across Learning' – with a Scottish twist given that this is the homecoming year. The event took place from 10.00am and finished around 2.00pm with over 90 parents from the Falkirk Council area attending the event. Parents got an insight of how literacy – reading, writing and talking - is taught in every area of the curriculum and they were able to participate in a variety of practical and informative workshops throughout the day.



Julia Swan, Director of Education, welcomed delegates to the event and introduced the guest speaker, Alan Bissett, a renowned author. Mrs Swan emphasised how important it is for parents to be involved, support and promote their child's learning throughout school and at home. Parents are the principal educators of their children and are vital in helping children learn.

In the main hall there was a 'Marketplace' set up with displays from a variety of schools, services and partner agencies all of which tied into the theme of the conference. Stalls ranged from adult literacy – the Big Plus – Parental Involvement including the launch of the new Parental Handbooks, Library Services and a variety of stalls from schools including Nethermain Primary School's display on the Scots language. Delegates were free to look round the market place before the start of the event and during lunch and could pick up information from stalls and ask questions.



Alan Bissett, our speaker, is an author raised in Falkirk and who attended Hallglen Primary School. He gave the entertaining and funny keynote speech.

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Parents' Conference at Victoria Primary School, Saturday 16th May 2009 Continued:-



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Alan then discussed the topic 'How I learned to stop worrying and love books' explaining how he became a writer, his inspirations and how parents can seek avenues of support for their children. Nethermains Primary pupils showed off their Scots language skills by reciting poetry and verse in the 'braw Scots tongue' and then performed the traditional nursery rhyme 'Heid, Shooders, Shanks and Taes' which was greeted by an enthusiastic round of applause.



After the keynote speech, delegates then attended their chosen workshops. There were eight very different workshops on offer as follows-

- 'Co-operative Activities in reading' which was hosted by Sacred Heart Primary;
- 'The Success of Debating in Our School' run by Easter Carmuir's Primary where pupils showed their debating skills;
- 'Promoting Active Literacy In the Infant Years' where teachers from Langlees Primary and P1 pupils demonstrated some of their literacy activities;
- 'Storytelling' with Slamannan Primary school staff and pupils;
- 'Scots Language' organised by Nethermains Primary;
- 'Early Literacy and Culture' hosted by Liz Rose, Curriculum Support Officer which looked at how babies and young children become literate;
- 'Introduction to Curriculum for Excellence' organised by a Falkirk High School teacher and
- 'Becoming an Author' where Alan Bissett spoke to parents about encouraging young people to use their imagination.

After a light lunch - which had a Scottish theme including Scotch broth and shortbread - delegates then went on to attend their second choice of workshop before returning to the main hall where Alan Bissett made his closing remarks and gave the vote of thanks.

As the event was ending delegates were asked to leave feedback on their opinion of the day. It appears from the comments received that everyone thoroughly enjoyed the conference and found it both interesting and inspiring. Here is some of the feedback –

- Excellent experience. Learned what I'm doing right and what else I can do. Enjoyed listening to Alan
- Another great conference! Loved the kids' involvement. So many parents are missing out by not attending. Looking forward to next year
- Great morning – literacy now is not so scary for me as a parent!!





Assessment is for Learning Workshop at Bothkennar

On 28th January, parents attended an evening workshop to learn about the concept and experience the benefits of “Assessment is for Learning” approaches in the classroom.

To begin, Qwizdom interactive voting tools were distributed and everyone had the opportunity to become familiar with the technology involved by warming up with a short general knowledge quiz. Following this, we asked questions to gauge the group’s experience of assessment when they attended school and throughout their adult life. Providing pseudonym login names allowed everyone to contribute fully and anonymously to the survey. The voting tools allowed us to immediately display and examine the data that people had sent via their interactive remote. The responses prompted discussion on how the group felt that past assessment practices often failed to support and extend their own learning.



This was demonstrated in a cooperative learning exercise whereby each participant was presented with an example of writing and given a specific aspect of the text to assess, ranging from making sure the sentences made sense, checking for spelling or punctuation errors or identifying potential opportunities to improve vocabulary. Everyone meticulously performed their role, highlighting areas for improvement. When time was up, we added all the mistakes together, congratulating ourselves on how thoroughly we had performed our assessors’ roles but then examined the detrimental effects that this marked piece of work would have on a child.



Parents were then introduced to the different forms of “Assessment is for Learning” in a new classroom culture in which *“the learner is responsible for the learning and construction of knowledge, through cooperative situations, discussion and discovery learning set in meaningful contexts”* (Shirley Clarke).

