



The Scottish
Government

Education and Lifelong Learning

Public Consultation on School Handbooks and Better Information for Parents Results from the Online Consultation



**PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON SCHOOL
HANDBOOKS AND BETTER INFORMATION FOR
PARENTS
RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE CONSULTATION**

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents the findings from the Scottish Government's Online Consultation on requirements for providing information for parents and carers about their child's school ("The school handbook"), which closed on 14 March 2011.
- 1.2 The consultation was supported by a number of engagement events and focus groups which are reported on separately¹. In addition, a small number of interviews with head teachers and Local Authority Parental Involvement Officers were conducted, and where appropriate, findings from these interviews are included in this report.

Background

- 1.3 Local authorities provide education services – nursery, primary, secondary and special schools. In terms of the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 1982 (the 1982 Regulations), the Local Authority have to provide certain information to parents and carers about their child's school (usually known as "the school handbook") This information might be available in a range of formats including a 'school handbook', leaflets and letters to parents, 'Information for Parents', on the school website or as part of the school's report to parents, called its Standards and Quality report. This information is often shared with parents at meetings and workshops.
- 1.4 The 1982 Regulations cover a range of information such as transport facilities, school meal provision, additional support for learning, post-school destinations, which schools the children usually transfer to, discipline and school rules, enforcement of attendance, specialist provision, examination achievement in National Qualifications and placing requests.
- 1.5 Curriculum for Excellence has been introduced in Scotland to raise standards for all 3-18 year olds, wherever they learn. There are changes to what and how young people learn, including how they are assessed and qualifications. For these reasons, the Scottish Government consider that school handbooks need to be refreshed and updated to be more relevant and helpful for parents, and more consistent with the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence, as well as reflect the changes to the new National Qualifications.

The consultation process

- 1.6 The Scottish Government wished to engage with as many parents/carers and other relevant stakeholders as possible, and launched an online written consultation, which ran for 4 months from 15 November 2010 to 14 March 2011. In addition a series of engagement events and focus groups were held to support the online written consultation.

¹ The report on the engagement events and focus groups is available on the Scottish Government website.

Who responded to the consultation

1.7 A total of **682** consultation responses were received and analysed. **678** of these followed the format of the online questionnaire and have been included in the statistical analysis. **679** responses were received **before the deadline** for responses - 675 online and four by other methods. Three of these additional responses followed the format of the online questionnaire to at least some degree, so they were inputted into the online tool and are included in the statistical analysis below. An additional three late responses were received beyond the consultation deadline, but prior to the analysis of the data. These were in letter form, and were included in the analysis of the free text responses in section 4, as was the fourth response above (which arrived before the deadline and did not follow the questionnaire format). This resulted in a total of **682** consultation responses being analysed, **678** of which were suitable for, and included in the statistical analysis.

Table 1: Breakdown of response numbers

Breakdown of response numbers	No.
Before the deadline	679
Includes: Online responses	675
Includes: Other responses	4
After the deadline	3
No. who followed the questionnaire, and are included in statistical analysis	678
Total number of responses received and analyses	682

1.8 The majority of respondents (84%) responded as individuals, whilst 16% responded on behalf of a group/organisation. The majority of respondents described themselves as parents/carers (70%), and a further 12% said they were responding on behalf of a Parent Council. 10% of responses came from head teachers, whilst only very low numbers of responses came from teachers (1%) and Local Authority employees (2%). Five percent of responses came from those who described themselves as "other". A range of groups were represented under "other" including: voluntary organisations and those providing support to parents or children, those providing after-school care/childminders and National Organisations and Non-Departmental Public Bodies. Throughout the report the results are based on all (678) respondents, unless otherwise stated. Where there are clear differences between the views of parents/ carers/ Parent Council representatives and head teachers these are reported. However, the numbers of respondents identifying themselves as teachers, LA employees or 'other' is too low to report on results for these sub-groups individually.

Table 2: Role of those responding to the online consultation

Role	No.	%
	<i>Base 678</i>	
Parent/Carer	473	70
On behalf of a Parent Council	83	12
Head Teacher	69	10
Teacher	8	1
LA employee	12	2
Other, please specify	33	5

1.9 In total 682 responses to the written consultation were received. It should be noted that due to the self-selecting nature of consultation exercises, the findings presented here relate only to those who responded to the written consultation and cannot be generalised to be seen as representative of the wider population.

2 THE RESULTS

Part 1 – The Current Situation

Part 1 – Key Points

- Nearly all (95%) of parents/carers receive general information for parents from their school, and 95% of those find the information useful.

2.1 Part one of the consultation asked about the information that parents currently receive, and so was *only asked of those who identified themselves as responding as a parent/carer* (535 respondents).

2.2 The vast majority of parents/carers (95%) said that they received general information for parents and carers from their child's school, and of those who received such information, the vast majority (95%) described it as either very useful or useful. When asked if they received a "school handbook", 84% of parents/carers said that they had, whilst 12% said that they hadn't and 4% weren't sure if they had or not.

Part 2 What Information Respondents Would Like in Future

Part 2 – Key Points

- Information on school policies, school contact details and the curriculum came out as the top-priorities respondents want their schools to provide them with.
- The least priority was given to information on school budgets and school attendance rates
- Respondents came up with a wide range of "other" suggestions for the type of information they wanted their school to provide them with – the most popular of which were school calendars/timetables and information on Parent Councils and how parents could get involved with the school.
- Some respondents suggested that schools should provide links to other information and other information sources
- Over half of respondents (51%) favour an online school handbook, just over a quarter (28%) favour a printed copy.
- Some respondents suggested that information should be provided in a variety of formats, to ensure it is as accessible as possible to as many people as possible.
- Just over two-thirds of respondents (68%) want their school to provide them with information about their school only, a quarter of respondents (24%) also want information about schools in their council area and only 8% want information about their school and other schools across Scotland.

2.3 Part 2 of the consultation was concerned with the type of information that parents/carers and others would like to receive in the future. They were asked about what type of information they would like, the format they would like to receive it in and whether they want information just about their school, or if they also want information about other schools in their council area or across Scotland.

Question 2 - type of information wanted

2.4 Question 2 aimed to find out what type of information respondents want their schools to provide them with, by allowing them to choose from a range of options and to suggest ideas of their own. Question 2b attempted to get respondents to prioritise the information they felt it was most important for their schools to give them, by asking them to choose their top ten priorities.

2.5 When respondents were able to choose as many options as they liked, there was near universal support for the top ten options (all scoring 90% or more). School contact details were considered the most important information for schools to provide (97%), closely followed by information on ways to

communicate with the school if you had a concern (96%) and school policies (94%). The least popular options included school attendance rates and school budgets, with around a half of respondents wanting their schools to provide them with that information. A quarter of respondents came up with their own suggestions for information they wanted their school to provide.

Table 3: Responses to Q2a) Ranked by popularity

2.a). What information do you think your own school should provide you with? Please select as many as apply		
Ranking	Alternatives	%
		<i>base 675</i>
1	School contact details	97
2	Ways you can communicate with the school if you have a worry about your child or school	96
3	Policies on issues like anti-bullying, discipline, equal opportunities, school uniform, homework, transport, school meals,	94
4	Names and roles of staff	93
5	Reporting – how you will receive reports on your child's progress	92
6	School values	92
7	Opportunities for parental involvement	91
8	Assessment approaches – how the school assesses your child's progress and achievements	91
9	The curriculum – subjects your child will be doing and skills they'll be learning	90
10	Support for pupils – how to access additional support for learning, how the guidance system works	90
11	How you can complain if you need to	89
12	Activities – after school activities like clubs and groups	89
13	How pupil achievements are recognised, celebrated e.g. weekly news, certificates at assembly, work displayed on monitors	85
14	School achievements e.g. Eco award, Health accreditation	83
15	School performance – standards of achievement, learning and teaching	79
16	School inspection reports	76
17	Feedback from any surveys of parents or learners during the year	67
18	School attendance rates	55
19	School budget	48
20	Other, please specify	25

- 2.6 When respondents were asked to choose their top ten priorities for information to include, information on school policies came top (83%), followed by school contact details (80%) and the curriculum (78%), which moved from ninth place when people could choose as many options as they wanted to third place, when asked to prioritise a top ten. Once again school budget and school attendance rates were amongst the least popular responses (11% and 7% respectively). Eight percent of respondents ranked their own "other" answer in the top ten types of information they wanted from their schools.

