Education Attainment Gap: Involvement of Parents

The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the study on how parents (including guardians) can best work together to raise the attainment of all pupils. Independent schools recognise that the role parents play is central to pupils’ attainment and independent schools support this recognition by the Scottish Government.

SCIS notes the increased awareness of the importance of links between parents and local authority schools as recently highlighted by a pilot scheme being rolled out by the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to encourage greater parental involvement in schools. Independent schools recognise that parental interest and engagement means pupils are more likely to perform well and endeavour to foster this. The relationship between schools and parents is seen as a partnership in the interests of each child’s education. Most independent schools lay out the expectations of education through a parental agreement signed when a pupil joins a school.

Parental contracts vary between schools but it would generally include a statement of the expectations of pupils’ behaviour and the learning philosophy and ethic of the school. Parents agree to work with the school to ensure pupils are fully supported in learning, inside and outside of the school week. In order to maintain this collaborative relationship, parents will be kept up to date in terms of their child’s personal progress through personal learning plans, face-to-face meetings and regular communication between school and family. Schools’ communication with parents can also include email, intranet/parent portal, text messaging, social media, newsletters, blogs and school-specific apps.

The links which independent schools build with their pupils and families are intended to be life-long. This sustains a strong school community in a variety of ways. For instance, former pupils and parents may be involved in fundraising activities for new developments and towards fee assistance provision. Independent schools also often put on workshops and seminars to assist parents in supporting children in their learning. Schools dedicate resources to the creation and support of strong alumni networks that will sustain interest in the school, may provide former pupils as speakers with individual career or subject expertise for current pupils, and will ensure a continued interest in the welfare and development of the school and its pupils.

---

development offices play an important role in maintaining these links between the school and former pupils and former parents. Social media has assisted schools in maintaining links with recent leavers.

Current parents are considered part of the school community. Parent Associations play a central role liaising with management and governance of the school and in day-to-day activities such as fundraising for particular assets. Parents of pupils attending independent schools contribute a great deal, such as giving their time to come and speak with pupils on a range of subjects, help with reading classes and other activities at a junior level, and provide assistance on school trips.

Some parents of current pupils, or former pupils themselves, will also be asked to serve on Boards of Governors and to share their professional expertise as well as their perspectives as pupils or parents. Independent schools also work hard to ensure that all prospective parents are fully aware of the financial assistance available. Currently SCIS member schools provide £45 million of financial assistance per year, of which at least £27 million is fully means-tested. There is a great deal of information about the possible routes for financial assistance on member schools’ websites. Admissions offices play a central role in providing information, advice and support to parents throughout the application process – particularly those engaging with the independent sector for the first time.

SCIS supports the Scottish Government’s view of the positive role parental involvement plays in pupils’ educational attainment and there is a great deal of work being undertaken in this area in independent schools. SCIS would be happy to provide further evidence to the Committee and individual schools are ready to provide individual experience both to the Committee and on-site.