We returned to the piece of writing that we had originally dissected but this time we looked at the learning targets and success criteria that the teacher had displayed showing the area of language work, on which our imaginary child had been required to focus. We re-examined the text for areas of strength and areas for development. Participants agreed that this form of assessment would more likely motivate the child to return and make improvements to their work as opposed to the original form of feedback.

Our entire school has been involved in a mini research project to examine the benefits of peer assessment, one form of “Assessment is for Learning”, in writing. Older, more experienced writers worked cooperatively with younger pupils to help them plan, add detail, use better vocabulary and more accurate punctuation in their writing over an eight week period. The workshop was a perfect opportunity to share the learning theories behind the research and brief parents on our preliminary findings. We were fortunate that a good number of pupils attended the workshop to share their experiences of the paired writing intervention.

Parents responded positively to the workshop. Written feedback included:-

- *“I think this is the way forward for the kids learning. Well done”*
- *“I feel that this is proving to be a very effective process of learning. It has encouraged me to look on the Parentzone website*
- *“AiFL seems a much better and clearer way for children to learn. By letting them integrate with each other and “teach and learn” from each other, I think this is helping to build children’s confidence and abilities”.*





Drumbowie Primary School

Positive Behaviour Focus Groups February 2009

In order to review our school's Positive Behaviour Policy we were keen to seek the views of all those involved – pupils, staff and parents.

We decided to hold Focus Group sessions based on the World Café Conversations style to encourage people to contribute their views in an informal, non-threatening atmosphere.

Two sessions were organised during the school day. Tables were set with tablecloths and refreshments were served. Each group was made up of a

mixture of parents, staff and pupils. The groups had three aspects of positive behaviour to discuss – Home / School



partnership, the House system and rewards & sanctions. Discussions were recorded by everyone at the table in a variety of ways – it made very interesting reading!

Feedback was very positive. This was an ideal opportunity to hear different perspectives from different groups of people.

Comments included –

- “It was good to get the chance to hear what other parents thought”
- “I got the chance to see things from other people's points of view”

World of Work Week

Week beginning 2nd March was World of Work Focus Week at Drumbowie PS.

We drew on the expertise of some of our parents to enhance learning and build pupil awareness of career options during this week. There was a wide range of activities, organised by Miss Saunders (Class Teacher) including a visit from the Fire Brigade and the P1 – P4 class visited Asda Distribution Centre.



Trip to Ratho Climbing Arena

On Friday 27th March our Parent Council treated the children in P5 – 7 to an outing to the Ratho Climbing Arena. (See photo below).

On the day groups of children, staff and parents had great fun together scaling the walls!

Children were overheard saying “This is the best trip yet!”





Early Years Parent's Group **St Francis Primary School**

This term, our Nursery Parent's Group had extended to include parents from P1 and P2. The Group meet on a weekly basis and a crèche facility is provided.

The Nursery Group contribute to the positive ethos of St. Francis Xavier's Primary School by supporting each other and supporting the school and nursery. In recent meetings, parents have been looking at health issues for themselves and their children, including an interactive presentation about children's vision and eyesight problems and a weekly weigh-in for parents! They have also helped with our outdoor development by applying for money, fundraising, and practical projects. The 'fones4schools' campaign, run by a parent group member, was a great success, raising approximately £600 for our developments. Our enthusiastic group are presently organising the Nursery Summer Fun Day, involving the whole community and outside agencies. The group organised and ran a coffee morning when the nursery performed their Easter show. Group members managed the 'story sacks' within the nursery and plan to help with transition procedures by talking to parents about their own experiences and answering questions on the final induction day.

The Parent's Group benefits both the parents themselves, the school and the nursery. St. Francis Xavier's Primary School appreciates their support and hard work and look forward to strengthening relationships and further development of the group in the future.





HELPING WITH HOMEWORK

Practical ways to help

1. Provide a Quiet Environment

Provide a quiet, well lit study area. Avoid distractions such as the television and loud music. Encourage other family members to be quiet, especially youngsters.

2. Have a Regular Homework Routine

Obviously household routines differ. Late at night is rarely a good time to study, as children are tired. You may need to be flexible if your child attends outside activities. Try to get a balance, but homework is a priority. If it is being rushed then consider reducing the school commitments or television viewing. Having a routine helps to avoid excuses such as "I'll do it after that programme" or "I forgot." It is important that a child learns to take responsibility rather than having to rely on reminders. Also do not expect your child to work on an empty stomach. No-one works well when they are hungry.

3. Praise Effort and Achievement

It is vital to praise a child for his or her efforts and achievements. Positive comments are more effective than critical ones. A child can become disaffected if continually reminded of shortcomings. Building self-esteem is very important.

4. Show an Interest

Make time to talk about school in daily conversations. Take your child to the library if he or she needs to access reference materials such as books and CD-ROMs. Librarians can also guide you child where to look for information. You can give your child a good start if you read with them and discuss current reading books, at least up to the age of eleven.