Table 4: Responses to Q2b) Ranked by popularity

2 b) Thinking again about the information you would like your own school to provide you with – please indicate which <u>10</u> things you feel are your top priorities.		
Ranking	Alternatives	%
		<i>base 674</i>
1	Policies on issues like anti-bullying, discipline, equal opportunities, school uniform, homework, transport, school meals	83
2	School contact details	80
3	The curriculum – subjects your child will be doing and skills they'll be learning	78
4	Ways you can communicate with the school if you have a worry about your child or school	77
5	Assessment approaches – how the school assesses your child's progress and achievements	68
6	Reporting – how you will receive reports on your child's progress	67
7	Names and roles of staff	66
8	School values	63
9	Support for pupils – how to access additional support for learning, how the guidance system works	54
10	School performance – standards of achievement, learning and teaching	50
11	Opportunities for parental involvement	47
12	School inspection reports	42
13	Activities – after school activities like clubs and groups	41
14	How pupil achievements are recognised, celebrated e.g. weekly news, certificates at assembly, work displayed on monitors	39
15	How you can complain if you need to	35
16	School achievements e.g. Eco award, Health accreditation	24
17	Feedback from any surveys of parents or learners during the year	16
18	School budget	11
19	My own idea, please specify	8
20	School attendance rates	7

2.7 There were some differences in priorities for information by respondent type. Table A1 showing responses and ranking by respondent type can be found in Annex A1.

Parents/carers were most likely to select:

1. school policies (87%),
2. the curriculum (80%)
3. school contact details (78%)
4. ways you can communicate with the school if you have a worry about your child or school (75%)

Those responding on behalf of a Parent Council were most likely to select:

1. school contact details (84%),

2. school policies (83%)
3. ways you can communicate with the school if you have a worry (78%)
4. Curriculum was fourth equal along with school values (76% each).

Head teachers were most likely to select:

1. school contact details (97%),
2. school values and ways to communicate with the school if you have a worry (93%) were second equal
3. the curriculum

2.8 Information about school attendance rates and budgets were ranked amongst the lowest priorities across all respondent groups, as well as overall.

2.9 A quarter of respondents (170) provided their own "other" ideas for information that they would like their schools to provide them with at question 2 (a). In addition a number of respondents used the free text question in section 4 to say what information they would like their school to provide. Responses to section 4 which specified information respondents wanted from their school have been included in the analysis of question 2 (a). The range of suggestions was varied and many respondents included more than one other suggestion. In all, these suggestions fell into 59 different themes. A table of all 59 is included in Annex A2. Suggestions ranged from information about Parent Councils to exams, to the provision of out of school care, to links between the school and the wider community and information about Curriculum for Excellence.

"General questions and answers about the classroom, what to expect, type of clothing to wear for gym time, how school lunches operate including packed lunches, what happens in the playground etc."

Parent/carer

"Holidays for the next 2 education years, How to apply for transportation for children, Parent Council Office Holders and dates for PC Meetings for the following educational year, a sense of objectives for each school year so parents understand what their children should be aiming to achieve in for example maths & English by the end of the school year, policy around homework."

Parent/carer

"Inspiring quotes, poetry, kids pictures - something that shows in a visual and simple way the ethos of the school".

Parent/carer

2.10 The most commonly mentioned types of "other" information respondents wanted included school calendars/timetables, both at the level of a calendar

for the year highlighting key dates, such as holidays, parents evenings etc and timetable information about gym days, lunch times etc as well as suggestions of exemplar timetables for the different year groups and information about Parent Councils and how parents could get involved with the school. A common theme, also coming out of interviews with head teachers, was that respondents would like the school to provide them with the essential information and provide links to where other relevant information could be found, it was suggested that this might be less off-putting than providing parents with a large amount of information.

"All of the above would be useful but if put in a book would it be too bulky and unwelcoming to read. I think all this information should be included on the school website and that way it makes it more readable."

On behalf of a parent council

- 2.11 There were suggestions that it would be good to have sections of the information provided by pupils or by parents, as they were best placed to know what type of information other pupils and parents were likely to want and find useful

"We also think that students should have a page on which they communicate directly with potential students, giving the information which they think is most important."

Other – Voluntary Organisation

Table 5: Q2 a – Top 10 "Other" Suggestions

Q2a) What information do you think your own school should provide you with? Top 10 "other" suggestions		
Ranking	Other suggestion	No.
		<i>Base 170</i>
1	School calendar/timetable	31
2	Information about parent council/how parents can get involved with the school	30
3	Include essential information and provide links to additional info	17
4=	Exam/ qualification/ assessment info	15
4=	School performance and statistics (including comparison to other schools/national average)	15
6=	Links with CfE/how CfE will be implemented	12
6=	School policies on issues such as homework, uniform, transport, school meals, truancy, mobile phones etc	12
6=	Staff absence rates/turnover/vacancies and staff qualifications and achievements	12
9	Basic admin requirements e.g. how to report a child's absence, opening times. Lost property, etc	10
10=	Information on Additional Support Needs (ASN)	9
10=	School development/improvement plan, progress	9

Responses include "other" answers to Q2(a) combined with relevant answers from section 4 "any further comments".

- 2.12 Question 2 (b) allowed respondents to include their own ideas in the top ten types of information they would like their school to provide them with. Fifty-six respondents included their own idea at question 2(b), including nine

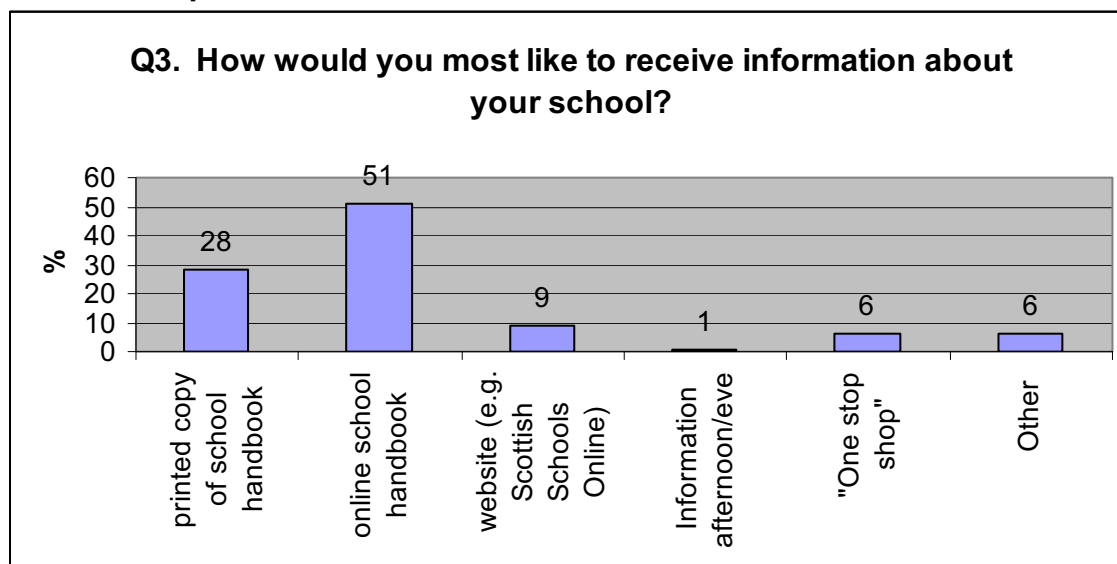
respondents who had not included an "other" suggestion in Q2 (a). In all, these suggestions fell into 35 themes, all of which are recorded in table A3 in Annex A3. As might be expected, a number of respondents reiterated the comments they had made in question 2(a), however some new suggestions were included in 2 (b), new suggestions are marked as such in table A3.

2.13 The top 3 themes related to the provision of out of school care, calendars/timetables and information about staff, such as absence, turnover and qualifications (each receiving 5 mentions). New suggestions included: having a question and answer section, as well as a comment that all information is important. There were also comments relating to how respondents wanted to receive information and suggestions for the format in which the information be presented.

Question 3 – format of information

2.14 Question 3 of the consultation asked respondents how they would most like to receive information about their school and asked them to only choose one of the options available. Just over half (51%) said that they would like an online version of the school handbook, and 28% said that they would prefer their own printed copy of the school handbook. Nine percent favoured a website such as Scottish Schools Online which provides key information about their school and other schools in Scotland, 6% favoured a "one stop shop" providing key information and reports about their school, and 1% favoured an information afternoon or evening.

Chart 1: Responses to Q 3



2.15 Head teachers also most commonly chose the option of an online version (46%). However, as a group they were keener than others on using a website such as Scottish Schools online (13% compared to 8% of parents/carers /those responding on behalf of a Parent Council) and a one stop shop (9% compared to 6% of parents/carers/those on behalf of a Parent Council). These findings were backed up by the views coming out of the head teacher interviews.

2.16 Six percent opted for "other", the most common other response being to support a combination of methods for providing information with access to online and printed material available, as well as using evening events, although environmental and cost considerations were mentioned as a reason for limiting the number of printed copies. The importance of the school regularly up-dating online information was highlighted. Comments were also made in relation to people with literacy problems and parents whose first language is not English, and it was suggested that school handbooks should be easy to read and avoid jargon, and should be made available in languages other than English. Some innovative suggestions were made around the format in relation to literacy issues, such as part of the handbook being in the form of a graphic novel, or using CDs or podcasts. A prevalent theme coming through the "other" comments was the importance of making school information as accessible as possible, regardless of internet access or literacy levels and that a range of formats would be necessary to best support that.

