

CASE *briefing*

A Briefing from Campaign for State Education

PARENTS' RIGHTS

A Code of Practice

CASE calls for a Code of Practice that enshrines parents' and carers' rights as equal partners in the education of their children.

1. Introduction

The Conservative Government has stated that it intends all schools to become academies, with the implication that parents will, in effect, cease to benefit from the rights conveyed by legislation relating to maintained schools.

Critically, the Education & Adoption Bill removes the requirement for consultation with parents when proposals are being considered to convert the school into an academy.

This is despite the key role of parents as the primary carers of most children; they know the most about their children and have the greatest influence on their formative years.

Parents' rights should be formally defined by the Department for Education in clear, unambiguous language and referenced in academies' funding agreements.

2. Partnership working

The aim should be to ensure partnership working between parents and schools through openness and accountability.

- a) All schools should offer fair and open access arrangements to parents, with clear, relevant and timely information. It should be clear to the parent with whom they can discuss issues, or raise

concerns and parents should be encouraged to use these communication channels.

- b) Schools must aim to create effective parent/teacher relationships that are designed to develop not only children's knowledge and skills but also their social and emotional dispositions.
- c) Clear arrangements should be made for home-to-school communication that enable parents and teachers to quickly identify any issues that arise for a child and also offer the opportunity to share good news.
- d) Parents should be encouraged to view the school as a resource-base where they can assist their children's learning, particularly where they may not have access outside school to the appropriate equipment.

This can be achieved through the following measures:-

- e) Every school should develop a strategy for communicating with parents.
- f) Schools should seek to break down barriers and to build confidence by

CASE believes in a fully comprehensive, locally accountable and democratic education system.

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encouraging the use of the school's facilities by parents.

- g) Communication should take whatever form may be appropriate, e.g. paper-based, via the school web-site, text messages, or by telephone.
- h) All schools should publish a clear and unambiguous complaints procedure.

Examples of good practice include:-

- 1) Regular newsletters accompanied by text message alerts
- 2) Information relating to assignments given
- 3) Progress reports on child's learning and development
- 4) Regular parents' evenings and review days where parents can meet class and/or subject teachers.
- 5) Periodic learning events which parents are encouraged to attend, supported where possible by suitable child-care.
- 6) Messages praising good behaviour and good news

Particular attention should be paid to those parents who have difficulty with written and spoken English.

A variety of approaches are to be encouraged, including:-

- Clearly written guidance for all parents on the different key stages of education provided in accessible and easy-to-read formats.
- Regularly updated websites that meet accessibility standards.

3. Monitoring individual children's progress

All parents should receive timely and sufficiently detailed information for them to be assured of their children's progress and allow for prompt remedial action if necessary.

This may take many forms, up to and including face-to-face meetings with senior school staff where appropriate.

At transition points such as entry to nursery or reception, secondary school transfer, GCSE and A-level choices, meetings with all parents should be provided as a matter of course.

4. Collective Representation

While many parents will feel able to discuss all aspects of their own children's education with school staff, collective representation through elected parents' representatives is important, especially as a way to tackle school-wide issues.

These might include items such as behaviour problems, the curriculum, closure, merger or federation with another school, or change of character.

Every school should have parent governors democratically elected by parents, but it is important that they also have a "constituency" to relate to and this is best done by establishing Parent Councils with representation from each year.

5. Professionalism

Currently, the education of teachers provides little to improve their knowledge and skills at working with parents. This needs to be given a new importance and included in professional development.

This is a particularly significant element of posts such as that of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators as well as all levels of management.

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