5. Provide Equipment

Ensure your child has basic equipment such as pens, pencils, a rubber, a ruler etc. Other useful items could include paper clips, a calculator, scissors, glue, a thesaurus and sticky tape. These should be kept together. Homework bags are a good idea because books can be carried to and from school safely.

6. Set a Good Example

Children's attitudes to homework are mainly influenced by their parents' guidance and examples. They are more likely to want to study if they see you reading and writing. Remember that educational visits can also support learning.

7. Checking Homework

Obviously how closely children need to be monitored is dependant on several factors:

- The age of child
- How able your child is academically
- How independently your child is able to work.

It is a good idea to check homework over and to remember that the homework is not yours, but your child's. If you do their homework for them, you are not helping him or her to become an independent learner.



Ladeside Primary School's Parent Council

It's AGM time.

How can we get as many parents as possible to know what we've been doing?

This was the question, Ladeside Primary School's Parent Council; Parents At Ladeside School (PALS) asked when planning their Annual General Meeting.

Their ethos to date has been to try and keep PALS communications to parents jargon free and having a tone of being approachable and informal.

They decided that the AGM would be called the "PALS Update". The programme would show 3 items; 1) Highlights of the year's activities, 2) Presentation of 2007/08 accounts and 3) Questions and Answers

Instead of listing everything PALS had achieved over the year, the Chairwoman, Elaine, would draw attention to the PALS Update Newsletter which highlighted our main projects and successes.

This Newsletter was sent to all parents and available at the meeting. On the back was the Statement of Accounts. The event would also be the launch of the revised web site; ladeside.webeden.co.uk.

Historically, parents at Ladeside have always been keen to learn about what the school is doing and attend events that involved pupils.

So that's what they decided to do; with the Head Teacher's approval, they organised a School Open Evening.

Parents, carers, friends and family were invited to look around the school; see what their children were doing; visit the various facilities and classrooms and look at a series of stands from groups that are affiliated to the School. The PALS Update was part of the Open Evening followed by a performance by the School Choir.

They invited the Nursery, CLASP, Taekwando Club, Active Schools, Anti-Dog Fouling Campaigners, child minding First 4 Kids to set up stands alongside their own PALS stand. Everyone was free to display information and news about their organisation.

Other things to consider were:

- A PALS greeter to welcome parents as they arrived. Everyone got information about the Parent Council and a flyer on the new web site
- Refreshments were offered in the Assembly Hall
- Feedback forms were collected after the event
- Registration forms were completed as the meeting went on

The event was considered to be a great success.

116 signatures were collected as attending our AGM – much, much more than holding a regular Parent Council AGM meeting.

The goals of the Parent Council which are - to reach out to as many parents as possible; raise the profile of the Parent Council and demonstrate that the Parent Council makes a difference to the School - were all met.



Annual Parent Council Survey 2009 – summary of results

Thank you to all Parent Councils who took the time to complete the annual Parent Council survey in January – March. This annual survey focuses on communication and consultation issues between Parent Councils and Education central services and staff to see how well we're doing and to highlight areas where we could do better.

Statistics indicate that there has been a general improvement in some areas or a similarity with last year as regards the number of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed that they are happy with communication response times and that they are adequately and appropriately consulted by Education Services.

Response time satisfaction was 53% (not including 33% don't knows) in 2009 compared to 68% (not including 12% don't knows) in 2008. Consultation satisfaction was 67% (not including 20% don't knows) in 2009 compared to 60% (not including 16% don't knows) in 2008. Parent Councils who chose to respond 'don't know' backed this up by saying that, in most cases, they had not been in contact with Education Services during the past year.

We have written to individual Parent Councils who raised any specific issues that they were dissatisfied with to try to resolve these issues.

Two main themes emerged from the surveys as follows –

Communication Response Times

Some respondents indicated that response times could be inconsistent depending on who they contacted.

What we've done to improve this - The Parental Involvement team has contacted all senior Education Services staff to remind them that there is a recommended response time – 10 working days - when dealing with any enquiries from Parent Councils. If the 10 day deadline cannot be met because the enquiry is of a complex nature, a holding letter should be issued to keep the Parent Council informed of progress.

Consultations

Parent Councils acknowledged that their views had altered the outcome in some consultations – specifically the Asymmetric Week consultation. Some respondents said that they did not always find out the results of consultations they had taken part in and what action had been taken as a result.

What we've done to improve this - The Parental Involvement team has contacted staff who may be conducting surveys and asked them to report back the survey findings and resulting action plans using, for example, existing Education Services newsletters such as Parents as Partners and In The Know.

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