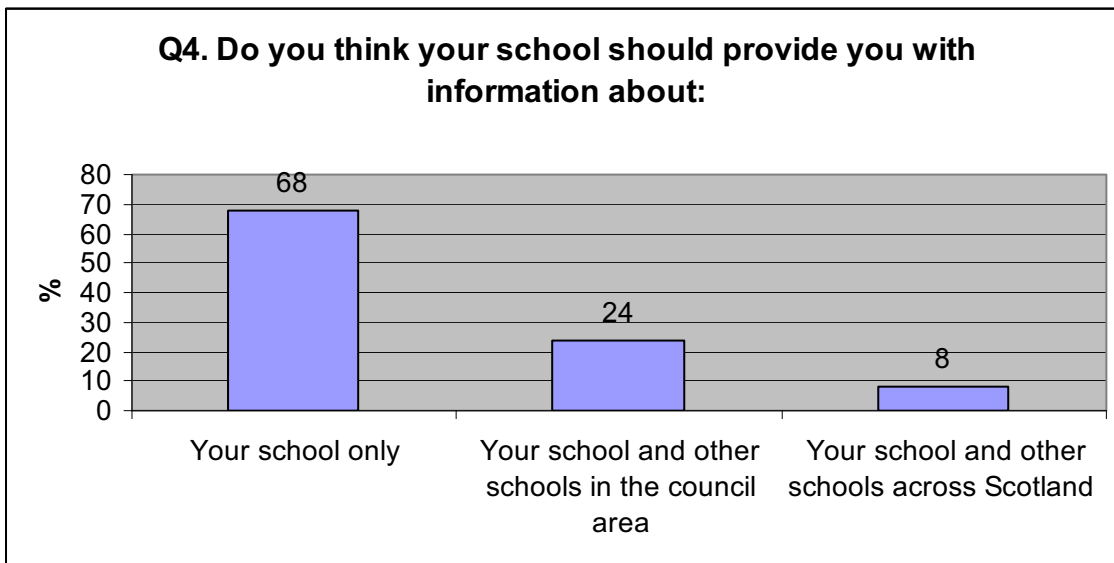
Table 6 – Other options suggested for receiving school information

Other Options Suggested	No.
	<i>Base 37</i>
Combination of methods (including printed, online & information evenings etc)	25
Easy to read/literacy issues/English not first language	3
School website	3
Through GLOW	2
Online one stop shop	2
PDF copy emailed or on school website	1
Parent Council Newsletter	1

Question 4 – the level of information respondents want

2.17 Question 4 attempted to find out how interested respondents were in their school providing them with information about other schools, e.g. other schools within the council area and other schools across Scotland. Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) wanted information about their school only, just under a quarter (24%) wanted information about their school and other schools in the council area and only 8% wanted information about their school and schools across Scotland. Head teachers were more likely than parents/those responding on behalf of a Parent Council to favour the school providing information on their school only (83% compared to 68%).

Chart 2: Responses to Q4



Part 3 – Who Should Decide What Information You Get

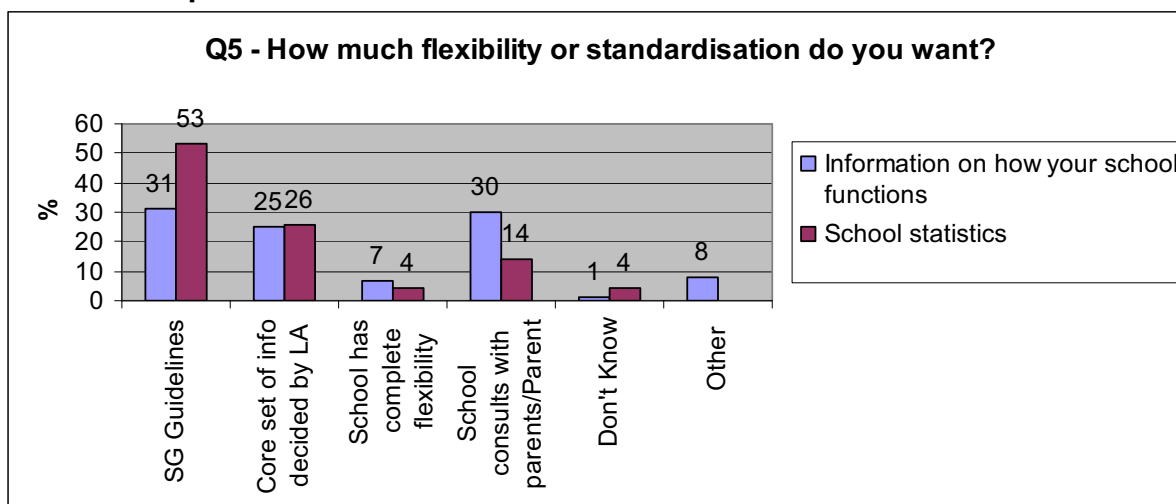
Part 3 – Key Points

- There is an appetite for some degree of standardisation of information, combined with the flexibility for schools to then add other information.
- There is seen to be a role for the SG in providing guidelines to schools on a core set of information. Over a half of respondents (53%) want the SG to provide guidelines in relation to school statistics, and just under a third (31%) for information on school policies.
- Approximately a quarter of respondents see a role for LA's to decide on a core set of information for both school policy information and school statistics (25% and 26% respectively)
- There is also support for schools consulting with parents/Parent Councils about what information to include (just under a third, 30%, want this in relation to school policy information)
- Not all respondents were convinced of the merit of including school statistics

Question 5 – Guidelines on standardisation

- 2.18 The third part of the consultation was designed to find out whether respondents wanted all schools to be required to provide the same set of information, (as is currently the case under the Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Regulations 1982) or if they wanted their Local Authority or school to have the flexibility to provide different information if they wished to. This question was broken down into two parts, the first asking about information on how the school functions (policies on attendance, uniform etc) and the second asking about school statistics (e.g. attendance rates, exam results etc).
- 2.19 It is clear that there is some appetite for a degree of standardisation in school information, either within the LA, or across the whole of Scotland, and that standardisation is seen as more desirable when talking about school statistics rather than policies on how a school functions. What is also clear, is that where respondents want the school to decide on information to include, they want the schools to do so in consultation with parents/Parent Councils rather than in isolation.

Chart 3: Responses to Q5a and Q5b



2.20 When asking about information on how the school functions (Q5a), there was a fairly even spread of responses on the amount of flexibility or standardisation that should be required. Just under a third (31%) wanted the Scottish Government to provide guidelines so that all schools provide the same set of core information, whilst a similar proportion (30%) wanted each school to decide, in consultation with parents/Parent Councils on all information to include and a quarter of respondents wanted the Local Authority to decide on a core set of information for all schools within that LA. Only 7% wanted the school to have complete flexibility on the information to include and 8% of respondents opted for "other".

2.21 Head teachers as a group, were just as likely as parents/carers/those responding on behalf of a parent council to favour SG guidelines (32% compared to 30%) for providing information about how their school functions. However head teachers most favoured option was for a core set of information decided on by the LA (35%, compared to 23% for parents/carers/those responding on behalf of a Parent Council). They were also notably more likely to favour each school having complete flexibility to decide on the information to include (12% compared to 6% for parents/cares/those responding on behalf of a parent council) and less likely to favour schools deciding on information in consultation with parents/Parent Councils (16% compared to 32% for parents/cares/those responding on behalf of a parent council).

Table 7: Q5a) Head teacher responses compared to parent/carer/Parent Council responses

Q5a) Thinking firstly about information on how your school functions (policies on attendance, uniform code, homework procedures etc), how much flexibility or standardisation do you want?	Head Teacher	Parent/Carer/ Those responding on behalf of a Parent Council (combined)
		%
	<i>base 69</i>	<i>base 555</i>
Guidelines should be provided by the Scottish Government so all schools provide the same core set of information	32	30
A core set of information decided on by the Local Authority, which is standard to all schools within the Local Authority	35	23
Each school to have complete flexibility to decide on all information to include	12	6
Each school to decide, in consultation with parents/Parent Councils, on all information to include	16	32
Don't Know	-	1
Other, please specify	6	8

2.22 The two predominant themes coming out of the "other" suggestions reflected a wish for some core information (either from the SG or LA) with the flexibility for schools to include further information that they felt was relevant and a desire for a core set of information and then further information which would be decided on in consultation with parents/Parent councils.

