

Working effectively as a parent association

Guidelines for Parent Associations

September 2004



National Parents Council Primary
12 Marlborough Court
Dublin 1

Using this book

Both new and experienced parent associations will find information and guidance to help them run their parent association in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 1998. Parent associations affiliated to National Parents Council Primary must conduct their business in accordance with these guidelines. The guidelines will also be of interest to school boards of management and principal teachers. Further support is available on the NPC website www.npc.ie

We suggest that committees of parent associations read and discuss the guidelines, section by section, so that they have a shared understanding of the important partnership role a parent association plays in the school.

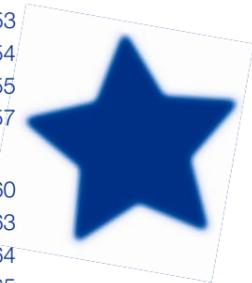
The guidelines have been developed, in consultation with parents and parent associations throughout the country, in accordance with the Education Act 1998, and have been agreed with the Minister for Education and Science.

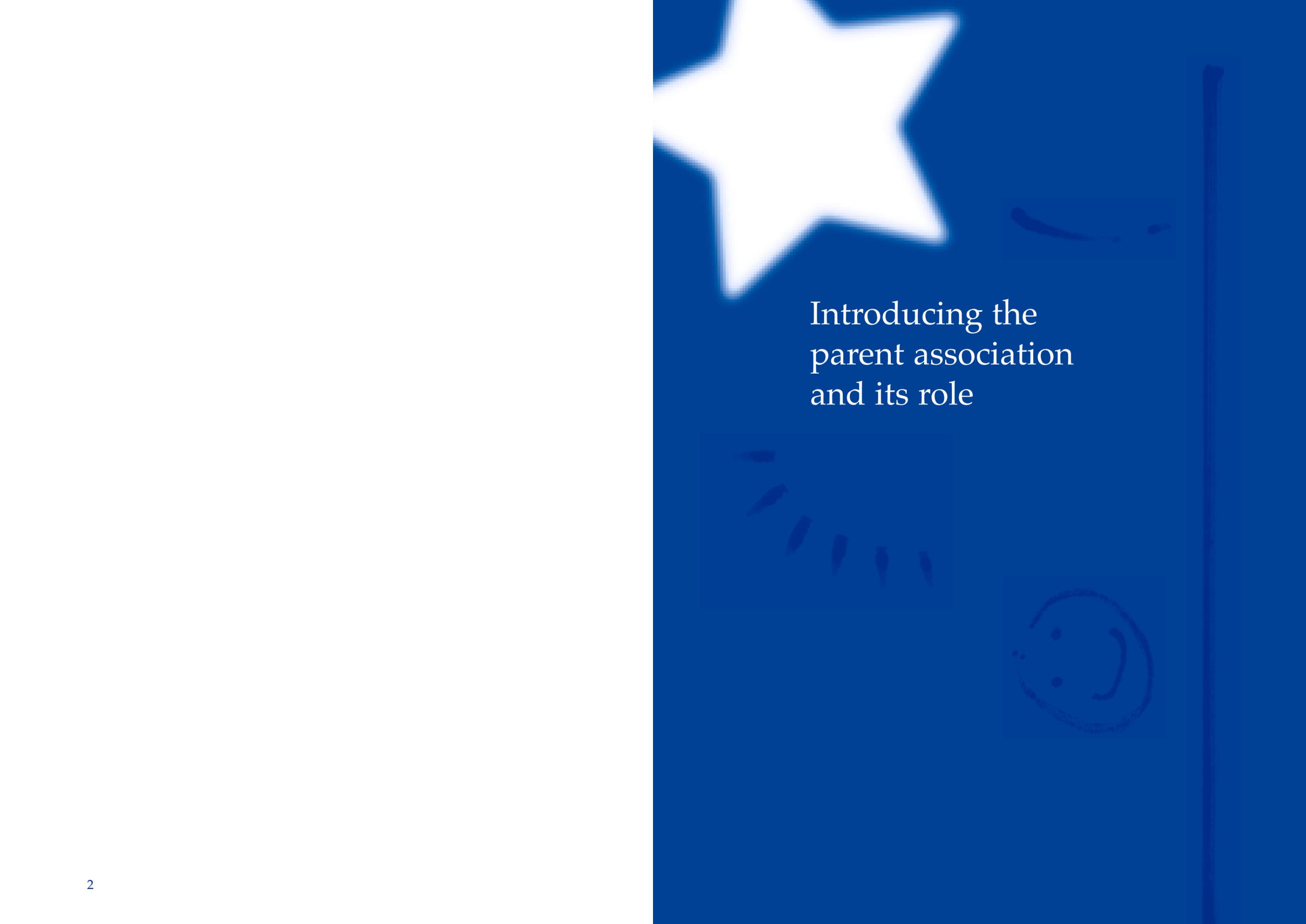
NPC trainers use this book as a training manual for parent associations.

National Parents Council Primary
First edition 2000
Second edition 2004

Contents

Introducing the parent association and its role	
What is the parent association?	4
The parent association and partnership between home and school	4
The role of the parent association	5
Key areas of partnership between parents and school	
Information for parents about school and about education	9
Opportunities for parents to learn more about helping their own child	10
Contributing to school policy and planning	11
Partnership with teachers in delivering the curriculum and in assessing children's progress	13
Networking among parents	14
Extra-curricular activities for children	15
Affirming the work of teachers	15
The parent association committee	
The role of the parent association committee	18
The work of the committee/team	18
Planning and managing the work	19
The Annual General Meeting	21
The structure, size and term of office of the committee	22
Electing committee members	23
Holding the election	24
Communication - a key to success	
The parent association and the school community	28
Communicating with the pupils	29
Communication between the committee and all the parents	29
Communication between the committee and the principal	31
Communication between the committee and the board of management	33
Getting started	
A new parent association	36
Making a start	36
Training for new committees	37
Drawing up a constitution for the parent association	38
National Parents Council Primary	
National Parents Council Primary (NPC)	42
The parent association and the county branch of NPC	43
Resources	
Sample agenda for AGM	46
Sample calendar of activities	46
Sample constitution	47
A guide to better meetings	51
Brief guide to running committee meetings	52
The committee should work as a team and each member has a part to play	53
Guidelines for speakers	54
Fund raising and the parent association	55
Insurance for a parent association	57
Appendices	
Extracts from Education Act (1998)	60
School Planning	63
Whole School Evaluation	64
National Educational Welfare Board	65
National Educational Psychological Service	65
Sources of information	66
Publications	71





Introducing the parent association and its role

What is the parent association?

The parent association is the structure through which parents in a school can work together for the best possible education for their children. The parent association works with the principal, staff and the board of management to build effective partnership between home and school.

The parents of students of a recognised school may establish and maintain from among their number, a parents' association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school. [Education Act 1998 26 (1)]

The parent association and partnership between home and school

Partnership between home and school is important because with positive and active partnership the child gets the best that primary education can offer.

- We know from research that children do better, behave better and are happier at school where parents and teachers work closely together and when parents are able to give their children support at home.
- Teachers can do a better job where they are supported by and working closely with parents.
- Parents can do a better job when they have the support of other parents.
- All parents together can play their part in planning for the best possible education for children in their school.

The parent association is a means to make this partnership happen.



The role of the parent association

The Education Act, 1998 sets down the role of the parent association:

A parents' association shall promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the board, principal, teachers and students.

The Education Act also sets down two broad tasks for a parent association, as ways of implementing that role:

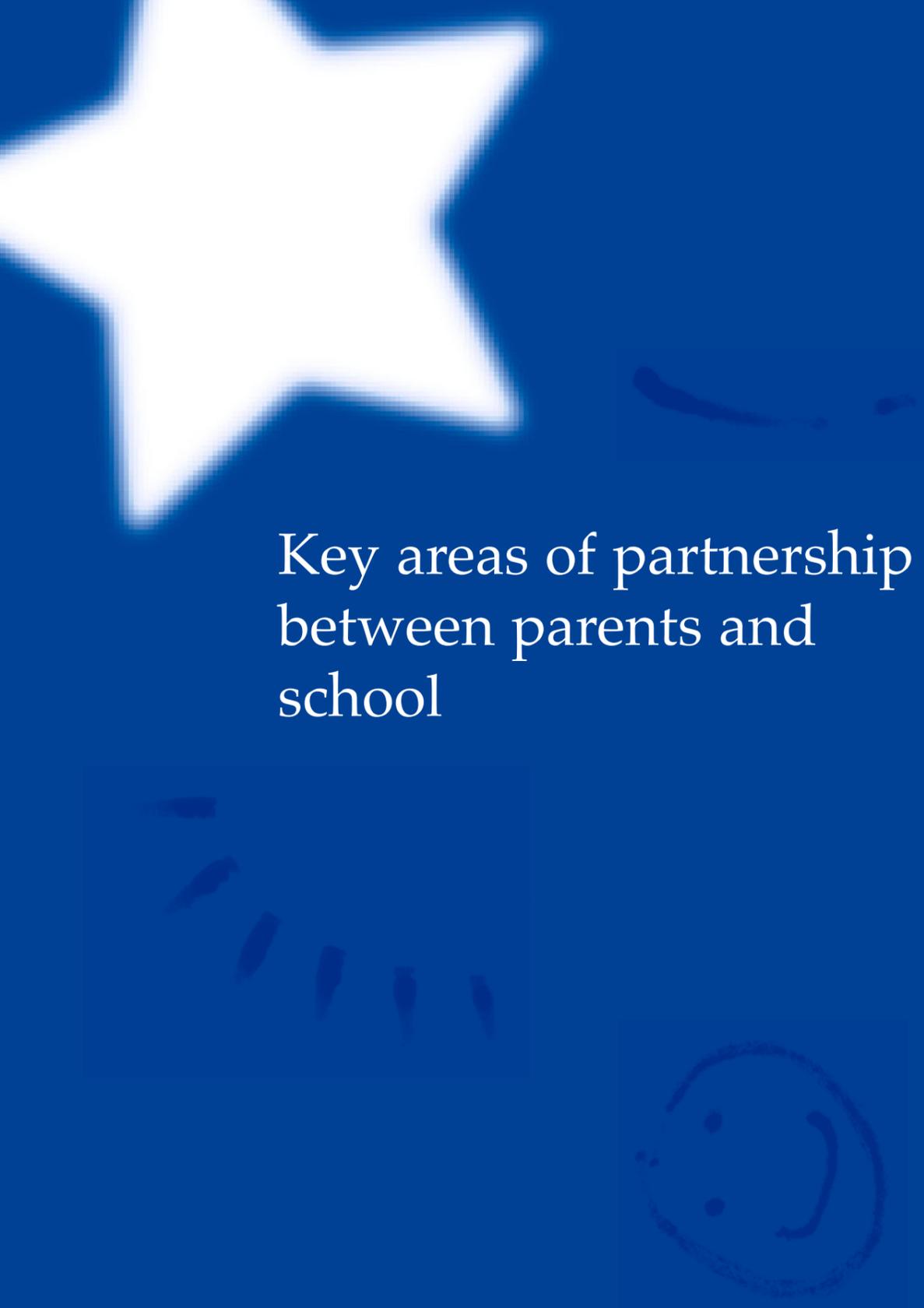
To advise the principal or the Board on matters relating to the school

To adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents in the operation of the school, in consultation with the principal.

 Education Act, 1998 26 (2) (a) and (b) see page 60 & 61

In order to do these tasks well, the parent association needs to have effective ways of

- Consulting with parents, so that parents can express their views on school policy and matters relating to the school
- Finding out from parents about the kinds of activities that will promote parental involvement and partnership for the benefit of the students
- Finding out from pupils about how the parent association can be of help to them
- Consulting with and advising the principal and the board of management



Key areas of partnership
between parents and
school

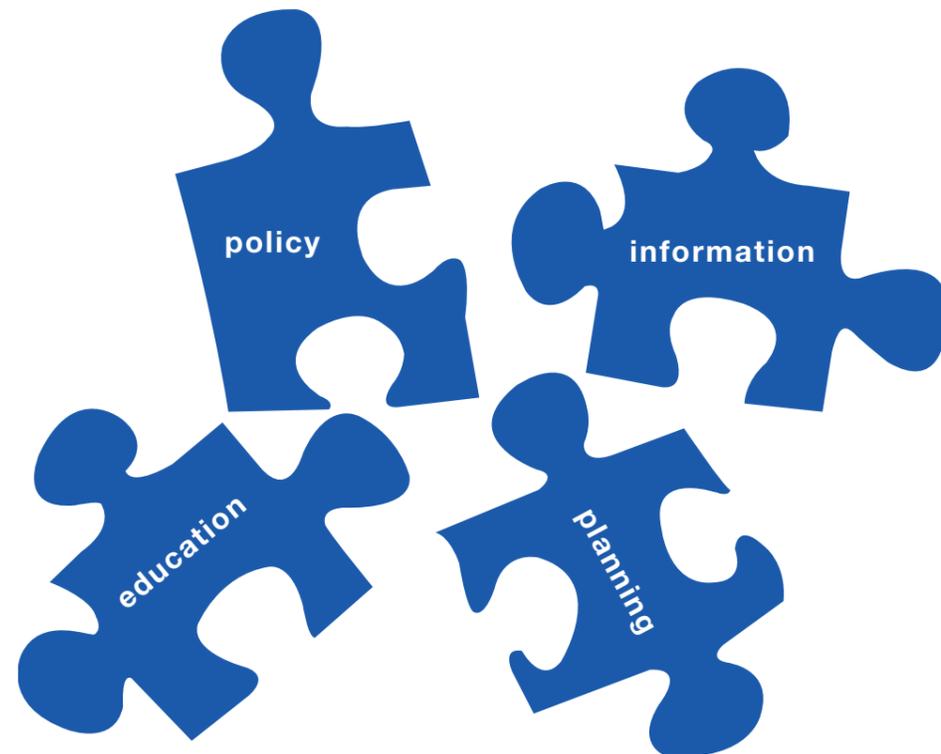
Partnership needs to happen in many aspects of school life.

Here are some of the important ones

- Information sharing about school and about education
- Information for parents about helping their own child
- School policy and planning
- Ongoing contact between parents, the principal and board
- Partnership with teachers in delivering the curriculum and in assessing children's progress
- Networking among parents
- Extracurricular activities for children
- Affirming the work of the teachers

The parent association plays a key and crucial role in promoting partnership in all of these areas.

Each of these key areas will be discussed.



Good partnership will have all these pieces in place

Information for parents about school and about education

Parents (especially new parents) need good quality information about how the school works and about the education system. The principal, board and teachers give information to parents but the parent association can also play a very valuable role in ensuring that the information reaches all parents.

The parent association can help by

- Finding out what information parents would like or need
- Preparing a newsletter or contributing to the school newsletter
- Helping the teacher to set up an information meeting for parents of a particular class
- Helping to prepare a school handbook
- Providing access for parents to leaflets and books on topics of interest
- Bringing Department of Education and Science circulars to the attention of parents (these are sent to the board of management for all partners in the school)
- Running a parents' room, if there is space in the school, where parents can meet and information can be displayed

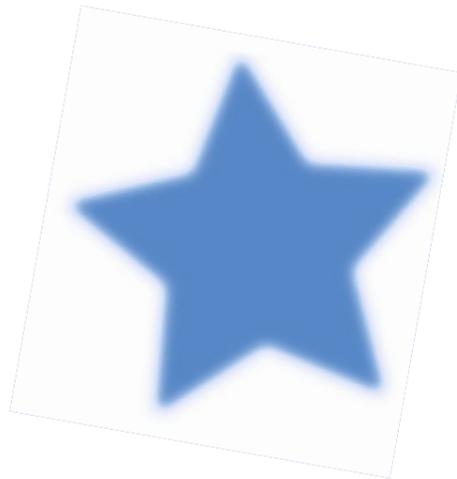


Opportunities for parents to learn more about helping their own child

Parents value opportunities to understand how children learn and how they can help their own child.

The parent association can help by

- Running talks and workshops for parents about all aspects of learning, education and child development
- Letting parents know about educational courses and training programmes being offered by organisations such as NPC
- Offering opportunities to parents for their own development (for example parenting courses)



Contributing to school policy and planning

Parents are partners and stakeholders in the school. They can and should contribute to school policy.

Examples of school policy issues where parents make an essential contribution include

- Strategies for encouraging school attendance
see → National Educational Welfare Board page 65
- Home School Partnership policy
- Homework policy
- Relationships and sexuality education policy
- Code of behaviour
- Parent teacher meetings policy
- Information and communication technology
- Policy on special needs
- Policy for addressing bullying behaviour
- Admission policy
- Participating in the Whole School Evaluation process
see → Whole School Evaluation page 64

The parent association can help with school policy by

- Creating opportunities for parents to discuss aspects of policy with each other and with the principal and board
- Gathering views about aspects of school policy from parents
- Channelling these views into the policy making process
- Giving information to parents on how they can contribute to school planning and policymaking
see → School Planning page 63



The principal, with the staff, leads school planning. Parents, students and the board are actively involved in school planning.



The parent association can advise the school principal about ongoing issues and incidents that may require a review of school policy

- Safety at the school gate
- Behaviour on the school bus
- Provision for children during wet/cold weather
- Provision for children who arrive by school transport before official school opening time
- Incidents of bullying or behaviour problems
- Holidays and school closures

The parent association and individual complaints

Parent associations do not have a role in pursuing individual complaints. However, it can happen that an individual parent will approach the parent association about an experience or concern that raises an issue for the parent association about some school policy.

For example, a parent may have a concern about a child's experience of bullying. The parent should be advised to bring their concern through the proper channels (at school level: teacher, principal, board of management). However, the parent association might want to consider whether there is a need to raise the question of the school's bullying policy with the principal or the board of management. Is there a policy in place? How is it working? Does it need to be revised and updated?

