



Co-production of primary education: A local case study analysis of the establishment of a parent council

ALISON BODY, UNIVERSITY OF KENT

JENNY ROSS, PARENT COUNCIL CHAIR

Education in Context

- ▶ Primary schools are facing unprecedented pressures
 - ▶ Fiscal challenges, reduction of 8% in per pupil funding (IFS, 2018)
 - ▶ 40% real terms decrease in local authority spending on early intervention between 2010/11 and 2015/16 (29% more predicted 2016/17 and 2019/20)
 - ▶ 43% of primary schools turning to voluntary action to support core statutory provision
- ▶ High-profile campaign groups such as Worth Less?, School Cuts and Fair Funding for All Schools, have all highlighted the growing demands on parents and other community members to support education
- ▶ Unsurprisingly schools and parents equally turn to voluntary action and co-production to help meet new challenges (Body & Hogg, 2018)

Co-production in Education

- ▶ Co-produced public services involve collaboration between professional staff and private citizens (Whitaker, 1980).
- ▶ Epstein and Dauber's (1991) six types of parental involvement
 1. basic obligations at home;
 2. positive communications between home and school;
 3. assistance in learning activities at home;
 4. assistance at the school through volunteer help;
 5. involvement in school decision making, governance and advocacy;
 6. collaboration and exchange of support with community organisations to benefit the school.

Promoted by Policy

- ▶ Successive governments promote parent councils and parent participation:
 - ▶ Over 50 years ago the influential Plowden Report described parental involvement as crucial towards the schools success
 - ▶ “The biggest factor influencing the success of a child is the parents. Involving parents in schools brings these two forces together and improves behaviour, results and the school.” (DCFS, 2006)
 - ▶ Promoted by OFSTED and DfE made Governors accountable for demonstrating meaningful parental engagement
- ▶ Research has consistently highlighted the benefits to student outcomes of parental engagement in school life and a supportive a positive home-learning environment (e.g. Goodall, 2017; Harris and Goodall, 2008).

The Oaks Primary Academy (*pseudonym*)

- ▶ Situated in the south-east of England, the Oaks Primary Academy is a Church of England school and has a student population of almost 350 pupils.
- ▶ Located within the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country, 33.6% children are eligible for free school meals, almost 10% above the national average (as of 2017).
- ▶ Turbulent time - graded Inadequate in 2014 (was amongst the lowest 10% nationally according to OFSTED), retaining the same rating the following year after a second full inspection.
- ▶ High staff turnover and the school experienced series of changes in senior leadership.
- ▶ In 2015, a new Headteacher was appointed to the school.
- ▶ In 2016, The Oaks, formally a state funded primary school was converted to an academy.
- ▶ In October 2017 The Oaks started the process of launching a parent council.
- ▶ Launched parent council in January 2018

Story of the Parent Council

- ▶ Started formally, led by Head-teacher and Senior Representative from Multi-academy trust, local vicar in attendance, alongside parent volunteers – showed senior support and buy-in
- ▶ Formal, situated in school hall – retained power imbalance
- ▶ Quickly shifted to allocating volunteer chair and secretary, moved meeting venue to staff – less formal, cake etc
- ▶ Minutes and agenda – structure developed. Meet with head-teacher to co-produce agenda
- ▶ Observed school in real-time – for example play-times and dinner
- ▶ Meet every six weeks, contribute policy and procedure decisions, as well as wider community initiatives

Research Design

We particularly focus on Epstein and Dauber's (1991) 5th and 6th type of parental engagement:

- ▶ 5) involvement in school decision making, governance and advocacy;
- ▶ 6) collaboration and exchange of support with community organisations to benefit the school.

A co-researching process between practitioner and researcher tracking the emergence and development of a new Parent Council seeks to identify the benefits, barriers and unexpected consequences of the parent council.

Research Methods

- ▶ Research methods draw upon
 - ▶ Practitioner observations and reflections
 - ▶ School survey administered 250 to families, 1 year after launch of council
 - ▶ 32% response rate
 - ▶ Feedback from parent council members and Head-teacher

Findings: Barriers

- ▶ **Suspicion and mis-trust:** At the start of process it was difficult to get parents and teachers to meaningfully engage, required relationship building
- ▶ **Raising awareness:** According to the mid-term survey, whilst 85% of parents aware of parent council, only 35% of parents aware of who their parent representative was (somewhat of a surprise!)
- ▶ **Defining role:** Over the start up procedure there was considerable misunderstanding about the role of the parent council – for example many thought it was a fundraising body
- ▶ **Power imbalance:** Breaking down power imbalances between parents and staff

Pro-actively Overcoming Barriers

- ▶ Increased presence at playground & school gates
- ▶ Liaising with office staff and teachers
- ▶ Termly newsletters
- ▶ School based email address
- ▶ Profiles on school website
- ▶ Work in partnership with children's school council
- ▶ Attended staff meetings



parent council news spring term 2019 | issue one

[our role]
To support our school and create a welcoming environment that is inclusive for all families. To promote relationships between the school, pupils, parents, carers and the wider community.