Table 8 – Other suggestions received for how much flexibility or standardisation respondents want in relation to information about how their school functions

Other Options suggested	No.
	<i>Base 51</i>
A core set of info plus flexibility for school to decide on other information	23
<i>Includes: A core set of info/(not specified by who) plus flexibility for schools to decide on other information</i>	8
<i>Includes: A core set of info provided by the SG/national level plus flexibility for schools to decide on other information</i>	12
<i>Includes: A core set of info provided by LA plus flexibility for schools to decide on other information</i>	3
A core set of info plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/Parent Councils	21
<i>Includes: A core set of info/guidelines on core info (not specified by who) plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils</i>	5
<i>Includes: A core set of info provided by SG plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils</i>	10
<i>Includes: A core set of info provided by LA plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils</i>	6
A core set of info/guidelines on core info and further info to be included at discretion of LA	1
Suggestions should be provided by SG on information to include, but LAs and schools to have freedom in how to interpret them.	2
Core set of info should be compulsory, not "guidelines"	1
LA core set of information to be decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils	1
Guidelines from LEA	1
Schools should aim for complete sharing of information	1

2.23 When asked about school statistics (Q5b) there was felt to be a greater need for standardisation, with just over half (53%) wanting guidelines from the Scottish Government, and just over a quarter (26%) wanting the Local Authority to decide on a core set of information. 14% wanted the school to decide in consultation with parents/Parent Councils and only 4% wanted the school to have complete flexibility to decide on the information to include. Four percent of people selected "other".

2.24 In relation to school statistics, once again, a similar proportion of head teachers and parent/carers/those responding on behalf of a Parent Council favoured SG guidelines (51% compared to 53%) and this was the most popular response for both of these groups. As with information on school policies, head teachers were more likely than parents/carers/those responding on behalf of Parent Councils to favour a core set of information decided on by the LA (32% compared to 25%), were more likely to favour the school having complete flexibility (7% compared to 3% for parents/carers/those responding on behalf of Parent Councils) and less likely to favour schools deciding on information in consultation with parents/Parent Councils (6% compared to 15% for parents/carers/those responding on behalf of Parent Councils).

Table 9: Q5b) Head teacher responses compared to parent/carer/Parent Council responses

Q5 b) Thinking now about school statistics (e.g. attendance rates, exams results etc) how much flexibility or standardisation do you want?	Head Teacher	Parent/Carer/ Those responding on behalf of a Parent Council (combined)
		%
	<i>base 69</i>	<i>base 554</i>
Guidelines should be provided by the Scottish Government so all schools provide the same core set of information	51	53
A core set of information decided on by the Local Authority, which is standard to all schools within the Local Authority	32	25
Each school to have complete flexibility to decide on all information to include	7	3
Each school to decide, in consultation with parents/Parent Councils, on all information to include	6	15
Don't Know	-	1
Other, please specify	2	3

2.25 A theme, which emerged from the "other" responses was that not all respondents wanted such statistical information to be included in the school handbook.

"Embracing CfE requires more than statistical returns. Schools should be reporting on awards, achievements, participation in school exchanges."

Other - Voluntary Organisation

"I think statistics are not very worthy - do not really reflect a sense of a school."

Parent/carer

Table 10 - Other suggestions received for how much flexibility or standardisation respondents want in relation to school statistics

Other Options Suggested	No.
	<i>base 24</i>
Don't include statistics/performance information	8
A core set of info plus flexibility for school to decide on other information	4
<i>Includes: A basic core set of info (not specified by who) plus flexibility for schools to decide on other information</i>	2
<i>Includes: A basic core set of info provided by the SG/national level plus flexibility for schools to decide on other information</i>	2
A core set of info plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/Parent Councils	6
<i>Includes: A core set of info (not specified by who) plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils</i>	2
<i>Includes: A core set of info provided by SG plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils</i>	3
<i>Includes: A core set of info provided by LA plus additional info decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils</i>	1
LA core set of information to be decided on in consultation with parents/parent councils	2
Guidelines from LEA	1
Standard info from LA but including data from all Scottish schools	1
Core set of info should be compulsory, not "guidelines"	1
Other	1

Part 4 – Final Comments

Part 4 – Key Points

Relating to Q1 – the current situation

- The role of the school handbook (in relation to other types of information schools provide) may require clarification.
- Calls were made to minimise the cost and time resources required for producing a school handbook, including utilising central resources to translate information.

Relating to Q2 – the type of information wanted

- There is tension between respondents wanting lots of detailed information, and respondents wanting just the key points to avoid information over-load. Signposting where further information can be found may be a way to balance these tensions.
- Information for parents needs to be relevant and useful.
- School information is felt to be about more than just statistics – it's about capturing the ethos and uniqueness of the school and providing the every-day information required. However there is interest in statistics and comparing schools with one another, and it was suggested that statistics could be provided in a separate place from the rest of the school information.
- There was a call for schools to be explicit and clear when including information that they are legally obliged to include.
- In relation to Additional Support Needs and Additional Support for Learning – respondents want schools to be clear in communicating information to parents and to be aware that parents themselves may require support.
- Anti-bullying policies should be laid out explicitly.

Relating to Q3 – how information received, formats, timings etc

- There was support for the majority of information to be provided online, as this was seen as being easier to up-date as required, being better for the environment and helping to reduce costs. Although there was an acknowledgement that hard copies of information are also still required.
- It was seen as important that information be regularly up-dated, and be accurate.
- It was seen as important that Information be "parent-friendly", clearly presented using Plain English and avoiding jargon. It should also take into account the needs of those with English as a second language, or who

require different formats such as Braille or British Sign Language.

- Information may be required in a variety of formats and mediums to best meet the needs of parents.
- Respondents want parents, Parent Councils and pupils to be involved in creating and designing information
- The timing of information to parents could be looked at to ensure it fits with key decisions such as subject choice
- Face-to-face communication between parents and the school is valued

Relating to Q4 – the level of information required

- Information about other schools is nice, but the priority is information about their own school.

Relating to Q5 – guidelines on standardisation

- A degree of standardisation was seen as desirable as it would allow for comparisons across schools and consistency, however it was also seen to be very important that schools were able to add their own individual information.
- There was a suggestion for 2 handbooks – a central one produced by the SG or LA, containing high level information, and a personalised one created by the school, this would ease the time and cost burden for individual schools.

2.26 The last question in the consultation was a "catch-all" question that allowed respondents to provide further comments on any of the questions asked or to include any other comments that they felt were relevant . 224 respondents provided information in response to part 4. Responses were analysed under the following broad themes laid out in table 11 below, which provides the structure for the rest of this section.

Table 11 Responses by broad question-related theme for section 4

Theme	No. of comments
	<i>Base 224</i>
Question 1 – the current situation	25
Question 2 – type of information wanted	33
Question 3 – how receive info/format/timings etc	140
Question 4 – the level of information respondents want	4
Question 5 – guidelines on standardisation	51
Comments on the consultation	13
Miscellaneous (comments about education, but not specifically relating to information for parents)	12

2.27 Where respondents indicated in section 4, information that they wanted their school to provide, this was included in the analysis of Q2a, which allowed respondents to include options for "other" information that they wanted their school to provide. Where more detailed responses were given on certain topics such as information relating to Additional Support Needs (ASN) or bullying, these were analysed as part of section 4, as well as being included in the count for question 2 a. A table breaking the main themes down into more detailed sub-themes can be found in Annex A4.

Comments relating to Question 1 – the current situation

2.28 Comments relating to question 1, the current situation included comments on the role of the handbook, views on the information currently received (both positive and negative), comments on who should get a school handbook, the practical implications for schools of producing handbooks and comments on utilising national resources to ease the burden on schools.

Table 12 – More detailed themes for Q1

Question 1 – The current situation	32
Practical implications/cost of producing handbooks	7
The role of the handbook	7
View of current info received (Happy with it)	5
View of current info received (not particularly happy with it)	4
Utilising national resources	3
Avoid repetition across different sources of info	2
Who should get a handbook	2
<i>All parents should get a handbook, not just incoming parents</i>	1
<i>Children should have a school handbook too</i>	1

The role of the handbook

2.29 A variety of different respondent types, parents, head teachers, Parent Councils and other, chose to comment on the role of a school handbook. It was commented that there is a distinction between the school handbook, and other types of information that parents require, and that it isn't necessary for all information parents require to be included in the handbook. As such the role of the handbook might need to be clarified. The tension between producing a handbook and producing up-to-date information was also noted. Handbooks were seen as important and it was felt that they should capture the ethos of the school.

"The purposes of the handbook should be clarified. Should there be greater emphasis on the provision of accurate information on an-ongoing basis rather than the production of a single document at one point in time?"

Other – On behalf of a Education Professional Association

"Producing a handbook is an expensive exercise but it is important. Done well it achieves a great deal more than dry statistics ever could. Schools are important community institutions. The handbook makes a

statement. It isn't just parents who should take pride in their local school's achievements."

Parent/carer

"The hand book should echo the ethos of the whole school community in its style and contents."