The parent association committee can

- Help a parent to find good ways of approaching a teacher about a problem with a view to having the problem sorted out
- Let a parent know that if they need to make a formal complaint there is a complaints procedure available through the school and encourage the parent to use the procedure
- Give parents the NPC Information/ Helpline telephone number 01 8874477 where they can get information in relation to managing a complaint



It's not the parent association's job to pursue a complaint on behalf of an individual parent

Partnership with teachers in delivering the curriculum and in assessing children's progress

It is widely recognised that significant educational, social and behavioural benefits accrue to the child as a result of effective partnership between parents and teachers. Close co-operation between the home and the school is essential if children are to receive the maximum benefit from the curriculum

Primary School Curriculum 1999 - Introduction

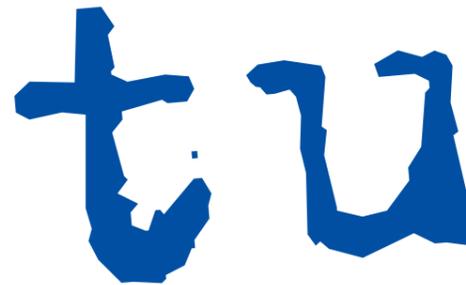
The 1999 Curriculum makes provision for parents to play an important role in children's learning

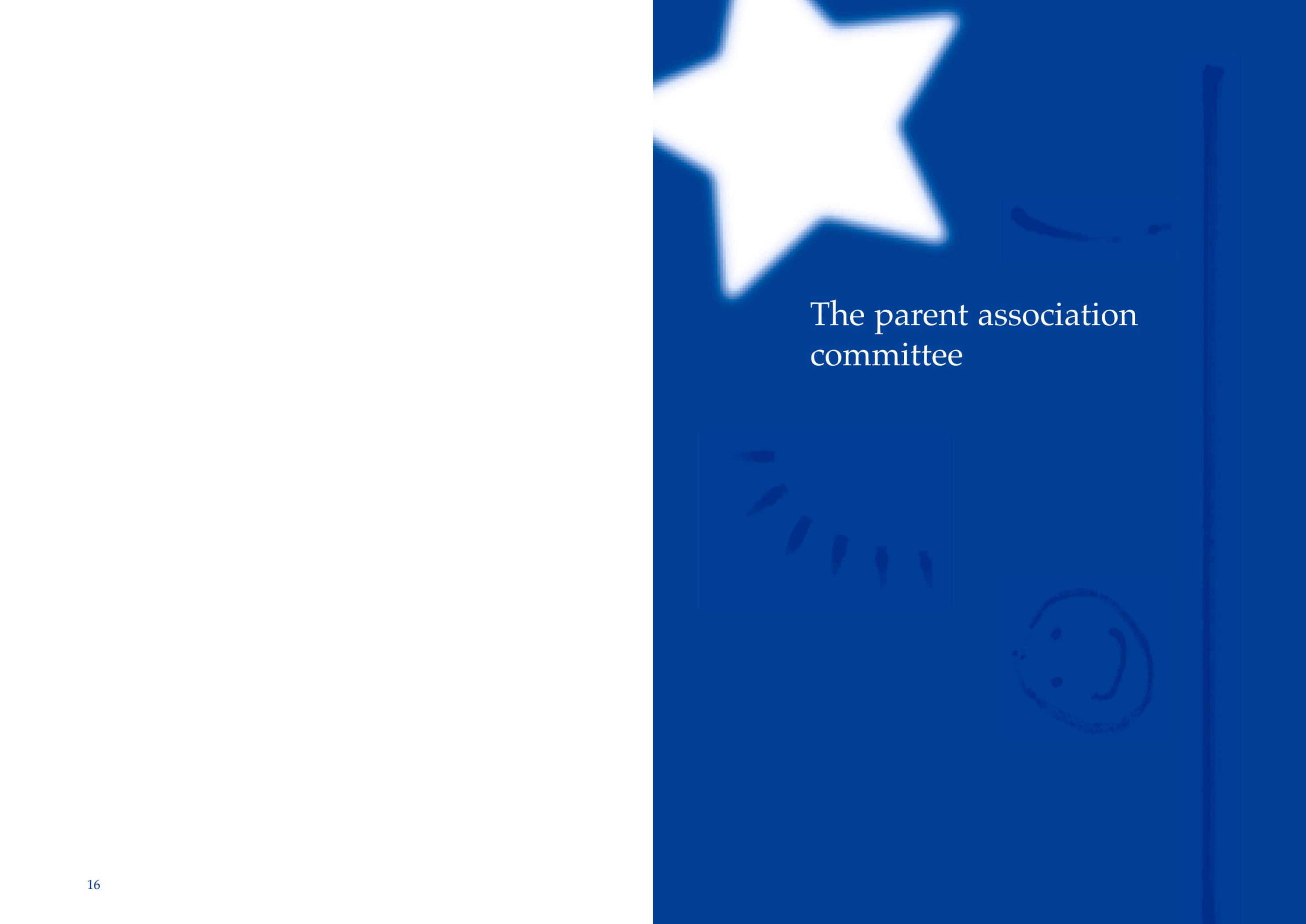
Parents can make a big contribution to the education of their children in school. This is why they have been given a distinct role in supporting the implementation of the curriculum. A parent will be encouraged to become involved in a number of ways. The school plan will identify ways in which parents can be involved in organisational planning for the curriculum. This might include arranging for a grandparent to come and talk to a class about his/her experience of the past as part of the history curriculum. It could also involve parents in helping to arrange and supervise out-of-service activities, like exploring the local environment.

Primary School Curriculum:
Your Child's Learning, Guidelines for Parents
Department of Education and Science

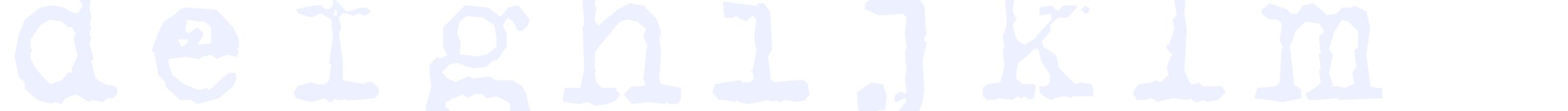
Teachers, parents and children can work on many practical projects

- Paired reading, paired mathematics, paired writing
- Projects to improve the school environment, for example painting murals or yard games
- Local history projects, gardening projects, sports





The parent association
committee



The role of the parent association committee

While all parents are part of the parent association, not all can be involved or need to be involved in the day-to-day business of organising the work. It is for this reason that parents elect a committee.

The committee is the team of people who manage the tasks of the parent association on behalf of all the parents. The parent association committee needs to work as a team in order to be effective. Teamwork is more important than individual roles such as secretary, chairperson, and treasurer.

The committee manages the business of the parent association in accordance with the constitution of the parent association.

The work of the committee/team

The team has shared responsibility for

- Planning for the future and developing a vision for the parent association
- Planning and managing the programme of activities for the year
- Communicating and consulting with and involving as many parents as possible in the activities of the parent association
- Communicating and consulting with other partners in the school community
- Planning agendas and keeping records of meetings
- Looking after finances
- Linking with National Parents Council Primary (NPC)



Value diversity and interculturalism, make sure you support and encourage parents who might find it hard to get involved

Planning and managing the work

The committee has the responsibility to plan and manage the programme of work of the parent association for the year.

There will be changes in the programme from year to year, as new needs and new interests emerge. The committee can begin well by taking some simple steps.

Hold a review meeting at the beginning of the school year to

- Reflect on the aims of the parent association
- Review the work of the past year
 - What went well and why? (Ask parents and other partners in the school)
 - How has each project helped to build partnership between children, parents, teachers?
 - What didn't go so well and what has been learned from this?

Gather information needed for planning

- What supports do parents need? Is there a way of checking?
- What supports do teachers need from parents?
- What would children like? How can you find out?
- What tasks have to be done to run the parent association effectively?

Look at the resources available

- Who is available?
- What time do people have to give?
- Are there any special skills among the parents that can be drawn on?
- What funds are there?



Remember - there may be many parents who do not want to be on a committee but who may want to help with particular activities. Make sure to find out about this at the annual general meeting or by sending out a request to parents.

Make an action plan

- Select priorities
- Set dates for activities
- Agree tasks to be done by individuals or groups
- Set dates and times for reviews

A good action plan will have

- Activities interesting and valuable to parents, children and the school
- A good balance between various kinds of activities
- Fun as well as work!
- A manageable amount of work and achievable goals

The Annual General Meeting

The AGM is an important meeting. Its purpose is to

- Account for the work of the past year and celebrate that work
- Account for money received and spent
- Hold elections for the parent association committee

see → sample agenda for AGM, under Resources page 46

Planning the AGM

- You can hold the AGM at anytime during the school year - most parent associations hold their AGM in September/October or during the month of June
- Give at least 10 working days written notice of the AGM, include the agenda
- Make sure all parents receive notice of the AGM

Accounting for the work

This is usually done through reports as follows

- A report on the work of the parent association
- A written financial report
- A report on the work of NPC

see → section on NPC page 42

Ways to make good use of the AGM might be to

- Welcome new parents
- Have an informal break at the AGM so that parents can meet each other
- Get feedback on events planned for the year
- Ask parents what activities would be useful to them
- Arrange a talk on a topic of interest to parents
- Opportunities should be offered for discussion and for parents to ask questions about the work of the parent association
- Consider inviting principal and/or chairperson of board of management to AGM



Keep the agenda precise and to the point so that people don't get bored! Start the meeting in time and don't let it go on for too long.

The structure, size and term of office of the committee

The committee could be drawn from the general parent body. Alternatively the committee could be formed from parents of children in each class, or from local areas or streets.

The size of the committee should suit the size of the school and the amount of work to be done. Each parent association needs to decide what will work well in their case. Experience has shown that a committee of 8-10 members can work well.

Usually, the committee serves for one year. In order to make sure that there are new as well as experienced members on the committee the constitution might provide for a number of places for new members each year (for example, on a committee of 12 a minimum of 4 places would be for new members). It is good practice to have a combination of experienced and new members, this is a good way of ensuring that the same group isn't 'stuck' on the committee.



The parents' representatives on the board of management are automatically members of the committee of the parent association. They should not hold officer positions on the parent association committee. This is to avoid any conflict of interest with their role as board members.

Electing committee members

Elections

The committee is elected at the Annual General Meeting, to which all parents and guardians of children of the school are invited. It is the responsibility of the outgoing committee to ensure that the elections are run efficiently and in line with the provisions in the parent association constitution.

The number of committee members to be elected will depend on what is in the parent association constitution.

