

# Strategic Plan 2006

National Parents Council Primary



## **Introduction**

### **National Parents Council Primary – strategy for the future**

As parents come under increasing pressure in their own lives, only the most vibrant and relevant organisations will attract them. Any organisation whose ways of working do not match, in a very clear way, the needs and expectations of parents, and the realities of their lives will lose support, falter and eventually fail, no matter how valid or worthy its mission. The board, together with the staff of National Parents Council Primary, have grasped this reality and this challenge, with courage and energy.

The end outcome of this strategic plan should be a new and energised organisation, which is open, accessible, flexible and responsive to parents' needs, as well as being effective, efficient, targeted and accountable.

## The Members

Parent associations in schools are the members of NPC (a parent association is all the parents/guardians of children attending the school).

### **Regional Branch**

(a regional branch can be a county or group of counties). The regional branch organises activities in its area.

Each parent association elects a number of representatives to a Regional Branch

### **National Special Interest Group**

(this group made up of representatives of parents of children attending: Special Schools, minority religion schools, Gaeltacht schools, scoileanna lán Gaeilge and parents of children with special needs who are attending mainstream schools. More groups may be added)

Individual parents can become part of the regional group in their area but have no voting rights.

## The Assembly

(the Assembly is the education policy-making body in the organisation)

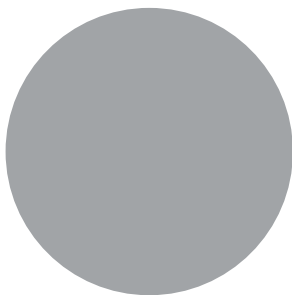
The parent association representatives in each Regional Branch elect two representatives to the Assembly

National Special Interest Group representatives elect a total of four representatives to the Assembly

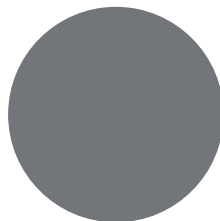
### The Board

(the Board provides governance and fulfils the legal obligations of the organisation)

The Assembly elects the Board.



The Members



The Assembly



The Board

## Contents

About National Parents Council Primary (NPC)	xx	
The legislative basis for NPC	xx	
Our mission statement	xx	
Our vision, our values	xx	
Strategic planning	xx	
Strategic proposals	xx	
Implementing the plan – the operational level	xx	
Appendix 1	Outline of the New Structures	xx
Appendix 2	Role of Finance Committee	xx
Appendix 3	Administrative/Secretariat support for Board	xx
Appendix 4	Supporting Change	xx
Appendix 5	Membership of Strategic Plan Implementation Group	xx

## **About National Parents Council Primary**

National Parents Council Primary (NPC) is the representative organisation for parents of children in primary or early education. This education can take place in a setting of parental choice. Some parents choose to educate their children in a variety of school or preschool settings while others may choose to educate their children at home.

National Parents Council Primary was set up in 1985, under the programme for Government, as the representative organisation for parents of children attending primary school, and received statutory recognition in the Education Act 1998. NPC has charitable status and is a company limited by guarantee. It has a board of directors and employs a chief executive and staff.

## The legislative basis for work of National Parents Council

### Education Act 1998

#### Interpretation

“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,

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 a 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, 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.

## Our mission statement

Mission is the fundamental purpose of the organisation and what the organisation stands for.

**Representation:** some examples of where NPC has made a difference.

- Every area of the curriculum, information for parents about children's learning - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- Recognition of children's rights, and promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - National Children's Advisory Council, Children's Rights Alliance
- Encouraging school attendance and preventing absenteeism - National Education Welfare Board
- Encouraging high professional standards in the teaching profession - Teaching Council
- Influencing education policy and legislation - Department of Education and Science

'National Parents Council Primary is established to contribute to the advancement of the early education and primary education of all children, in order to improve and enrich the education of each child and to support the involvement of parents in all stages of education.'