Head Teacher

- 2.30 Views gathered from the head teacher and Parental Involvement Officer interviews suggested that the purpose of the school handbook was seen to be to inform parents about what the school has to offer and to help parents help their child and take active role in child's education and in school life.

View of Current Information

- 2.31 Some parents/carers and Parent Councils commented on the information that their school currently provided, some said that they were happy with the information they received, although a couple mentioned concerns about how much it might cost the school to provide this information. Others commented that they weren't happy with the information they received, in one case it was felt that the school did not give enough information about the subjects being taught and in another case, a parent/carer had difficulty finding all the information required when moving to a new school.

"Currently very happy with the info from xxx."

Parent/carer

"I feel there is a sense that we 'should' know things that we don't know - like when parent's night is and when the reports come out - and that new parents are not given a proper introduction to the school."

Parent/carer

Who should get a handbook

- 2.32 A couple of comments mentioned who should receive a handbook – it was mentioned that pupils should get their own handbook aimed at them, and that all parents should get a handbook annually, not just new parents.

Practical implications/cost of producing a handbook and utilising national resources

- 2.33 Parents/carers, Parent Councils, head teachers and other commented on the practical and cost implications to schools of producing handbooks. It was felt that the effort required to produce school handbooks should be kept to a minimum as should the associated costs. It was felt that centrally produced templates or the sharing of best practice might help to minimise time and effort, whilst focussing on online distribution could help to reduce costs. Linked to cost implications were suggestions to minimise content by reducing the duplication of content across sources. It was felt that there could be a role for national resources to be utilised to translate information into community languages and BSL, which was seen as desirable but costly at an individual

school level. It was also suggested that support and guidance for maintaining up-to-date school websites could be provided by the Scottish Government.

"Please do not create a labour-intensive exercise for schools when we are already overloaded with administrative tasks."

Other – On behalf of an Education Professional Organisation

"As a head teacher, I am concerned at the cost of printing School Handbooks, especially when we have already put it on our school website. Also, it needs to be finalised by November each session, for the following session, so it is often out of date by the time some parents may read it. If there is a way of providing all the information online, in an easy-to access manner, and which can be updated as required, I would be very interested. However, a 'printed version' would need to be available, so that we could give this to parents who don't have access to the internet, and request a paper copy."

Head Teacher

"Action should be taken to minimise costs, particularly by: making on-line access the preferred medium, providing paper copies on request only, reducing content by directing readers to other relevant web-based sources at both national and authority levels."

Other – On behalf of an Education Professional Association

"Information for parents should be available in several different languages, but this is often beyond the remit of individual schools. If the Scottish Government were to be responsible for the production of a schools' information service, translation into a variety of languages would be far more straightforward."

Head Teacher

"We recommend a standardised national approach as this gives parents comparable data on schools. Parents should feel welcomed and all schools should ensure that they are given a leaflet telling them how to access school handbook information which should also be available in community languages and BSL. If a standardised approach is used this should be possible in terms of national resources for translation etc. instead of individual schools having to pay for this."

Other – School-Age Childcare National Organisation

Question 2 – Type of information wanted

- 2.34 As mentioned above, where respondents included a "wish list" of information they wanted their school to provide, their responses were included in the analysis of question 2 a. The information analysed here relates to comments on the type of information more generally or to more specific detailed responses given on specific topics such as information relating to additional support needs.

Table 13 – More detailed themes for Q2

Question 2 - type of information wanted	33
<i>General comments on information</i>	
Less stats /shouldn't just be about statistics	5
Relevant/useful info	4
Info needs to be comprehensive - more detail not less	4
Type of info required might be different for secondary schools and primary schools	2
Provide statistical / performance information separately	2
Say which policies are statutory (SG), which come from the LA and what comes from the school	2
Handbooks of faith-based schools should reflect the faith based education they give	1
What shouldn't be included in handbook	1
Info that focuses on academic progress	1
Info specific to own child's performance	1
School info should demonstrate good practice	1
Include legally required information clearly	1
<i>More detailed responses on specific topics</i>	
Additional support for learning /ASN(more detailed response)	5
Bullying (more detailed responses)	3
Out of school care (more detailed response)	1

General comments on information

- 2.35 It was commented that the type of information required might differ according to the type of school, for example attendance and attainment were seen as more relevant at secondary school than primary school, whilst it was mentioned that Catholic schools' handbooks should reflect the faith-based education that they provide.

"As our school is a primary school, I think the focus of information should be on the social and emotional education of youngsters (school values) and that academic focus can come later."

Parent/Carer

- 2.36 It was highlighted that it was important for the information provided to be relevant and useful to parents. Some parents/carers stated that information had to be comprehensive and that they would like more information from their schools, and more detail was requested on curriculum, policies and information about changes before they happened rather than after. There was also a comment about what shouldn't be included in the handbook, which suggested that the school handbook should be about the school and not wider policy issues.

"The most obvious question not asked is 'What should not be contained in the handbook?' I believe there is no point in repeating what the local authority say or indeed trying to explain CfE. The school handbook should only contain information relevant to the school not local authority policy."

Parent/carers

- 2.37 Statistics were mentioned, and it was commented that the school handbook should be about more than just statistics, and that less emphasis should be

placed on statistics. It was suggested that perhaps statistical information could be provided separately to those parents who wanted it. However another respondent flagged up the importance of information that focuses on educational attainment and exam success, which suggests that a balance is required between statistical and attainment information and other information about ethos and values etc. There was also a call for more regular information that is specific to your own child.

"We would prefer to see a reduction in the volume of statistics gathered, believing that most parents value the handbook more as an operational document to help them understand school policies and procedures."

Other – On behalf of a Education Professional Association

"Education and what a child gains from school is so much more than the statistics ever show."

Parent/carer

"Performance info, external reports e.g. HMIE don't necessarily need to be included in the handbook as long as hyperlinks or instructions on where to get the info is included"

On behalf of a Parent Council

- 2.38 Some parents said that they would like it made clearer which policies in the handbook were statutory and which came from the school. There was also a request for legally required information to be included in a clear and obvious manner, this came from a parent/carer who had struggled to find the relevant information about withdrawing children from religious assemblies.

"I'd like to have set out the distinction between what the which of the schools policies/actions come from the Scottish Government, the education authority, or the school itself."

Parent/carer

"With regards the right to withdraw from Religious Assemblies, although it is legally required that school inform parents of this I struggled to find it in the handbook given out with my first child (we didn't get a handbook when the 2nd child started school - nobody did). In the end I found it tucked away in a paragraph about what to do if a pupil required to be off school for a religious reason. Not relevant to many of the parents who may be interested in knowing about the right to withdraw from RO assemblies. A legal right to inform parents about something should be stated in clear terms and this should be a requirement of all school handbooks."

Parent/carer

Additional Support for Learning /Additional Support Needs

- 2.39 Parents and Other gave more detailed responses around Additional Support for Learning and Additional Support Needs (ASN). These responses indicated that it was important for staff to know about ASN and that it was very important for information on support to be communicated clearly to parents. Schools need to be aware that parents themselves may require additional support whilst trying to get support for their child, and therefore further sources of help and advice should be clearly signposted, particularly "Enquire" the national additional support for learning helpline.

"Feedback about the support available for disabled pupils in mainstream schools has highlighted issues that school handbooks could help address. "Support" is often ill-defined – the school handbook should define what support is and how it is delivered. Is the support available 1:1 for particular pupils, or also for the wider class? Is the support 'floating support' which covers more than one class? If so, this often presents continuity issues, particularly relevant when working with autistic pupils."

Other – voluntary organisation

"In line with the ASL legislation we would ask that the updated version of the Parents School Handbook is published with information not only around ASL for the child but that some thought be given to the parents who may need to approach the school for assessment on their child or worries around their child's learning. X would like you to recognise that this is a particularly difficult, emotional and often challenging time for a parent and that the parents themselves may require support. Acknowledging that teachers and staff are very busy within a school it may be useful for the handbook to have a section on support groups, advocacy or other services who may be able to provide the parent with the support they require."

Other - helping to support parents/carers of disabled children and young people

"Our experience ... indicates that many parents need help and advice in respect to their child's learning and school experiences that is not often perceived by them as being readily available and clear. This concern is especially true among parents of children having additional support for learning needs."

Other – Voluntary organisation

"Cannot express enough how important it is for all professionals in the education system to know the identification of additional support needs procedure and to voice any concerns they have about an individual, no matter how small!"

Parent/carer

Bullying

- 2.40 Other and parents provided more detailed comments around bullying. The responses highlighted the importance of a child being safe at school. There was a call for schools to explicitly include information on their anti-bullying policy, how bullying will be responded to, and what role parents can play in responding to bullying, and for this information to be included in a consistent manner across Scotland. A National Youth Group recommended that homophobic bullying should be mentioned specifically.

