

The Student and Parent Charter

Background

- The National Parents Council Primary made a submission to then-Minister for Education & Skills Ruairi Quinn in 2012, - requesting a strengthening of the role of parents in the Education Act 1998. (Section 28 of the Act provided for the Minister to prescribe grievance and complaint-handling procedures, but this had never been effected).
- The Programme for a Partnership Government 2016 committed to introduce a *stronger complaints procedure and charter for parents*.
- On 5 December 2016 Minister Bruton published the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill.

The key elements of the proposal are;

- Every recognised school will be required by law to have a Parent and Student Charter that will set out, among other things, the information which will be made routinely available to parents and students, as well as how to request information. This charter will adhere to guidelines published by the Minister.
- The Minister will have the power to direct a school to comply with the published guidelines.
- The legislation will provide for principles to be included in the legislation, which will guide how schools interact with students and their parents.

Principles of the Charter

- Placing the student at the centre of school life.
- Respecting and valuing the role of a parent.
- Consultation, engagement and participation.
- Accountability, including information on school performance and outcome of complaints.
- Inviting feedback and developing a listening culture in the school.
- Ensuring courtesy, confidentiality and equality of esteem.
- Seeking parental consent where appropriate.
- Providing a safe environment.
- Operating quality assurance.
- Acknowledging gaps, deficiencies and room for improvement.
- Obviating as far as possible the need for grievance and complaint processes.
- Providing, as appropriate, processes for grievance and complaint resolution.

The guidelines will cover these elements

- How schools will engage with students and parents.
- How students and parents will be consulted and invited to take part.
- Empowerment by the provision of information.
- How the school will be accountable to students and parents.
- Provision of information on academic school performance.
- How feedback will be invited, and how concerns will be identified.
- How the school will seek to be responsive, and
- How grievances and complaints will be handled.

Key changes

- Changes will be made to the Education Act 1998 so that:
- A school must promote the involvement of parents and students;
- A school must pro-actively be inclusive of, and accountable to, its parent and student body;
- A school must demonstrate how it is delivering on these requirements;
- The Student Council must promote the interests of the students of the school (currently the law says it must promote the interests of the school).

Relevant points made at PLS

- The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that Ireland should ensure that the Education Act 1998 is amended to guarantee the right of the child to be heard in individual cases;
- The introduction of a Parent and Student Charter complies with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- Documentation accompanying the General Scheme does not identify students as an equal partner in any working party established to develop guidelines (raised by OCO);
- A recognition of the need for student input and representation on Boards of Management.

In summary

- Our emphasis is on improving the day-to-day experience students and parents can expect from schools.
- Our principles are designed to achieve a culture change in our schools in terms of how schools engage with students and their parents.
- The Charter intends to enhance the level and quality of student participation in devising and developing the overall student experience in a school.
- A key element of every charter will be how the school will engage with, and be responsive and accountable to, its students and parents.