[our aims]
To benefit the school with ideas, skills, knowledge and opinions of members. To decide what actions to take to improve our school and the learning environment for our children.

welcome
to our very first bumper issue of the Parent Council news.
We understand that communication is key for parents and carers. As a result of the feedback from the recent survey sent out to you all, we identified a need to better communicate to families and the wider community.
We will aim to distribute the Parent Council newsletter every term, with the aim to share our areas of focus, success, future projects and developments.
The Parent Council are a friendly and welcoming team that always gratefully receive feedback and thoughts from families within our school.
We are here to represent EVERY family, not just those on the Parent Council. Our aim is to improve the school experience for every St Nicholas pupil by working with parents, carers, children, teachers and the wider community.

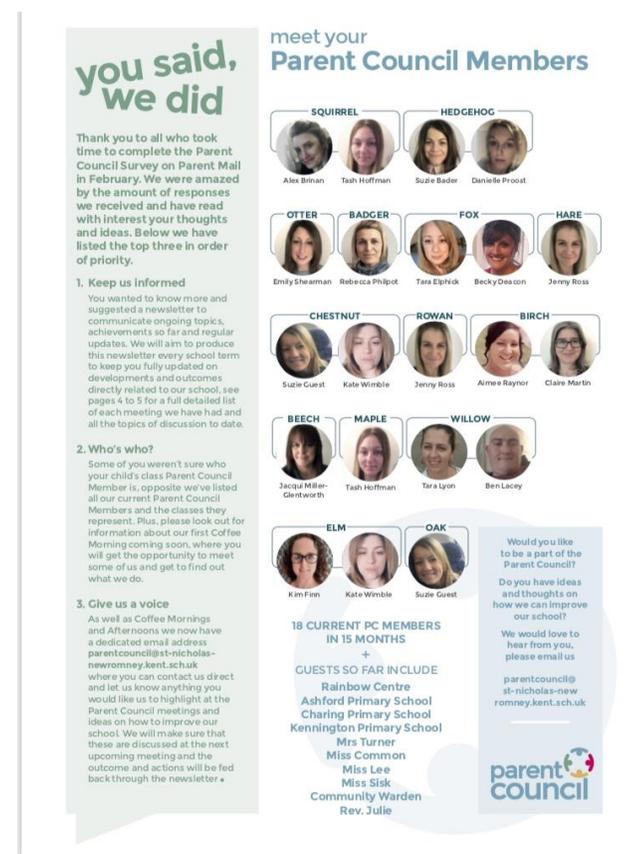
Jenny Ross
Parent Council Chair

COMING SOON
coffee morning
Look out for more info after the Easter holidays

- Chat and share ideas to help improve our school
- Meet some of the Parent Council members

We'd love to meet you

parent council
WORKING WITH AND SUPPORTING
St Nicholas CE Primary Academy • Fairfield Road • New Romney • Kent TN28 8BP
t. 01797 361906 e. parentcouncil@st-nicholas-newromney.kent.sch.uk



you said, we did

Thank you to all who took time to complete the Parent Council Survey on Parent Mail in February. We were amazed by the amount of responses we received and have read with interest your thoughts and ideas. Below we have listed the top three in order of priority.

1. Keep us informed
You wanted to know more and suggested a newsletter to communicate ongoing topics, achievements so far and regular updates. We will aim to produce this newsletter every school term to keep you fully updated on developments and outcomes directly related to our school, see pages 4 to 5 for a full detailed list of each meeting we have had and all the topics of discussion to date.

2. Who's who?
Some of you weren't sure who your child's class Parent Council Member is, opposite we've listed all our current Parent Council Members and the classes they represent. Plus, please look out for information about our first Coffee Morning coming soon, where you will get the opportunity to meet some of us and get to find out what we do.