In keeping with our mission

- 1 We advocate for and represent parents  
We consult with parents and bring parents' views to bear on education policy
- 2 We provide services for parents  
We have a helpline service for individual parents and parent associations  
We have an information service for parents  
We provide a wide range of training and support services for parents
- 3 We facilitate and support parents to develop associations in their schools and organise ways at county level and at local area level, for parents to support each other

## Our vision, our values

- We believe in the empowerment of parents, so that they can take responsibility and make choices about their role as educator
- We believe that all parents have the capacity to help their children to learn well. All parents have the right to the support they need in order to do this
- We believe that all children are capable of learning and have the right to access the best possible education service
- We believe in the value of partnership with other educators in the way we work
- We believe in the importance of childhood and children's experience
- We see children as being partners in education
- We believe in the right of parents to lifelong learning opportunities

Vision is an organisations view of the desired future, expressed in terms of what an organisation wants to achieve for a particular group (parents and the education of their children). A vision of a desirable future is something you hope to contribute to, but will not be able to achieve alone.

Our values tell the world and ourselves, what we believe in, in the business of children's education and parental involvement. These values and beliefs should guide all that we do, and be very visible in our work.

## Strategic planning

Strategic planning establishes direction, priorities and broad timescales. Responsibility for developing strategic plans rests with the board and senior management. It is, however, important to involve those who will implement the plan.

It is now 21 years since NPC was set up. Many things have changed in that time. The organisation is working in a very different environment from that of 1985.

There are many new challenges facing parents, children and schools. We have asked parents if they have new needs that have not been met. We have asked them if there are better ways of meeting the needs that we were set up to meet. Over many years there was widespread consultation about NPC and its future. We consulted with the National Parents Council Primary national executive, county executive, parents who are directly and not directly involved with NPC, including lone parents and school principals.

To date some structural changes to the organisation have been agreed, with a view to modernising the organisation.

In the light of the information we have gathered about NPC and its work, we have identified important ways in which we should try to change and strengthen our parents' organisation. We have proposed actions that would make us most effective in achieving our goals.

Here are four goals drawn from the views we collected from parents:

- making NPC accessible to a much wider range of parents
- helping parents to get whatever support they need for their job as educators
- having better consultation with a wider range of parents, in order to strengthen our lobbying and representation role
- helping to improve parental involvement at school level

Corporate/internal goals have also been derived through consultation with the national executive and staff: agreeing the purpose/priorities of NPC and clarifying roles and responsibilities.

## Strategic proposals

The goals identified by parents, board and staff translate into a set of strategic proposals:

1. To open up the membership base, to strengthen the voice and the influence of NPC as the parents' voice; a voice for all kinds of parents in all parts of the Country
2. To have more flexible ways for parents to be part of a national movement at local level - minimum bureaucracy and maximum access
3. To devise new ways of targeting our limited resources to get maximum gain for parents and to focus on things that NPC can do best
4. To develop new ways of consulting, so as to widen the consultation, and strengthen our lobbying on behalf of parents
5. To find new ways of developing more comprehensive national policies on educational issues, to strengthen our input into national policy
6. To build new organisational structures to carry forward the increased membership and new ways of working.

With the adoption of new Articles of Association, a new organisational structure to facilitate this desired organisational modernisation has been put in place.

It must be noted that Memorandum and Articles are not strategic plans. Rules are important, and they are there to ensure that things are done properly, but an organisation should not become hidebound by rules.

## **Implementing the plan - the operational level**

The difference between strategy and operations: strategy is the direction, “what you want to be and why”, operations are about the “how”.

In the following pages each of the strategic proposals is broken down into a series of actions with proposed time lines.

**GUIDE** to strategic proposal action sheets

Each task will be further broken down into a series of steps and require resource allocation, staff time/finance

Some actions will require consultation with county executives

Dates given are for guidance only

### Strategic proposal 1:

To open up the membership base, to strengthen the voice and the influence of NPC as the parents' voice; a voice for all kinds of parents in all parts of the Country.

Actions to implement proposal	Tasks	Date
Engage with and motivate affiliated parent associations.	Inform about organisational change. Send affiliation forms and documentation.	Early 2007. September 2007.
'Market' NPC to unaffiliated parent associations.	Information about change, affiliation forms & documentation. Offer support/training to establish parent associations.	October 2007.
'Market' NPC to potential associate/individual members. (parents)	Promotion campaign. Information to crèches, pre schools, early education settings, parents educating children at home etc. Offer support/training to established parent associations.	October – December 2007.
Market NPC to potential associate members. (others)	Identify potential (including post primary parents, grandparents & organisations).	January 2008 (start).
Target categories of parents we are not reaching.	Identify priority groups & develop new ways of communicating, working & training.	Summer 2007 (start) implement 2008 onwards.
Communicate NPC to parents & public.	Media campaign with professional advice.	September 2007 onwards.
Communicate NPC to partners in education.	Inform & seek support.	February 2007 onwards.