"Specifically, X would encourage all schools in Scotland to reference their anti-bullying policy within handbooks, set in the context of both the 'National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People' and guidance provided by their local authority. Parents should have information on how to access policies, what their role in implementation is, and how bullying behaviour will be responded to within the school community. Information on the wealth of resources and training provided by respectme for parents, teachers or any adult with a role to play in the lives of children and young people should be promoted in the handbook to aid consistency and understanding. This approach would help maximise the impact of the Government's investment in anti-bullying work, and support achievement of the best outcomes for children and young people."

Other – Anti-bullying Service

"In general parents want to know their child will be safe in school and that if any issue arises it will be dealt with sensitively and effectively. We therefore recommend that school handbooks have information that refers to how incidents of bullying will be dealt with and makes references to their anti-bullying policy. It is also important to note that homophobic bullying is often a silent form of prejudice-based bullying and many young people and their parents find it difficult to come forward to seek support and advice. It is important that the school sends a strong message that pupils and parents will be supported and treated equally regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We therefore recommend that the handbook mentions homophobic bullying specifically and includes a statement on Equality and Inclusion which refers to all protected equality strands (as outlined by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission) and specifically includes Sexual Orientation, Gender and Transgender Identity."

Other – National Youth Project

"Bullying is a national problem and I don't believe that head teachers and school cultures are prepared to address the issues that arise every day. What are the children taught about bullying, relationships, personal respect? What action is taken when instances of bullying occur? What happens for the child who is bullied or for the child who is bullying? What is the definition of bullying? What is the guidance on how parents and schools can deal with it together? What assurances do parents have that their child is physically, emotionally and mentally 'safe' when we hand over our children? and what rights do we have to

challenge the schools on how they deal with it? These things are not explicit in school handbooks or on any websites - at school or local authority level and should be."

Parent/carer

Out of school care

- 2.41 Seven respondents in Q2a other and section 4 asked for schools to provide information on out of school care, such as before or after school club. A manager of an out of school care service, gave a more detailed response on this subject saying that currently it is up to the head teacher's to decide whether or not to provide information on afterschool care, and feels that all parents should be provided with this information before their children start school, as not all parents are aware of what services are available.

"Currently it is up to the head teacher if he/she wishes to advertise or provide information on out of school care services which operate within their own school or which caters to their school. Many families are unaware of the childcare options available to them when their child starts primary school. Some head teachers will only give out information when it is specifically requested from a parent. Others are happy to notify parents through the school newsletter. Many parents find out by chance that an out of school care service exists in their area. As manager of a community "not for profit" out of school care service, I believe that all parents should be provided with this information before their child starts school."

Other – manager of out of school care service

Comments relating to Question 3 how information is received, format, timing etc

- 2.42 Comments relating to Q3 around how information is received, format, timing etc received the most comments (136). The top three themes identified were: that information should mainly be available online, information should be regularly updated and accurate, and information should be parent-friendly and easy to understand.

Table 14 – More detailed themes for Q3

Question 3 -how receive info - format/timings etc	136
Info should be mainly online	32
Regularly updated and accurate info	30
Parent -friendly information simple to understand, short /info on how to access info	25
Encouraging parental/parent council involvement /communication	11
Suggestions for format of info	10
Access - language (including Gaelic) /BSL issues	8
Hard copies required	5
Review timing of info to parents	5
Face to face communication /easy access to school if have a concern	3
Give parents a choice of formats	2
More engaging style for handbook	2
Pupils should be involved in providing info	2
Show sensitivity to parents' circumstances	1

Format of information - Information should mainly be made available online

- 2.43 Using online information as the preferred method was a popular suggestion (32 comments), from a range of respondent-types including parents/carers Parent Councils, head teachers, teachers and LA employees. Benefits of making information primarily web-based were seen to include, helping schools to keep costs down and being more environmentally-friendly than printing information, the ability for information to be up-dated regularly and parents and prospective parents would be able to view information when convenient to them, including before their child was enrolled in the school. A number of respondents who favoured information being made available online also noted that hard copies would still need to be available on request for those without internet access. Similar themes emerged from the head teacher interviews.

"I think we need to question the necessity of printing anything in hard copy - for sustainability and cost reasons. If information is posted on the school's website, it can be updated quickly and easily and schools can offer to print this information for parents if they request it. Most parents prefer being told information face to face anyway and we are wasting money printing a document they may not read, may only ever need a small portion of in any case and which may be out of date almost as soon as it is printed - especially due to the present the inclusion of staff names and roles which may change frequently."

LA employee

"School Handbooks are a great thing but are now out of date, both in style and more importantly the content. With the far reaching changes caused by budget cuts the information supplied in the handbook will be out of date by the time it reaches the intended audience. With an online version, the information will be up to date and the costs of production / distribution can be GIVEN BACK to the individual schools to enhance their communication budget."

On behalf of a Parent Council

If the school handbook was online it could then be live and therefore could be constantly updated as required. It would also be kinder to the environment.

Parent/carer

"School handbook given to me, before son started p1, he is now in p6, how do I know the information is still the same? Online version would be good, as more up to date, and accessible."

Parent/carer

Format of information - Hard copies of information are required

- 2.44 However some parents/carers and Parent Councils stressed that hard copies of school handbooks were still required, citing factors such as: not all areas have internet access, not all people are comfortable using computers or the internet, the fact that technology can malfunction, and that even where information is available online it is good for parents to have a hard-copy handbook where they can find the key information.

"At this stage I feel it is still important for parents to have a hardcopy handbook - even if it just contains basic information and then directs users to online links to more in depth information - not everyone is yet comfortable using modern technology to its fullest extent and if you want some piece of information quickly, the handbook is usually the first place you look. Also computers fail electronically, and books don't!!!"

Parent/carer

Format of information – other suggestions for format

- 2.45 Respondents, including parents/carers, Parent Councils and teachers provided suggestions for the format used to provide information to parents. These included: welcome packs for new parents, newsletters, bulletins, booklets highlighting what information is on the website and a suggestion that information be provided loose-leaf in a folder, rather than as a booklet. It was also suggested here (as in question 3) that parents should be offered a choice of formats, so that they can access information in the way that best suits them. It was also noted that the style used for handbooks should be made more engaging.

"Parents should be regularly informed of school's progress and achievements through school's website and if possible through bulletins, newsletters etc sent electronically to parents' email addresses"

Teacher

"I think a booklet summarising what is available on the school website should be handed out to P7 Parents with a reminder letter on day one of new academic year for every pupil that all info on website."

On behalf of a Parent Council

"I think it is important that schools provide a welcome pack to all new children/parents as well as making policies etc available to all parents in whatever form. Also, that this information is made available to new parents as early as possible preferably when they register their child for a place at the school."

Parent/carer

"X Primary School provides a very detailed newsletter with school and pupil achievements, staff training, events past and to come, school improvement plan progress as well as changes in staffing"

Parent/carer

"As much information as possible to be made available at all times and kept updated. thought to making it available in a variety of ways which might appeal best to the variety of parents. some might appreciate online, some might appreciate printed. Choice of these ideally?"

Parent/carer

Face-to-face communication

- 2.46 Parents highlighted that one of the most important things was that the school was approachable if they had a concern about their child, and that they were able to have face-to-face communication with relevant staff at the school if required.

"The most important part should be that as parents we can phone or speak face to face with someone about anything that is worrying parents or a child, then be helped to resolve any problem that may arise with good guide-lines in place."

Parent/carer

Information needs to be regularly updated and review timing of information to parents

- 2.47 The importance of information being regularly updated, so that it is up-to-date and accurate was highlighted by parents/carers, Parent Councils, head teachers (both in the written consultation and in interviews), teachers and LA employees. As noted above, one of the key advantages of information being made available online is that this should make it easier to update as required. Regular newsletters were also suggested as a method of providing parents with ongoing information, which was seen as important, in addition to the annual snapshot of information provided by a school handbook.

"I received my School Handbook when my son started school and haven't received any updates - there doesn't appear to be a system to distribute any revised policies to parents."

Parent/carer

"Children are not very forthcoming about what they have done at school. My son is in P2 but I am told this situation worsens as they get older. Our school has recently started to provide class newsletters (we

have had 1 so far and I think they are planned for each term). This has been a revelation! Very useful for homework too. This kind of thing could not be in a "one off" handbook but is hugely helpful to parents. Can there be "ongoing information provision" requirements for schools?

Parent/carer

- 2.48 Following on from calls for information to be up-dated regularly, parents/carers and Parent Councils also felt that the timing of information to parents should be looked at. It was commented that information tends to be given to parents at the start of Primary one or Secondary one and does not seem to be updated after that, whereas parents would appreciate a more regular (e.g. annual) supply of information. It was also felt that information should be given to parents as soon as possible after their child was enrolled at a school. There was a comment that the timing of information specific to individual children should be provided in adequate time for informing decisions such as subject choices, and should be done at a point in the school year when the teacher has had a chance to get to know the child.