All the committee members whose term of office is finished stand down. If they are willing to go forward for the next year they should seek nomination again.

It is advisable that the members of the parent association committee should not hold officer positions for more than three consecutive years.

Taking nominations

Nominations are usually taken at the AGM. They may also be requested by post.

Holding the election

At the AGM

The election usually takes place at the AGM.

It is good practice to ask an independent third party to chair the election, for example, an outgoing member of the committee who is not standing again.

The outgoing committee members vacate the 'top table' and leave the election process to the person taking nominations and running the election.

Postal Ballot

An alternative is for the election to take place by postal ballot - each parent should get a list of the parents standing for election, and a CV or short description to help people decide whom they want to vote for. It is not good practice to simply send out a list of names and expect people to choose, especially in a big school where people might not know each other.

Voting system

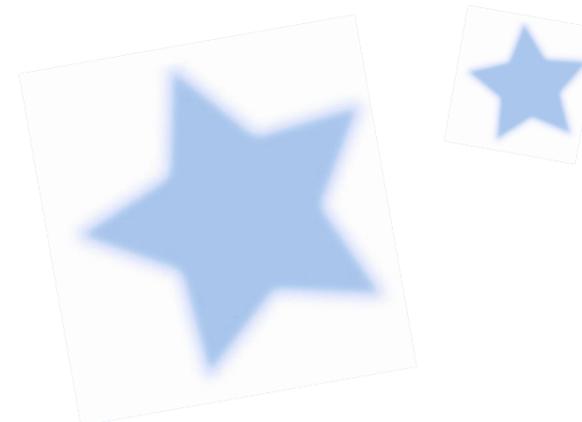
Most parent associations will use a simple voting system, based on who gets the highest number of votes. When a class representative is being elected, only the parents of children in that class vote. If an area representative is being elected only parents living in that area vote.

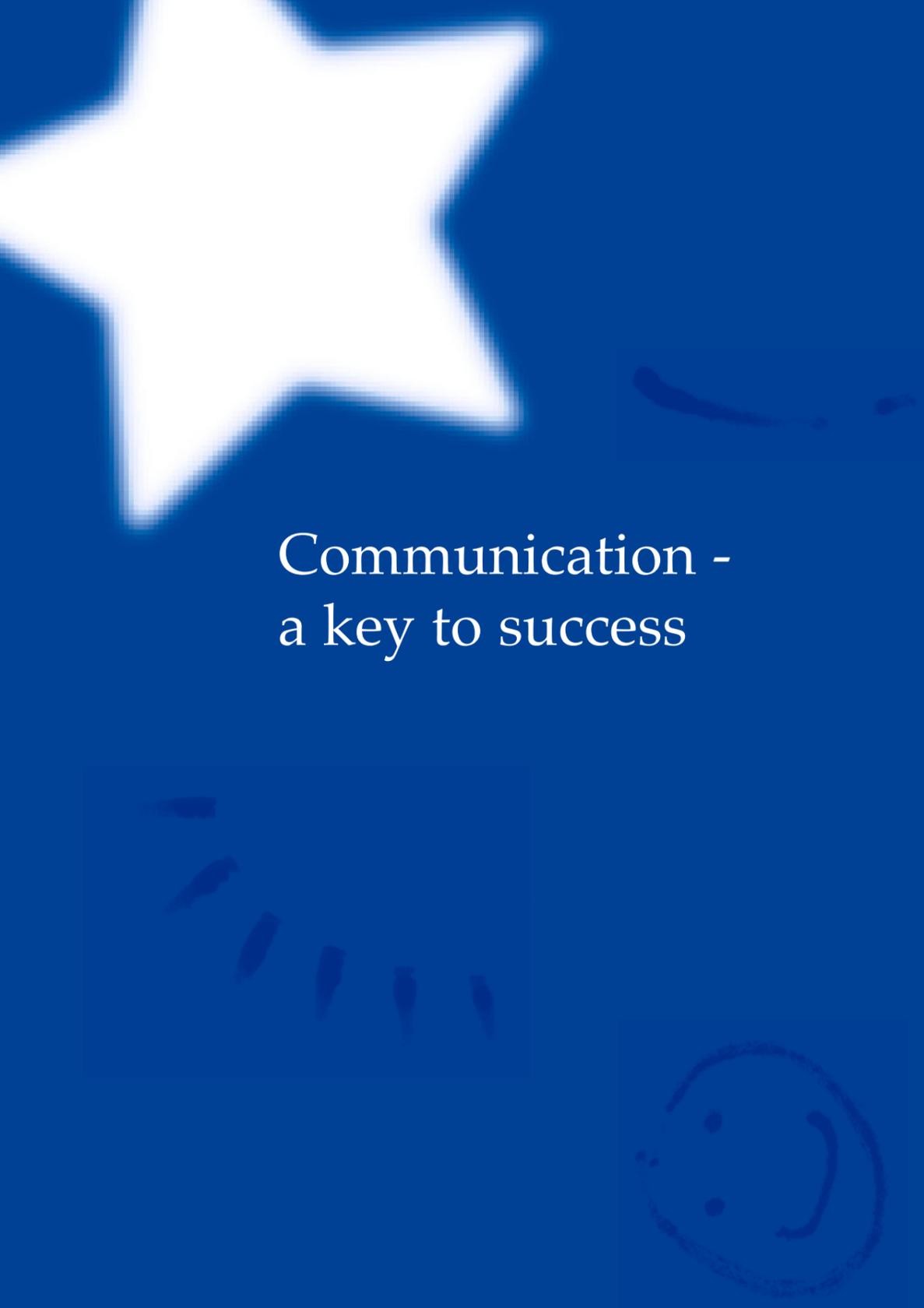
All parents should be notified in writing of the names of the committee members elected.

Counting the Votes

Whether the elections take place at the AGM or by postal ballot you will need to nominate two people (tellers) to count the votes. Votes should always be counted in public. This is usually at the AGM. If not it should be at a time and place known to parents in advance. It is good practice to retain votes in a sealed envelope.

★ Remember to check the parent association constitution for details about the number of committee members, the structure of the committee and the election process to be used. If you are experiencing any difficulty it is advisable to have an independent third party to oversee the whole process and especially the counting of votes.





Communication -
a key to success

The parent association and the school community

The school is a learning community. This community is made up of pupils, staff, the board of management and the parents of the school. All of these have a strong interest in the school and are commonly known as stakeholders. The linkages and connections between all these partners must be clear and effective, if they are to work well together for the benefit of the children.

Good relationships between the partners depend on good communication between them.

The parent association committee, on behalf of parents, must ensure that it has good connections, both formal and informal, with all the other partners in the school community, so that there are

- Shared understandings of one another's work and responsibilities
- Shared goals and expectations for children and the school
- Good ways of solving problems
- Good ways of consulting with each other

Communicating with the pupils

The parent association, staff and board should actively encourage a culture and practice of giving information to pupils and involving them in decisions that affect them.

The Education Act, 1998 states that the board of management in post primary schools should encourage students who wish to establish a student council, and support the council when it is established. At primary level some schools now have pupil councils. Primary school pupils would learn a lot from being members of such councils.

 National Children's Office page 69

The parent association, staff and board need to plan together to give pupils real opportunities for involvement and need to involve the pupils themselves in the process. The Social, Personal, Health Education section of the Curriculum will be very helpful when planning for and with pupils.

Communication between the committee and all the parents

The parent association committee needs to make their communication parent friendly

- Avoid long complicated letters with lots of jargon
- Consider what time will suit parents best for meeting

The parent association committee can communicate in a number of different ways, such as

- A formal meeting such as an AGM
- An informal social gathering to welcome and involve new parents
- A meeting of parents of children of a particular class group to discuss a topic that concerns the parents of that class, for example, transition to post primary school, 5th class homework
- Structured communication to ensure valid representation, for example, gathering views on a policy issue such as RSE or code of behaviour

Some ways of making it easy for parents to give their views to the committee

- Give good notice of meetings so that parents can plan to attend and meet members of the committee
- Send out names of committee members and suggest ways of contacting the committee
- Have a post box for parents in the parents' room, community centre

Communication between the committee and the principal

The principal has a central role in the school. S/he is responsible for the day to day running of the school and plays an all-important leadership role. S/he has responsibility to encourage the involvement of parents.

[Education Act, 1998 26 (2) (a) & (b)]

The parent association and principal need to develop a good working relationship with a good system for communicating with each other.

The principal and the committee need to plan together how they will communicate.

When a system of communication has been planned it will be important to review it together from time to time to make sure that it is working for both parties.

Ways of communicating will include

- Giving written or verbal feedback on parents' views on aspects of school policy which the committee has gathered for example, weight of school bags, homework, school uniform
- Giving written information to the principal from time to time on progress on the work of the parent association (for example the calendar of events of the year)
- Having regular meetings between the committee and the principal to
 - update the principal on activities of the parent association
 - share information about school developments
 - be briefed about new department circulars
 - consult with and advise one another about particular issues which arise
 - consult with the principal on the programme of activities of the parent association

Other ways of working together

- Membership of a joint policy group, for example, on some aspect of school policy
- Membership of a project group, for example, a school garden, paired reading

Some parent associations have chosen to invite the principal to be a member of the committee. While this can work well for some groups, it has many disadvantages.