3. Give us a voice
As well as Coffee Mornings and Afternoons we now have a dedicated email address parentcouncil@st-nicholas-newromney.kent.sch.uk where you can contact us direct and let us know anything you would like us to highlight at the Parent Council meetings and ideas on how to improve our school. We will make sure that these are discussed at the next upcoming meeting and the outcome and actions will be fed back through the newsletter.

meet your Parent Council Members

SQUIRREL
Alex Binan, Tash Hoffman, Suzie Bader, Daniele Proot

HEDGEHOG

OTTER
Emily Sheaman

BADGER
Rebecca Philpot

FOX
Tara Elphick, Becky Deacon

HARE
Jenny Ross

CHESTNUT
Suzie Guest, Kate Wimble

ROWAN
Jenny Ross

BIRCH
Aimee Rayner, Claire Martin

BEECH
Jacqui Miller-Glentworth

MAPLE
Tash Hoffman

WILLOW
Tara Lyon, Ben Lacey

ELM
Kim Finn

OAK
Kate Wimble, Suzie Guest

18 CURRENT PC MEMBERS IN 15 MONTHS

GUESTS SO FAR INCLUDE
Rainbow Centre
Ashford Primary School
Charing Primary School
Kennington Primary School
Mrs Turner
Miss Common
Miss Lee
Miss Sisk
Community Warden
Rev. Julie

Would you like to be a part of the Parent Council?
Do you have ideas and thoughts on how we can improve our school?
We would love to hear from you, please email us
parentcouncil@st-nicholas-newromney.kent.sch.uk

parent council

Findings: Benefits

Parents consistently identify and recognise positive benefits of the parent council:

- ▶ *The parents are well informed of any changes happening within the school, and I'd like to think they play an active role and are included in the function of the school*
- ▶ *A proactive voice for the parents to enable change and direction in the school.*
- ▶ *Parents are taking an active role in their child's education and taking a interests and having a say on how to help and improve the schooling for everyone staff parents and children.*

SIAMS (Church of England School Inspection body) commend school for pro-active approach to engaging parents – Good award overall for school, outstanding for leadership and management - School is considered to be making good progress

Head-teacher Reflections

- ▶ *"Having seen the impact of a parent council at a previous school, it was fundamental to the development of the school that we established one as soon as possible. **Parental engagement in the school was poor previously** - the school kept parents out! Allowing our parents to contribute to the school decision making process was crucial, we wanted them to see that their views mattered. The reasons for doing so were simple - **Children do better when their parents are involved in their education.** As a result, parents now contribute to whole school improvement. Parents views on our (school) practices have **strengthened the school** and parental input on the procedures and policies of a school only strengthens parents support of a school and knowing they have been part of it, gives them greater faith in their schools future."*

Impact Within the School

Epstein and Dauber (1991)	Examples
Involvement in school decision making, governance and advocacy;	Two parent council members on board of governors
	Re-launched the Parent Teacher Association (closed in 2015 due to inefficiency)
	Reviewed and helped redevelop the behaviour and homework policy
	Challenged safety and parking issues with community warden and county councillors
	Increased communication with parents enables parents to understand school pressures
	Representation and managing of parents concerns
	Increased volunteering within the school
	Advocacy within school – certain amount of crisis management

Moving Beyond the School Gates

Epstein and Dauber	Examples
<p>Collaboration and exchange of support with community organisations to benefit the school (benefits to wider school community due to fiscal pressures on wider services)</p>	Set up partnership with local charity to establish emergency Breakfast scheme for children
	Parent council representative can issue emergency food bank vouchers for parents to avoid stigma of approaching office
	Holiday hunger scheme in collaboration with two other local schools – free cooked meal each day and support for local families
	Supported other schools locally to establish parent councils
	Shared experiences more widely for example article features with ParentKind (National Charity), invited talks at practitioner events, etc

Conclusion – Great but proceed with caution

- ▶ Co-production in education has the possibility of breaking down traditional barriers between parents and teachers in education and actively promotes parent engagement.
- ▶ It can bring significant benefits to the school and wider school community.
- ▶ It is time consuming, requires a whole school approach and dedicated leadership.
- ▶ Can have additional benefits which can go beyond the school walls to support access to early intervention and wider support services for families.
- ▶ Needs careful consideration – wider research suggests voluntary action in education is unevenly dispersed, often favouring more privileged areas.
- ▶ Whilst co-production in education should be encouraged and welcomed for local benefits, when austerity is the driving force we must proceed with caution.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens, can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has”

MARGARET MEAD

Alison Body: A.M.Body@Kent.ac.uk

Jenny Ross: Jennyross36@gmail.com