"Handbooks tend to be handed out at P1 only in primaries. It would be beneficial to receive essential info at the beginning of school then further data could be handed out in later stages when pertinent to the child stage at school. Too much info in one go!"

Parent/carer

"The timing of information to parents needs to be looked at. What is the point of a report on your child progress only 3months into their first year when their teachers do not really know them or a report in March of their 2nd year just before they pick their 3rd year subject - by then it is too late to pick up on problem areas. In short time on information needs to be looked at."

Parent/carer

Parent-friendly information

- 2.49 Parents/carers, Parent Councils, head teachers and other all stressed the need for information to be parent-friendly and easy to understand. Plain English and avoiding jargon was called for. Some respondents suggested keeping the information provided short and to the point, as if parents are provided with too much information it can be overwhelming. Succinct information with links to where to find more details if required was suggested as a sensible way to address parents' rights and need to access a wide range of information without resulting in information overload. There was a suggestion that "everyday" information be presented in a separate place from statistical information, once again as a way of providing the required information, but avoiding creating a document which is too long to be accessible and manageable for parents. It was also suggested that parents be told how to access school handbook information, e.g. through a leaflet. If different information is supplied in different places, then this type of sign-posting to information becomes even more relevant.

"It would also be extremely nice if all info was set out in 'plain speaking' English and not so much 'jargon'."

Parent/carer

"I think the current school handbook is trying to do too much. As a parent I want easily accessible information about what affects my child on a daily basis - school uniform, how much lunch costs, what to do if my child is ill etc. I'm interested in inspection, curriculum, attendance, exam results etc, but these don't need to be in the same document as the 'everyday' information."

Parent/carer

"I feel that a lot of the information provided is dictated by the Local Authority and is in language which is inaccessible to parents. At the moment we have very little flexibility and the handbook is far too big. We need short statements giving basic information and a contact where more detailed information can be sought if required."

Head Teacher

"I'm afraid that much of the communication I have received, from educational professionals (mostly not in the school) has used heavy doses of professional edu-speak, and a language style which is significantly 'over-verbose' for the average parent... If the School Handbook is to contain new core and localised information on CfE (as an example), a significant amount of work should be done by education authorities to make its content and language easy for ALL parents/carers to understand and digest effectively."

On behalf of a Parent Council

"Essential info. about each school. Working parents do not have time to read non-essential info. Keep it short and snappy. Parents gather worthwhile information from other parents and from visiting schools. Too many external groups contributing, e.g. overall Local Authority statistics and guidelines - can make document too weighty and discourage parents from reading it. Keep it slim and relevant is the message from X."

On behalf of a Parent/Council

Access – Language issues (including Gaelic) and BSL

- 2.50 As well as the importance of using Plain English to make school information easy to understand, parents/carers head teachers and other also took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of school information being available in other community languages, Braille and British Sign Language (BSL) in order to make it as accessible as possible to as many parents and to meet equality requirements. The costs of such translations were noted by some respondents who felt that there may be a role for utilising central resources to do this (see quotes included at paragraph 2.33 on utilising national resources).

"On a practical level the handbook should be clearly laid-out, well designed, attractive and available in a variety of formats reflecting the language needs of the community the school is serving. Additional formats such as Braille, large print etc should also be available - this should be in place to meet the Disability Discrimination Act and Equal Opportunities."

Parent/carer

- 2.51 Gaelic was mentioned specifically by some respondents. There was a request for better information on Gaelic medium education to be provided. It was also felt that school handbooks should reflect that Gaelic and English are classed as equal curriculum areas under Curriculum for Excellence.

Encourage Parents/Parent Councils and Pupils to get involved with providing information and encourage parental communication

- 2.52 A number of respondents (including parents/carers, Parent Councils, teachers others, and head teachers who were interviewed) emphasised the importance of getting parents and Parent Councils involved in helping to design school handbooks. It was felt that this input would keep the handbook "fresh" and ensure that it contained the type of information that parents wanted. Some respondents also felt that pupils should be involved and could perhaps have sections that they designed. There was also a suggestion for how schools could help to facilitate better communication between parents.

"The current school handbook was written by both school staff and parents It contains information that is relevant to parents. It is important that the Handbook is seen as a document that will change and adapt to the evolution of the school - producing it on-line makes this possible while keeping costs low."

On behalf of a Parent Council

"The School handbook should be issued by the school within the framework of a national guideline, and should have significant consultation and input from the parent council. This would systemize parental involvement in the running of the school. I understand that not all schools have a strong parent council, but having a core which the school professionals complete and a flexible part which can be done jointly by school management + PC would allow for this variance in parental involvement."

On behalf of a Parent Council

"I think Parent Council input to the newsletter is important - the document gets very stale and a fresh set of eyes is a good idea!"

Parent/carer

"I would like the school to have a web site, with all the information I've have already ticked, that is updated daily that has an area for pupils to access and change, and an area for the parent council to access and change."

Parent/carer

"In our school I find there is not communication between parents. It would be fantastic with an intra net or mailing list where parents in each class could send information to each other. A list of the children's names for each class with addresses telephone numbers etc to encourage play dates and parent communication"

Parent/carer

Comments relating to Question 4 – the level of information that respondents want

2.53 Question 4 in the consultation asked respondents whether they wanted their school to provide them with information about their school only, their school and other schools across the council area or their school and other schools across Scotland. Only four additional comments were received relating to this.

2.54 These comments indicated that whilst information about other schools was seen as nice, it was not seen as essential, and that differences between schools made it hard to make meaningful comparisons. Although there was an indication that it was good to be able to compare schools with other schools within the area. A Education Professional Association felt that comparisons with other schools should be restricted to at a national level or within their own Local Authorities.

"Information regarding "other" schools is / might be useful but certainly not essential. School handbooks must be pertinent to the individual school itself and not generic across a local authority (or wider) area."

On behalf of a Parent Council

Comments relating to Question 5 – Guidelines on standardisation

2.55 Questions 5a and 5b in the consultation aimed to get an idea of the amount of standardisation or flexibility that respondents wanted in terms of the information their school provides them with. The "other" responses at question 5 indicated that where people favoured a set of guidelines they also wanted their school to have flexibility to add in additional information. This was also a predominant theme coming out the comments here – respondents felt that it was important for their own schools to have the freedom to add extra information. Some respondents favoured a National standardised approach to ensure consistency, whilst others wanted schools to produce information that was specific to them and not generic. One option mentioned was that there should be 2 handbooks, one produced by the Scottish Government or Local Authority, which would contain the high level information, and could be translated into different languages at that central level, and a second one produced by the school, which would contain the information specific to the school.

Table 15 – More detailed themes for Q5

Question 5 - guidelines on standardisation	51
SG guidelines plus school freedom to add more	26
National standardised approach/consistency	9
2 handbooks – LA or SG produce core info, school more personalised	5
Info specific to individual school rather than generic	4
Central guidelines require input from schools and parents to make them relevant	1
Could be issues ensuring all parents get a voice	1
If standard information is required ensure it is of a high standard	1
Information should demonstrate that minimum standards are being met	1
Regulations should allow as much flexibility as possible for schools	1
SG core info plus LA core info plus school flexibility	1
Standardisation at LA level	1

Scottish Government/LA Guidelines plus the school has freedom to add more

- 2.56 Respondents, including parents/carers, Parent Councils, teachers, head teachers and other, felt that a degree of standardisation was desirable as it allowed for comparisons across schools, however they also stressed the importance of schools being able to add in their own information so that they could demonstrate what was unique about their school. Some respondents spoke of national guidelines, laid down by the Scottish Government, whilst others focused on guidelines at a LA level, so that like for like could be compared within the local area. It was also mentioned that there should be three levels of information, that stipulated by the SG, that stipulated by the LA, and that chosen by the school.

"I'd like to see something pretty standard, so that if a child is moving school the handbooks can be compared like for like, but also for a school to have the opportunity to customise it (report any specific achievements for example, or ways that they differ from other schools)."

Parent/carer

"In general, we favour the provision of a core of information in school handbooks that is common to all schools -- and based upon guidance from the Scottish Government. However, we also support the inclusion of supplementary material in each school's handbook that is local, bespoke and guided by consultations with at least parent councils and pupil councils."

Other – Voluntary Organisation

"Keeping consistency in the reports so that when schools are compared in the area then it is like for like."

Parent/carer

*"I feel there should be 3 types of information
- core information as stipulated by Government
- core information as required by local authority
- flexibility for each school to add information particular to the individual school"*

Head Teacher

- 2.57 When talking about national guidelines, respondents mentioned that these required input from schools and parents to ensure they are relevant, and also that the regulations should allow schools flexibility.

"Although I opted for central guidance on both types of reporting, the type of guidance must be influenced by parents and schools and not just decided within government, The information/ guidance must be fit for purpose and that can only be decided by a combination of government people, local authorities, schools and parents."