Parents need to

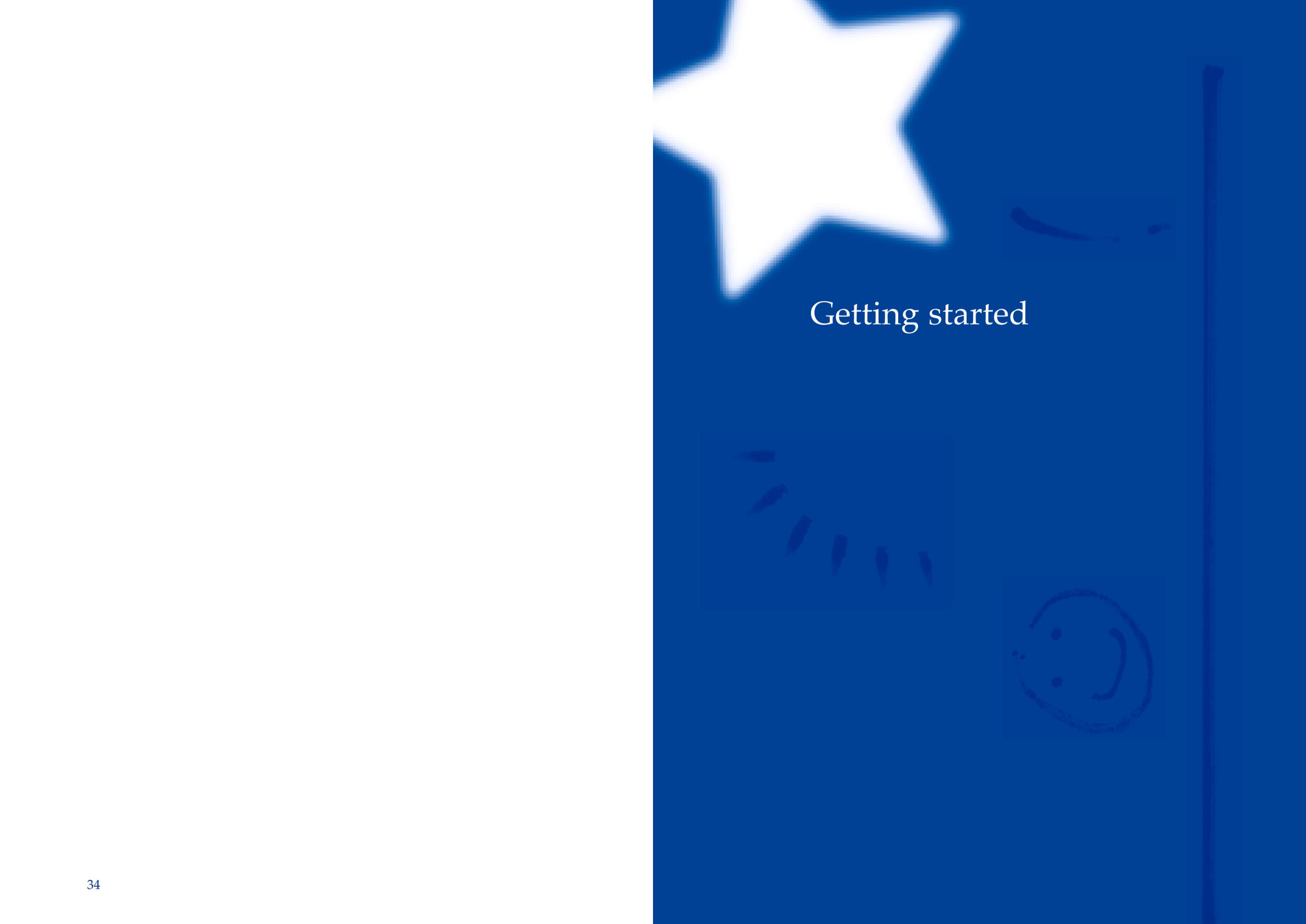
- Have the opportunity to discuss their own ideas and views before putting them forward
- Grow as a representative body and avoid being dependent on the principal
- Discuss different issues; they will often resolve internal issues without having to bring these to the attention of the staff. This is not possible if the school principal attends all meetings

Communication between the committee and the board of management

Both the parent association and the board have a common interest as partners in the running of the school. To fulfil these duties as set out in the Education Act, 1998, the board and the parents need to have effective ways of communicating with one another.

Here are some good ways of communicating between the board and the committee

- An annual meeting, early in each school year, with a jointly planned agenda, to discuss ideas for working together, to share information and to exchange views
- An annual social meeting, where people can get to know each other
- A space on the agenda of both parent association committee and the board for regular exchange of information on various topics
- Joint working groups (parents, teachers and board) for particular projects or policies, for example, code of behaviour, relationships and sexuality education, school sports and fund raising
- Meetings between the chairpersons of board and parent association
- Through parents' elected representatives on the board (as they are also automatically members of the parent association committee)



Getting started

A new parent association

The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school.

[Education Act, 1998 26 (1)]

The parent association is the structure through which parents in a school can work together for the best possible education for their children. The parent association works with the principal, staff and the board of management to build effective partnership of home and school.

Making a start

Here are some different ways of forming a planning group to start a parent association

- The principal or chairperson of the board or parents representatives on the board might write to all parents and invite them to a meeting. At that meeting a group of parents could volunteer or be elected to get the parent association started with the support of the principal/board
 - The principal might write asking for volunteers who would do some initial planning before calling a general meeting of parents
 - A group of parents with an interest in setting up a parent association could come together as a first step. They could do some initial planning with the support of the principal/board
- In one of these ways, a planning group will be formed.

This planning group would

- Gather information from this booklet and from National Parents Council Primary about how a parent association can work
- Give this information to the parents in the school and consult with them about what kind of things they would like their parent association to do
- Talk with the school principal and board about the work of the parent association
- Contact the county branch of NPC or NPC Information/Helpline (01 887 4477) for advice
- Arrange a general meeting for parents to formally agree the setting up of the parent association. The election of the parent association committee would also be held at this meeting

Training for new committees

Make sure you begin well

NPC has a training programme for new parent associations.

The trainer will help the committee to

- Explore the role and potential of a parent association in their school
- Develop the skills, knowledge and practices that they need to work effectively as a committee
- Understand the importance of good working relationships between all the partners in the school
- Identify what they want for their own parent association



Drawing up a constitution for the parent association

Every organisation needs to have some simple ground rules to guide them. These rules are usually brought together in the constitution of the organisation.

It is important that any new parent association gives thought to the way the parents want their association to work.



It is not wise to rush into writing a constitution nor is it advisable to 'copy' some other constitution which may be very good for the people who drew it up, but may not suit your needs at all.

A check list of important questions

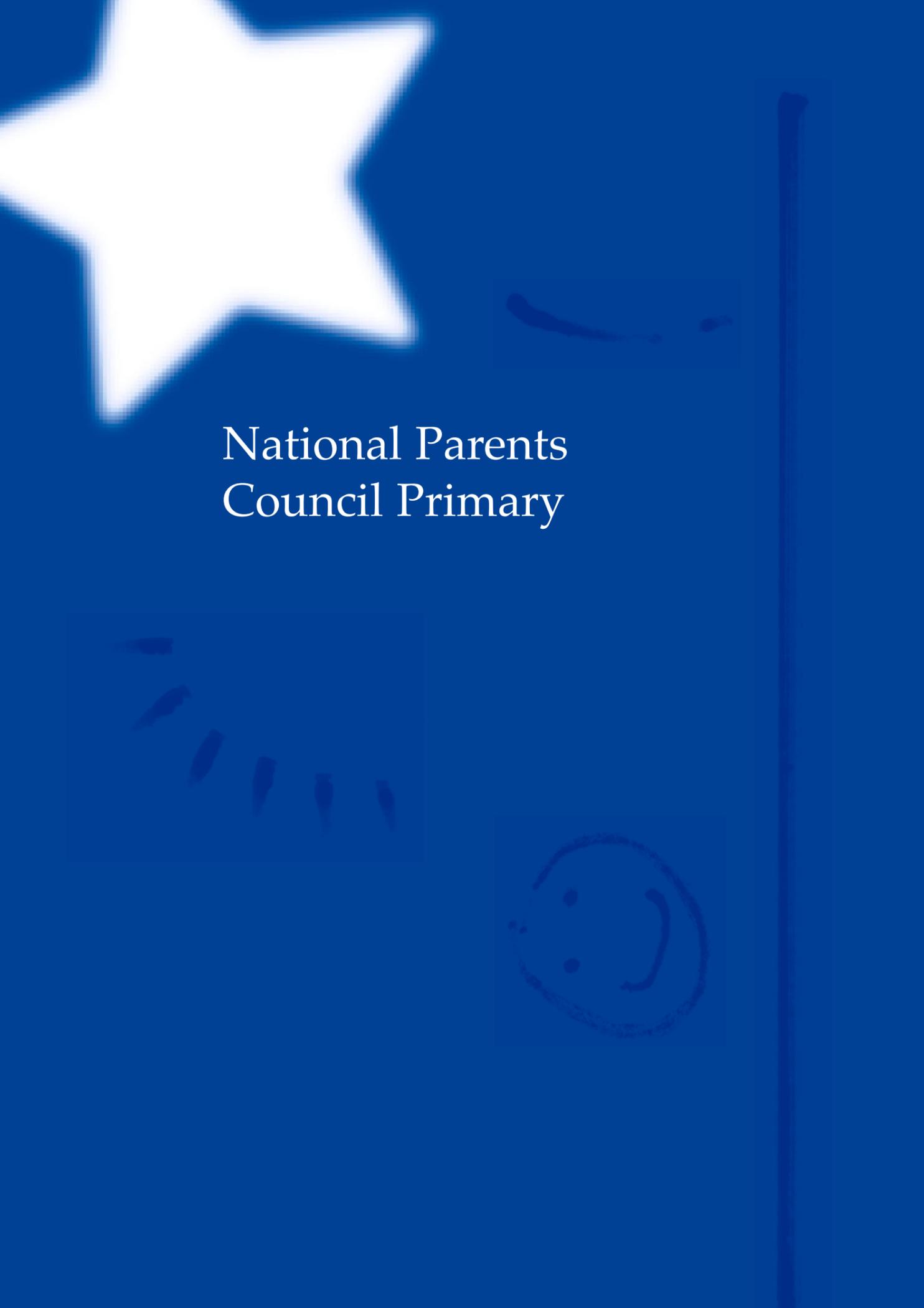
- What is the aim of the parent association?
 - Who can be a member?
 - How many people do you think you would need on the committee? Remember to count the parents' representatives on the board of management
 - How would the committee be structured? For example, would you have class representatives, or area representatives, or just those who are willing to go forward for election? How many members of the committee need to be present for the group to make a decision (would a quorum of the members be 50% + 1)?
 - Would you need sub-committees? How would a subcommittee be set up? What would it do? How would it report back to the committee?
 - How would you make sure the committee is inclusive and doesn't exclude some parents?
- How will you get funds to run the association? How will the funds be managed?
 - Will you raise funds for the school? If so, will you want to suggest a joint fund raising group with the board?
 - How will you change the constitution if it needs to be changed?
 - Have you made provision for membership of National Parents Council Primary?