### Strategic proposal 2:

To have more flexible ways for parents to be part of a national movement at local level – minimum bureaucracy and maximum access

Actions to implement proposal	Tasks	Date
Set up local groups.	Pilot scheme getting a group of parents together at local level (general or special interests).	January 2008 onwards.
Strengthen county (district – more than one county) branch.	Discuss with existing branches & affiliated parent associations who have no branch.	October – December 2007.
Examine ways of running effective county /regional level with minimum bureaucracy.	Pilot optional 'core group' system to progress county/ district activities.	January 2008 onwards.
Set up and promote/support regional forums.	Run a number of regional forums to bring parents together for information/discussion/consultation.	January 2008 onwards.
Design linkages between parents at local, regional and national level.	Develop system for linkage with Assembly.	January 2008.

### Strategic Proposal 3:

To devise new ways of targeting our limited resources to get maximum gain for parents and to focus on things that NPC can do best

Actions to implement proposal	Tasks	Date
Increase resources to implement strategic proposals	Establish small group with professional advice to formulate plan and action to devise new ways of targeting our limited resources to get maximum gain for parents and to focus on the things NPC can do best.	February 2007.
	Consider how best to approach parents/parent associations, charitable foundations. Department of Education and Science, sponsorship.	

**Strategic proposal 4:**

New ways of consulting, so as to widen the consultation, and strengthen our lobbying on behalf of parents

Actions to implement proposal	Tasks	Date
Consult with parents at regional level.	Plan/run a number of regional forums to give geographic coverage for parents.	January 2008 onwards.
Consult with parents and children.	Pilot a fun, lightweight event/roadshow to involve children and parents.	September 2009 onwards.
Enhance and support consultation work at county /district and interest group level.	Enhance and support consultation work at county/district/ Special Interest Group level.	October - December 2007.
Reach parents/groups we haven't reached.	Identify and prioritise groups and develop a focus group plan. Try out market surveys/vox pop.	January 2008 onwards.
Use new technologies to inform & consult.	Develop web consultation system. Develop email membership database. Explore use of mobile technology.	September 2007 onwards.
Plan systematic way of influencing and lobbying.	Meetings/seminars: partners in Education, politicians, public officials etc. Plan PR/media campaign. Engage PR consultant.	January 2008 onwards.
Bring all initiatives together.	Develop system for linkage with Assembly. Run annual National Education Conference bringing parents and policy-makers together and generating media coverage for parents' agenda.	January 2008 onwards.

**Strategic proposal 5:**

New ways of developing more comprehensive national policies on educational issues, to strengthen our input into national policy

Actions to implement proposal	Tasks	Date
Establish new policy making assembly	Examine models from other councils, for example, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Plan system of getting best possible information and research for members. Develop cycle of information / discussion / consultation with parents / feedback to Assembly.	February 2007 onwards
Maximise potential of NPC representatives on outside bodies	Develop support and feedback mechanism for representatives	January 2008 onwards
	Would require a research/policy officer	To be considered

### Strategic proposal 6:

New organisational structures to carry forward the increased membership and ways of working

Actions to implement proposal	Tasks	Date
Establish governance structure.	Identify and document skill set needed to be a member of a board and how skills will be developed for board members. Document system for election. Consider cooption of non voting members with 'expertise' to assist the board. Develop a Code of Governance. Hold elections. Provide induction/training for good governance.	Mid 2007.     Date to be decided. Following election of board.
Establish clear linkages between board, Assembly and local parents.	Clearly set down the role and work of the Assembly and relationship with the board. Pilot Regional forums for information/consultation. Develop communications system with membership/parents.	Mid February – Mid March 2007.  April 2007 onwards.

## Appendix 1

### Outline of the New Structures of National Parents Council Primary

#### Membership

The members of National Parents Council Primary are the affiliated parent associations.

Affiliated parent associations may elect representatives to their regional branch. (Existing numbers of delegates to be reviewed).

Individual parents or groups with an interest in children and primary education may become associate members.

#### Regional Branch

A regional branch consists of one or more counties. A committee/core group will be formed to organise activities in the area. Each regional branch may elect two representatives to the Assembly.