Drafting the Constitution

One way to begin is for a small group to work on the above check list. Other parents, the principal and the chairperson of the board may have ideas to offer. NPC will be able to advise you.

When the small group has done some homework, it could prepare a draft constitution, and circulate this to parents. Parents' views could be collected at a special meeting, or in writing. The draft constitution may be revised at this point.

A simple majority at a meeting to which all parents are invited adopts the constitution. A similar procedure is followed if and when changes to the constitution are required.



National Parents
Council Primary



National Parents Council Primary

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the nationwide organisation for parents of primary school children and is recognised by the Education Act 1998.

see → Extract, page 60

A county branch of NPC is a structure or network through which parents and parent associations in a county can work together for the best possible education for children.

Membership of NPC brings many benefits

- Access to information about education
- Support systems
- Training programmes
- A channel for views on education to influence policy at national level
- Opportunities to exchange views with other parents at local, regional and national levels
- Reduced insurance costs for parent association activities

The parent association and the county branch of NPC

When a parent association joins NPC it is entitled to have a number of delegates. The number depends on the size of the school.

These delegates on behalf of their association have the opportunity to

- Exchange ideas and experiences about children's education
- Promote partnerships between children, teachers, parents and local communities
- Discuss educational issues of local, regional and national importance

The delegates keep parents in their school informed about the work of NPC and let them know about training opportunities/talks being run locally and regionally. The role of the delegate also involves bringing forward the views of parents in their school on educational issues to NPC.

Each year, the county branch sends a number of parent association delegates to the Annual Delegate Conference (ADC). Parent associations can send policy proposals (motions) to their county branch. The county branch sends proposals for ADC.

A number of regional forums for parents are held each year. The purpose of these forums is to consult parents and to give good information on educational issues.

NPC is at present (2004) restructuring and these pages may be reissued.



Resources



Sample agenda for AGM

NEWSTREET NATIONAL SCHOOL PARENT ASSOCIATION

It's AGM time again! We need you there!

We want to:

- Report on last year's work, including a written financial report
- Hear your ideas about what you would like the parent association to do next year
- Give some new people a chance to get involved at election time
- Meet each other again
- Hold a short talk on the curriculum and what it means for children and parents

We will meet at 8.00 pm
Tea & biscuits at 9.45 pm



Remember this is the first meeting for many parents – so do make them feel welcome

Sample calendar of activities

Here are examples of what a parent association calendar of events might include

- A coffee morning for new parents
- A talk on a topic such as homework or the curriculum
- A workshop on homework policy for parents, teachers and board
- A talk/workshop on the Department of Education and Science Publication "Your Child's Learning – Guidelines for Parents"
- A cup of tea during/after the AGM for parents to meet
- A discussion with children for suggestions on extra curricular activities
- A social event to thank teachers

Sample constitution

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PARENT ASSOCIATION OF NEWSTREET NATIONAL SCHOOL

The Purpose of the Parent Association

The purpose of the parent association is to provide a structure through which the parents/guardians of children attending Newstreet N.S. can work together for the best possible education for their children. The parent association will work with the principal, staff and board of management to build effective partnership of home and school.

The Aim of the Parent Association

The aim of the parent association is to enable parents to play their part in ensuring the best possible education for their children, through the association's programme of activities.

The parent association will promote the interests of the students in co-operation with the board, principal, teachers and students, in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, 1998.

The Work of the Parent Association

The parent association will undertake a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents and which will support pupils, parents and school staff. In planning its activities, the parent association will consult with the school principal.

The parent association may advise the principal and board on any matters relating to the school in accordance with the Education Act, 1998, 26 (2)(a)

The Membership of the Parent Association

All parents or guardians of children attending Newstreet N.S. will be deemed to be members of the parent association.

The Committee of the Parent Association

The members of the parent association will elect a number of members who will have responsibility for managing the activities of the parent association. This team will serve as the committee of the parent association.

The Work of the Committee of the Parent Association

The committee is the team that will manage the tasks of the association on behalf of the parent body (the members).

The committee will draw up a plan for the activities of the association, in consultation with parents and in accordance with their wishes.

The committee will be responsible for seeing that activities are run in an efficient and effective way.

The committee will consult with the school principal when planning the programme of activities for a particular year.

The committee will arrange with the principal and board a system for ongoing communication.

At the annual general meeting (AGM) the committee will report to the parent body (the members) about its work.

The committee will manage and account for any funds collected by the parent association.

Membership of the Committee

The members of the committee will be elected each year at the AGM of the parent association.

The number of the committee will be a maximum of 12 with a minimum of 6.

Each member will be elected for one year. Members may go forward for election for a further year, providing they have a child in the school.

Parent representatives elected to the board of management are automatically members of the committee, but will not hold an officer post.

Co-options and Subcommittees

The committee may co-opt people onto the committee to assist in their work. Subcommittees can be set up for particular tasks. The subcommittees may also co-opt people to assist in their work. The subcommittees may not make decisions. They are accountable to the main committee.

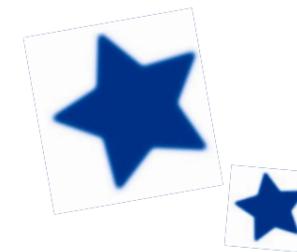
Finance

The parent association will finance its activities through fund raising specifically for the work of the parent association, or through a small annual charge on parents to be agreed at the AGM.

A treasurer will be appointed from among the committee members and will be responsible for keeping the accounts of the parent association finances. The treasurer will give a statement of income and expenditure at each committee meeting.

A written statement of income and expenditure will be given at the AGM.

The parent association will keep a bank account in its name. The treasurer and at least one other member of the committee must sign cheques drawn on the account.



Fund raising for the School

Fund raising for the school by the parent association will be done with the prior agreement of the board. The parent association committee will agree with the board as to the specific school projects for which funds are to be raised by the parent association.

Membership of National Parents Council Primary

The parent association will affiliate to National Parents Council Primary annually.

Changing the Constitution

Changes to the constitution can be made at the AGM. Proposals/motions to change the constitution must be submitted in writing to the parent association committee. The parent association committee will then circulate these motions to all parents before the AGM. All parents of children in the school at the meeting are eligible to vote on the proposals.

A guide to better meetings

Welcoming newcomers to the committee

Take time at each meeting to help newcomers to

- Feel welcome
- Get actively involved

 Remember it's hard for new people to join an already established group. Do you remember your first time attending a meeting of your parent association? What can you learn from this?

Take time at each meeting to help new people to become actively involved

- Pair up with someone new
- Introduce yourself
- Take time to hear why people have become involved
- Organise a social occasion to help people to get to know each other
- Keep language at meetings simple and be ready to explain to new people what you mean
- Sometimes parents who are new to the parent association committee may have questions about the aims and work of the parent association.

 If you are a newcomer don't be afraid to ask, you won't be expected to know everything

Brief guide to running committee meetings

Agenda

The agenda is the list of items that will be discussed at a meeting. A good agenda is essential to having a productive meeting.

The chairperson and secretary set the agenda together. At the end of each meeting the chairperson asks the committee if they have any item they would like on the next agenda.

The agenda should be sent out to all members of the committee including the parents' representatives on the board of management (a week in advance of the meeting where possible).

Minutes

Minutes should list those attending the meeting and any apologies received. Minutes cover the topics discussed, decisions taken and who will do what and when. Minutes should not include comments made by individuals.

It is always a good idea to write the minutes just after the meeting. Remember – minutes are a record for the members of the committee.

At the next meeting these minutes are signed by the chairperson after the committee agrees that they are a true record of decisions taken.

Communication and confidentiality

The committee should communicate openly with parents in the school. Occasionally matters may arise that should be kept confidential, it is very important that this confidentiality is respected.

How often meetings are held

Knowing how often the committee will meet will help to encourage people to join the parent association.

When the meeting will start and finish

Knowing the length of the meeting helps people stay focussed and encourages a good use of time.

Evaluating

It is a good idea for a committee to develop the practice of reviewing their work. This enables the group to be effective and to value the work they do. An evaluation can take place at the end of a meeting with the question 'what did you think of the meeting?' An overall review of the work of the committee can be done at the end of each school year.

Training and support

To be effective a committee needs to have skills such as decision making, team working and planning. The committee should consider looking for training and support to develop their skills. Contact NPC for information.

The committee should work as a team and each member has a part to play

Prepare well

Read the minutes and any other information sent out before the meeting. Be clear about the purpose of the meeting. Prepare any points that you are going to raise.

Participate fully

Listen carefully and think about what is being said. Feel free to speak when you have something to contribute. Make your point at the appropriate time. Speak loudly enough to be heard by everyone and look around the group as you speak.

Be aware of feelings

Our feelings influence what is going on and too often they are ignored at meetings. If, for example, you feel confused, upset or nervous, it is important to say so as openness will help everyone to hear and understand better.

Listen to others views

Be reasonable and open to changing your mind – one of the purposes of the meeting is to exchange information and ideas, to learn from each other and to listen to other views on the issues.

Help others participate

Show you are listening through eye contact, body language and by not interrupting. Build on what others have said. Draw in someone who is left out or hasn't yet contributed. It is important that people feel valued and by having one person speaking at a time it ensures that everyone is listened to and that people have a clear understanding of what is happening at the meeting.

Communicate honestly and openly

It is important that people should give their opinions at the meeting, even though this can be difficult at times, but it is much more constructive than making comments outside the meeting.

Help the chairperson

Be supportive of the chairperson. Give constructive feedback. Give ideas on ways to proceed. Remember it is important that the committee works as a team.

Be reliable

If you agree to take on a task be sure to carry it out. Then be ready to report back at the next meeting.

★ *There are many publications on good committee practice, for example [Managing Together – A Guide to Working Effectively as a Committee](#), a publication by the Combat Poverty Agency, 1996. This publication is out of print and no longer available in hard copy, but is available in PDF format from the Combat Poverty Agency website www.combatpoverty.ie*

Guidelines for speakers

Indicate to the speaker ahead of time what you hope to achieve through the talk, for example, in a talk on homework, that parents will have

- Gained insights into the educational value of homework, and what is good practice in the use of homework as an aid to learning
- Learned how best to support their children in this aspect of their learning

Let the speaker know how long the talk will be for. Stress that a good proportion of the time should be made available for discussion and questions. Agree on the starting and finishing time for the talk and the discussion.

Indicate if you would like the speaker to provide the key points in written form for participants.

Make arrangements for meeting and greeting the speaker before the talk. Make sure that the chairperson for the talk knows the speaker's name and how they should be introduced.

Agree the rate of any payment in advance.

Fund raising and the parent association

A parent association is entitled to raise funds for the administration and activities of the association. Full accounts must be maintained and presented at the parent association Annual General Meeting, in accordance with the rules of the association.

The parent association should consult with the board about fund raising for the school or school projects. The approval of the board is needed prior to these funds being raised. The expenditure of these funds is by the board of management, in consultation with the parent association. The board prepares a total account of income and expenditure at the end of each school year and this is available to parents.

Any funds raised must be used for the purpose/s for which the money was collected. If, in exceptional circumstances, it becomes unnecessary for the board to use all the funds collected for the purpose specified, the board will communicate this to the parent association and where appropriate the local community. In any event, the funds must be used for the school. The board in consultation with the parent association committee will decide the change of purpose for which the funds are used.

This information is also published in the Management Board Members Handbook published by Catholic Primary School Managers Association.

Fund raising ideas

- Art exhibition
- Auction
- Bag packing
- Barn dance/ceílí
- Cake sale
- Car wash and valeting
- Cat/dog show
- Christmas fair
- Coffee morning
- Disco/Disco Marathon
- Fancy dress competition
- Fashion show
- Fitness testing day
- Folk night
- Gardening question time
- Guided walk
- Hairdressing marathon
- Home produce fair
- Jumble sale
- Lawn mowing
- Local history tours
- Lucky dips
- Mile of cents
- Mountain climb
- Non uniform day
- Orange peeling competition
- Painting competition
- Pet sitting
- Plant a tree
- Poetry reading
- Pop concert
- Quiz night
- Race night
- Raffle
- Recipe competition
- Recycling
- Scavenger hunt
- Second hand book sale
- Shoe polishing
- Sponsored silence
- Sports
- Story telling
- Talent contest
- Toy fair
- Trivial pursuit
- Tug of war
- Welly throwing
- Wine and cheese evening

Insurance for a parent association

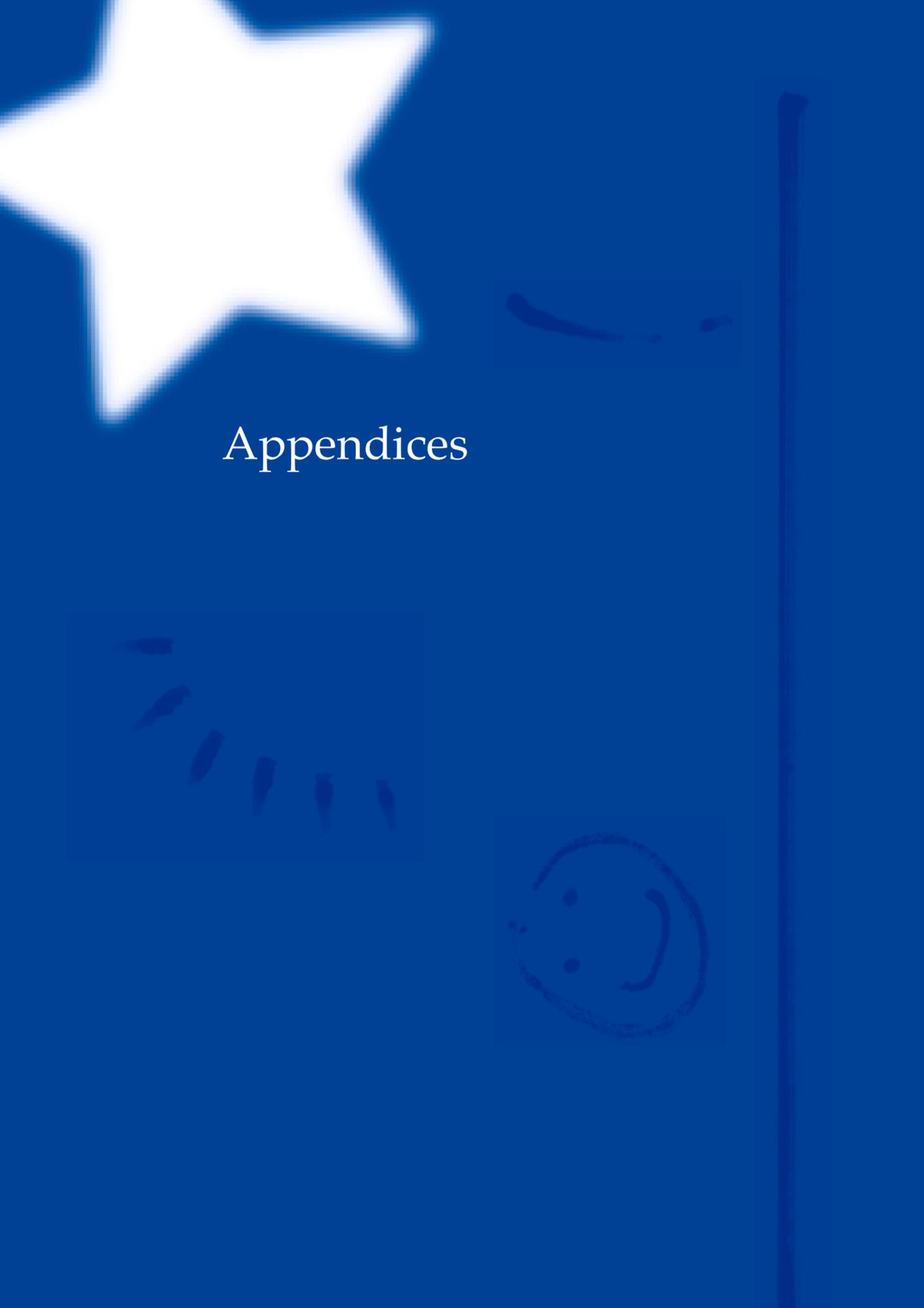
Parent associations need to take out their own insurance policy to cover the members in the event of claims. Parent associations need to discuss their insurance requirements with an insurance broker.

A parent association who employs anyone must have an Employer's Liability Policy.

Insurance policies are available for summer schools run by parent associations.

The parent association committee should make sure that all activities of the parent association comply with health and safety regulations.

For information on insurance please contact your insurance broker.



Appendices

Extracts from Education Act, 1998

Parents

2. - (1) “parent” includes a foster parent, a guardian appointed under the Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997, or other person acting in loco parentis who has a child in his or her care subject to any statutory power or order of a court and, in the case of a child who has been adopted under the Adoption Acts, 1952 to 1998, or, where the child has been adopted outside the State, means the adopter or adopters or the surviving adopter;

National Association of Parents

“national association of parents” means an association or other body of persons established by parents with objects which include representing the views and interests of parents with regard to education and assisting parents in exercising their rights and role in the process of the education of their children, that is-

- (a) established and organised on a national basis and has a membership distributed over a substantial part of the State, and
- (b) for the time being recognised by the Minister for the purposes of this Act, including the National Parents Council-Primary and the National Parents Council (Post Primary) Limited, being bodies for the time being so recognised;

Parent Associations

26. – (1) The parents of students of a recognised school may establish, and maintain from among their number, a parents’ association for that school and membership of that association shall be open to all parents of students of that school.