#### National Special Interest Committee

The National Special Interest Committee comprises of nominees from groups who represent parents of children with special educational needs who attend special schools and mainstream schools, and parents of children who attend Minority Religion Schools, Gaeltacht schools and Scoileanna Lán Gaeilge.

The number of groups representing special interests may be expanded.

The National Special Interest Committee may elect a total of four representatives to the Assembly.

#### European Officer

The Assembly will elect a European Officer.

#### The Assembly

The Assembly is the body concerned with and has overall responsibility within NPC for educational policy.

The Assembly elects the Board of Management from amongst its members.

#### The Board of Management/Directors

The board consists of 12 persons who are registered as the directors of the company.

The board will establish a standing finance sub-committee which will be chaired by a member of the board (see Appendix 2), and may also establish other sub-committees.

#### New Ways of Working

##### The Assembly

The Assembly is the body concerned with and has overall responsibility within NPC for educational policy.

The Assembly has responsibility for:

- Developing the Council's education policies
- Electing board members
- Representing the views of NPC on education issues
- Linking with counties and regions

- Representing, in partnership with NPC staff members, NPC on other education bodies

The Assembly would not be involved in matters to do with company law, employment of staff, or governance issues, which would be the remit of the Board of Management.

The Assembly will meet at least three times a year.

As an education policy-making body, it is important that the Assembly is widely representative of all shades of parental opinion. In this way, NPC will have a rich mix of opinion on which to base policy, and ensure that policy broadly reflects the spectrum of parental opinion in Ireland.

The Assembly may set up sub-committees. These would be formed to deal with emerging educational issues as required. They could have a very short lifespan, or a long one, depending on the subject matter or purpose. For example the special interest groups could have standing committees (i.e. permanent committees). At present there are four special interest groups represented in the National Special Interest Committee. More may be added, for example, ethnic minority parents, parents educating their children at home.

In order to create strong links with parents, the Assembly will develop ways of informing and consulting meaningfully with parents through a wide variety of means including: parent association and local interest group meetings; forums, including special interest groups at regional level; focus groups, including young people; publications and website information; on-line consultation and questionnaires; use of the media especially local media and the innovative use of new technologies.

The work of the Assembly must be open, transparent and accountable.

#### Education Conferences

The Assembly will hold an annual National Education Conference to profile and showcase the educational policies of NPC. The Assembly will also support the holding of regional conferences. All welcome!

Ongoing research and other supports, including training/facilitation will be required to support the work of the Assembly.

#### The Board of Management/Directors

The board is elected annually by the Assembly from amongst its members.

The board consists of 12 persons who are registered as the directors of the company.

The board may co-opt two additional members for their particular expertise (NOTE Boardmatch provides this service); these additional members will not have voting rights.

Training for the governance role will be provided for the board.

The board will meet at least six times a year.

The duties and responsibilities of the board

- Leadership and collective responsibility
- Strategy
- Internal policy, for example, employment policy
- Legal responsibilities and compliance with company law
- Hiring and supporting a chief executive
- Ensuring the aims and purposes of the organisation are fulfilled
- Financial accountability and budget
- Corporate governance:
  - Oversight
  - Standards of management
  - Integrity
  - Transparency
  - Accountability

There will be administrative/secretarial support for the work of the board (see Appendix 3).

#### Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The board must hold an annual general meeting (AGM). The AGM will review and approve the company's audited accounts, appoint NPC's auditors, adopt internal policies and approve and adopt the annual report of the Assembly. The Members (affiliated parent associations, representation to be decided) and members of the Assembly may attend and vote.

#### The Chairperson and Chief Executive

The chairperson and chief executive share the leadership role in the organisation.

The chairperson's role is to lead the board and ensure that all members contribute to strategic direction and governance.

The chief executive's role is to report to and advise the board and to lead the staff to implement agreed strategies and priorities, and to ensure delivery and performance. The chief executive is accountable to the board.

The separation of roles provides the necessary checks and balances on each others authority, and underlines the importance of there being a good professional working arrangement between them.

The chairperson chairs both the Board of Management and the Assembly

### The Company Secretary

A company secretary manages the processes that ensure the organisation complies with company legislation and regulation and keeps board members informed of their legal responsibilities. By law, every company must have a company secretary.

The company secretary maintains the register of NPC members.