(2) A parents’ association shall promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the board, Principal, teachers and students of the school and for that purpose may-

- (a) advise the principal or the board on any matter relating to the school and the principal or board, as the case may be, who shall have regard to any such advice, and

(b) adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents, in consultation with the Principal, in the operation of the school.

(3) The board shall promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a parents’ association and to a parents’ association when it is established.

- (4) (a) A parents’ association shall, following consultation with its members, make rules governing its meetings and the business and conduct of its affairs.
 - (b) Where a parents’ association is affiliated to a national association of parents, the rules referred to in paragraph (a) shall be in accordance with guidelines issued by that national association of parents with the concurrence of the Minister.

The Inspectorate

13. – (1) The Minister shall appoint a Chief Inspector and such and so many Inspectors as the Minister considers appropriate and the Chief Inspector and Inspectors collectively shall be known and are referred to in this Act as the “Inspectorate”.

(2) The Minister shall include amongst those he or she appoints as Inspectors under subsection (1) persons who hold qualifications as psychologists or who have other expertise, including expertise in the education of students with special educational needs.

(3) The functions of an Inspector shall be:

- (a) to support and advise recognised schools, centres for education and teachers on matters relating to the provision of education and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, an Inspector-
 - (i) shall visit recognised schools and centres for education on the initiative of the Inspectorate, and, following consultation with the board, patron, parents of students and teachers, as appropriate, do any or all of the following:

- (I) evaluate the organisation and operation of those schools and centres and the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools and centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers;
- (II) evaluate the education standards in such schools and centres;
- (III) assess the implementation and effectiveness of any programmes of education which have been devised in respect of individual students who have a disability or other special educational needs;
- (IV) assess the implementation of regulations made by the Minister, and
- (V) report to the Minister, or to the board, patron, parents of students and teachers, as appropriate, and as prescribed, on these matters or on any other matter relating to the activities of those schools or centres and the needs of students attending those schools or centres,

Boards of Management

21. - (1) A board shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, make arrangements for the preparation of a plan (in this section referred to as the “school plan”) and shall ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated.
- (2) The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures, which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including equality of access to, and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs.
- (3) The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans.
- (4) A board shall make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school.

School Planning

All primary schools are required to prepare a school plan.

The purpose of the plan is to keep every part of the work of the school under continuous review, so as to make sure that all the learning needs of the children are met.

School Planning is not a “once off” exercise. It is continuous. It usually works in a cycle

- In each school year some aspect of education in the school is reviewed to see how well the objectives for that part of the work are being met
- If change is needed, the change is planned, and new objectives are set
- At some later stage in the planning process this part of the work is reviewed again

Here are some examples of what is reviewed

- How reading or maths is taught throughout the school, and how well the children are achieving in relation to national standards
- How the overall curriculum in the school is being planned and delivered
- How provision for students with special needs is made and how well their needs are being met
- How important aspects of school policy are revised and updated, for example, homework policy, code of behaviour, health and safety, relationship and sexuality education (RSE)

The principal, with the staff, leads school planning. Parents, students and the board are actively involved in school planning.

Planning for the implementation of the curriculum is the professional responsibility of the staff. Parents and students contribute to the review and evaluation process, and parents are active partners in planning for parental support of the curriculum.

In most areas other than curriculum, parents, staff, board (and pupils where appropriate) work together as partners in the planning process.

Where parents are members of working groups set up as part of school planning they should seek the views of parents in the school. A leaflet for parents is available from School Development Planning Support (Primary).

 School Development Planning Support (Primary) page 70

Whole School Evaluation (WSE)

Through Whole School Evaluation, the inspectors from the Department of Education and Science carry out an evaluation of the quality of education being provided by a particular school. The work of the whole school, as a unit, is looked at, as well as the work of individual teachers. The team of inspectors evaluates the quality of

- Teaching and learning
- School planning
- School management

The inspectorate will meet with elected members of the committee of the parent association in schools where the parent association is affiliated to NPC. If there is no parent association or where the association is not affiliated the inspectorate will consult with the parents' elected representatives on the board of management. There are also plans to develop a questionnaire for a random sample of parents in larger schools and for parents in general in small schools.

 extract from Education Act, 1998 section 13, page 61

National Educational Welfare Board

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) has been established to encourage school attendance and ensure each child in the State receives a certain minimum education. An educational welfare service is being developed throughout the country. Educational Welfare Officers are employed to work with students, parents and schools to make sure that children receive their full entitlement to education (Education Welfare Act, 2000 - children's rights to education).

 National Educational Welfare Board page 66

National Educational Psychological Service

The National Educational and Psychological Service (NEPS) provides psychological services in both primary and post-primary schools, both state and private, and in related educational centres backed by the Department of Education and Science. NEPS helps students to develop their potential and maximise the benefits of their educational experiences. In the early years of the development of the service, priority is being given to children who have learning disabilities. The usual way to access NEPS is through the school, but parents can contact NEPS directly.

 National Educational and Psychological Service page 69

Sources of information

National Parents Council Primary

12 Marlborough Court, Dublin 1.

Tel: 01 887 4034

Information/Helpline: 01 887 4477

Email: info@npc.ie training@npc.ie

website: www.npc.ie

Department of Education and Science

Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.

Tel: 01 889 6400

email: info@education.gov.ie

website: www.education.ie

Department of Education and Science

Primary Administration, Cornamaddy,

Athlone, Co Westmeath.

Tel: 090 64 83721

National Educational Welfare Board

NEWB, 16 - 22 Green Street, Dublin 7.

Tel: 01 873 8700

Education Helpline: 1890 36 36 66

Fax: 01 873 8799

email: info@newb.ie

website: www.newb.ie

Ombudsman for Children

Tel: 1890 654 654

Further sources of information

(in alphabetical order)

Anti-Bullying Centre

Department of Teacher Education,

Room 3125, Arts Building,

Trinity College, Dublin 2.

Tel: 01 608 2573 / 608 3488

website: www.abc.tcd.ie

Catholic Primary School Managers Association

CPSMA, Veritas House,

7/8 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

Tel: 01 874 2171

Church of Ireland Board of Education

Church of Ireland House,

Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin 6.

Tel: 01 497 8422

Combat Poverty Agency

Bridgewater Centre, Conyngham Road,

Islandbridge, Dublin 8.

Tel: 01 670 6746

email: info@cpa.ie

website: www.combatpoverty.ie

Comhairle

7th Floor, Hume House, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4.

Tel: 01 605 90 00

email: info@comhairle.ie

website: www.comhairle.ie

Department of Education and Science

Planning and Building Unit, Government Buildings,

Tullamore, Co. Offaly

Tel: 0506 21363

Department of Education and Science

School Transport Section,
Portlaoise Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
Tel: 0506 24353

Educate Together

(Multidenominational schools),
H8a Centrepoint,
Oak Drive, Dublin 12.
Tel: 01 429 2500
email: info@educatetogether.ie
website: www.educatetogether.ie

Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán Ghaeilge

92 Bóthar Seannaigh, Rath Eanaigh, Baile Átha Cliath 5.
Fón/Facs: 01 831 4487
ríomhphost: eolas@foras.ie
website: www.foras.ie

Gaelscoileanna

7 Cearnóg Mhuirfean,
Baile Átha Cliath 2.
Fón: 01 639 8431
ríomhphost: oifig@gaelscoileanna.ie
website: www.gaelscoileanna.ie

Health & Safety Authority

10 Hogan Place, Dublin 2, Ireland.
Tel: 01 614 7000
website: www.hsa.ie

Irish National Teachers Organisation

INTO, 35 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.
Tel: 01 804 7700
email: info@into.ie
website: www.into.ie

**National Association of Boards
of Management in Special Education**

NABMSE, 'Shalom', Athlacca,
Kilmallock, Co Limerick.
Tel: 063 90565

National Centre for Technology in Education

Dublin City University,
Glasnevin, Dublin 9.
Tel: 01 700 8200
email: info@ncte.ie
website: www.scoilnet.ie (Network for Irish schools)
www.ncte.ie (National Centre for Technology in Education)

National Children's Office

1st Floor, St. Martin's House,
Waterloo Road, Dublin 4.
Tel: 01 242 0000
email: nco@health.gov.ie
website: www.nco.ie

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NCCA, 24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 661 7177
email: info@ncca.ie
website: www.ncca.ie

National Council for Special Education

Newtown, Trim, Co. Meath.
Tel: 046 943 6646

National Educational Psychological Service

NEPS, Frederick Court,
24 - 27 North Frederick Street,
Dublin 1
Tel: 01 889 2700
email: neps@education.gov.ie

National Parents Council – Post Primary

Unit 5 Glasnevin Business Centre,
Ballyboggan Road, Dublin 11.
Tel: 01 830 2740/47
website: www.npcpp.ie

Primary Curriculum Support Programme

SIAC Building, Monastery Road, Clondalkin, Dublin 22.
Tel: 01 464 2227
email: eolas@pcsp.ie
website: www.pcsp.ie

Relationship and Sexuality Education Support Service

Education Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
Tel: 01 857 6422

School Development Planning Support (Primary)

SDPS, Drumcondra Education Centre,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
Tel: 01 857 6427
email: info@sdps.ie
website: www.sdps.ie

Some Publications of Interest to Parents

National Parents Council Primary

Newsbrief
Annual report
Information leaflets and booklets

Catholic Primary School Managers Association

Management Board Members Handbook Revised 2004.

Department of Education and Science

Your Child's Learning: Primary School
Curriculum Guidelines for Parents
Going forward together 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidelines for parents'

National Children's Office

National Children's Strategy
Information on Student Councils

National Educational Welfare Board

Information leaflets for parents and students