## Appendix 2 Role of Finance Committee

- Oversight of the financial responsibilities of NPC, on behalf of the board
- Duty of care in respect of finances - as part of the fulfilment of this duty two cheque signatories are required, one of whom must be from the finance committee and the other from senior staff
- Duty to ensure that money is spent and assets held/managed in line with the purposes and objectives of the organisation, as set down in the Memorandum and Articles
- Duty to safeguard against any spending that is outside the power of the board and its objectives
- Duty to ensure that accurate accounts/ records are kept
- Duty to ensure accurate reporting in respect of expenditure
- Responsible for developing policy in respect of financial systems and controls on expenditure, in consultation with chief executive; must ensure that their policy facilitates the efficient running of the organisation
- Propose budget to board
- Examine proposals for capital spending and make recommendations (large projects)
- Ensure statutory audits are carried out
- Provide training for members of finance committee

## Appendix 3 Administrative/Secretariat support for Board (Staff Personnel)

- Standard format for agenda and minutes including: – indication whether items on the agenda are for discussion, decision, or information
- Timing clearly set for each agenda item so important strategic issues get the time they require – each agenda item to be numbered
- Ensuring that correspondence to the board is drawn to the attention of the chief executive and chairperson between meetings
- Typing any necessary correspondence
- Keeping copies of all correspondence and ensuring that filing is kept confidential and up to date
- Book venue and requirements for meetings, and make sure that all board members know of the time, date and venue of meetings well in advance
- Send out agenda, minutes and any necessary documentation required for meetings within the time frame agreed by the board
- Record attendance of board members and those in attendance at the meetings
- Record all decisions taken at meetings and reasons for decisions as required
- Make sure that the chairperson signs and dates minutes at the meetings

- After meetings prepare draft minutes as soon as possible and show draft copy of minutes to chairperson and chief executive. These remain as draft minutes until they are adopted by the board
- Place a copy of the signed minutes in the minutes file and ensure that this is kept in a safe confidential place
- Training for staff member

## Appendix 4 Supporting Change

### 1. Assembly

- An information programme on the role of the new Assembly has been developed
- From this, an information roadshow has been rolled out around the Country by staff and volunteers
- Training will be put in place for volunteers
- Induction training will be developed for members of the new Assembly on the roles and responsibilities of the Assembly

### 2. Board of Management

- Induction training will be developed for members of the Board of Management
- Administrative/Secretariat support will be made available to the Board of Management to deal with the agenda / minutes / correspondence / arrangements for meetings
- A finance sub-committee will be established by the board to oversee the financial responsibilities of NPC and report monthly to the board. A member of the board should chair the finance committee.

### 3. Chief Executive

National Parents Council Primary will continue to have a chief executive. This position will be advertised publicly with outside assistance.

### 4. Training and Leadership Development

A major training and leadership development programme will be put in place to develop capacity throughout the organisation, as follows:

- Induction training for members of the new Assembly
- Induction training for members of the Board of Management
- Access to training on chairmanship and leadership for the chairperson
- Specific training for members of the finance committee
- Communications and media training for spokespersons
- A staff development programme with specific training for the staff member providing administrative/secretariat support to the board of management.

## 5. Governance Manual

A governance manual, setting down the specific role and responsibilities for the operation of the National Parents Council Primary organisation, will be developed. This manual would also be used as part of the training and leadership programme.

Boardmatch Ireland which works with boards in the private and public sectors will, as part of a project on the voluntary sector, work with National Parents Council Primary on the development of a governance manual and guidelines of good practice.

## Appendix 5 Membership of Strategic Plan Implementation Group

The Implementation Group was set up by the board to develop the strategic plan and to make recommendations to the board. This strategic plan has been adopted as a working document by the board of National Parents Council Primary.

### **Members of the Implementation Group**

Mr Francis Linden, *NPC Chairperson*

Mr Paul Stevenson, *NPC Vice Chairperson*

Ms Gile MacLochlainn, *NPC National Executive for Leitrim*

Ms Carol Ollry, *NPC National Executive for Dublin SW*

Ms Fionnuala Kilfeather, *NPC Chief Executive*

Ms Deirdre Sullivan, *NPC Training & Development Officer*

### **Moderator**

Mr Peter Cassells

National Parents Council Primary  
12 Marlborough Court  
Dublin1

**Tel:** 018874034

**Fax:** 018874489

[www.ncp.ie](http://www.ncp.ie)