Parent/carer

*"The regulations for handbooks should allow as much flexibility as possible for schools. For example, the topics to be covered should be indicated with the schools given scope to adopt their own descriptions. However, I acknowledge that this opens the danger of misinterpretation. Responsibilities should be allocated as follows:
-the context areas to be included : Government
-the scope of the content areas of leaving maximum flexibility for local interpretation: Authorities
-preparation of documents : customised to reflect local circumstances : Schools"*

Other – On behalf of an Education Professional Organisation

- 2.58 Some parents/carers, Parent Councils and others stressed the importance of a national standardised approach to school information, which would allow parents to make informed choices when comparing schools and ensure that all schools were providing a similar standard of information. A standardised approach was also seen as beneficial in terms of translating information into other languages and formats (see quote included at paragraph 2.33)

"It's currently very difficult to compare schools- especially when new to an area. The provision of consistent information in the same format would be very useful."

On behalf of a Parent Council

Information should be specific to the school rather than generic

- 2.59 Some respondents stressed the importance of the information schools provided, being specific to the school rather than generic, and as such saw a very limited role for legislation around school handbooks.

"X believes that national legislation in relation to School Handbooks should be limited to the stipulation that a Handbook should be produced in a format and with content which are agreed and defined jointly by the school's parent forum and Senior Management Team. School Handbooks must serve the requirements of the particular school community they serve and it is counter to the notion of parental involvement to use the blunt instrument of legislation to micro manage how this should be done on a local level."

Other

Two handbooks – centralised (SG or LA) and local (school) level

- 2.60 Head teachers, parents/carers and other suggested that it might be useful to have two handbooks, or two different sources of information – one which could be produced centrally (by the SG or the LA) which could contain core information and provide the background on national policies such as Curriculum for Excellence. This information could also be centrally translated into other languages and formats. Schools would then focus on producing information specific to themselves, minimising the time and cost input required by the individual school.

"I think as the Scottish Government has brought in CfE then they should be the one to report/set the basics and the local council and the school would then only report their own news. Thus setting them out from other schools but keeping the information in one place like fifedirect."

Parent/carer

"It would be helpful if SG could collate useful source information on an annual basis to support handbook preparation, or perhaps a handbook website or linked to the "Choosing a School" publication."

Other - On behalf of an Education Professional Association

Comments on the consultation

- 2.61 Some respondents took this opportunity to comment on the consultation. Some said that they liked the consultation and were glad to have had the opportunity to contribute to it, others said that they were unclear about the point of the consultation and others pointed out things that they did not like about the consultation and the way that it was asked.

Table 16 – themes for comments on the consultation

Comments on the consultation	13
Not impressed with consultation	6
Liked the consultation / glad to contribute	4
What's the point of the consultation?	3

Miscellaneous (comments about education but not specifically related to information for parents)

2.62 Some respondents took the opportunity to make comments about education in Scotland more generally, but which were not specifically related to information for parents. These comments have been themed and presented in the table below, but it is not appropriate to analyse them further here.

Table 17 – Themes for "Miscellaneous" Comments

MISCELANIOUS (comments about education but not specifically related to information for parents)	12
Teacher performance /training/staff policy	4
Concerns about education system	2
Role of parent councils	2
Consult with parents more about changes in education	1
Role of inspection	1
SG should develop a guide to volunteering for schools	1

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Currently parents/carers who receive information from schools say that they find it useful. Respondents value the information that they receive from schools and there is a feeling that school handbooks are important and worthwhile. Respondents have a variety of needs, when it comes to the information they require from schools and these varying needs have to be taken into account to produce information that will be as accessible and as useful to as many people as possible whilst bearing in mind the practical and cost implications for schools around producing such information. Calls were made to minimise the time and cost input for schools, for example through using central resources to translate information into other languages and formats. Another suggestion for easing the burden on individual schools was for there to be two sets of information or two "handbooks" available, a centrally produced one containing high level details, policies and statistics which either the SG or LA would have responsibility for and a handbook specific to the school, which the school would create and disseminate.
- 3.2 Information that schools provide needs to be relevant and useful to parents and needs to be up-to-date and accurate. There is a tension between respondents who want more information from their schools and those who want "short and snappy" information which tells them the key things that they need to know. One way to potentially balance these tensions is for schools to signpost where further information can be found. This allows parents to access the information they need, without creating a document that is so long people will be put off reading it.
- 3.3 School policies, school contact details, the curriculum and how to communicate with the school if you had a worry about your child or the school, came out as the top priorities for information respondents wanted from schools, when asked to choose their top ten priorities from a list. Respondents were also asked for their own suggestion of information they would like to receive, and the most common other suggestions included school calendar and timetable information and details about the Parent Council and how parents could get involved. A wide range of information was suggested and information on exams, qualifications and assessment, links with Curriculum for Excellence and how it will be implemented, and information about staff, including absences and turnover were also commonly mentioned.
- 3.4 The least priority was given to school attendance rates and school budgets. There was some interest in statistics, and being able to compare schools with other schools in the area in order to make informed choices, although not all respondents were convinced that it was appropriate to include statistics in school handbooks. It was suggested that statistics could be provided in a separate place from the rest of the school information. There was a strong feeling that school information is about more than just statistics – it's about capturing the ethos and uniqueness of the school and providing the every-day information required.

- 3.5 There was a call for schools to be clear and explicit in conveying information which they are legally required to provide to parents. In particular, information about support for learning, additional support needs and anti-bullying policies should be laid out clearly and consistently.
- 3.6 There is a feeling that information from schools should be provided in a variety of formats to best meet the needs of as many people as possible, regardless of internet access, literacy level or English not being their first language.
- 3.7 There was support for the majority of information to be provided online, as this was seen as being easier to up-date as required, being better for the environment and helping to reduce costs. However there was an acknowledgement that hard copies of information are also still required.
- 3.8 Information needs to be "parent-friendly", clearly presented using Plain English and avoiding jargon, and be regularly up-dated and accurate in order to best meet the needs of parents. There was a suggestion that the timing of information for parents should be looked at and there were requests for on-going information to be provided by the school, for example through regular newsletters.
- 3.9 There was an appetite for parents, Parent Councils and pupils to get be consulted about the information that schools provide and for them to be involved in the process of producing this information. It was felt that this would help to keep the information "fresh" and ensure that it was the type of information that parents and pupils were interested in.
- 3.10 Face-to-face communication with the school and the school being seen as open and accessible so that parents could get in contact if they had a concern, was valued in addition to the more formal, standard information schools produce.
- 3.11 Respondents gave priority to getting information about their own school, although there was some interest in comparisons with schools within their Local Authority area.
- 3.12 There was a desire for some level of standardisation of information (be it at Scottish Government or LA level), which was more pronounced for statistical information than for information relating to school policies. It was felt that a level of standardisation should ensure information was consistent and would allow schools to be compared on a like for like basis. It was seen as very important that schools have flexibility to add their own information and reflect their own unique qualities in the information they provide, and there was support for parents and Parent Councils to be consulted about the information provided.
- 3.13 In summary respondents value the information they get from schools and find it useful. Respondents want a wide range of information presented in an accessible easy-to-read format which uses plain English, and is up-to-date. School information is about more than just**

statistics and should reflect the ethos of the school. Online, is the preferred format for information, but other formats are required too, to meet a range of needs. Respondents are most interested in information about their own school, although there is an interest in comparisons with other schools in the Local Authority. A degree of standardisation is seen as desirable in school information, particularly in relation to statistics, but within this, schools should have the flexibility to include other information that they want and respondents want parents and Parent Councils to be involved in this process.

4 ANNEXES

Annex A1 – Responses and Ranking of Q2(b) by Respondent Type

Table A1 Q2b, responses and ranking by respondent type

Q2 b) Please indicate which 10 things you feel are top priorities								
Alternatives	ALL respondents		Parent/ Carer		On behalf of a Parent Council		Head teacher	
	Base 674		Base471		Base 82		Base 69	
	%	Ranking	%	Ranking	%	Ranking	%	Ranking
School contact details	80	2	78	3	84	1	97	1
Names and roles of staff	66	7	68	7	61	9	70	6
School values	63	8	57	8	76	4 -	93	2-
Policies on issues like anti-bullying, discipline, equal opportunities, school uniform, homework, transport, school meals,	83	1	87	1	83	2	61	9
Ways you can communicate with the school if you have a worry about your child or school	77	4	75	4	78	3	93	2-
The curriculum – subjects your child will be doing and skills they'll be learning	78	3	80	2	76	4-	78	4
Assessment approaches – how the school assesses your child's progress and achievements	68	5	75	5	62	8	49	10
Reporting – how you will receive reports on your child's progress	67	6	69	6	66	6	71	5
Activities – after school activities like clubs and groups	41	13	42	12	35	13-	39	13
Support for pupils – how to access additional support for learning, how the guidance system works	54	9	52	9	56	11	64	8
Opportunities for parental involvement	47	11	41	13	57	10	65	7
School performance – standards of achievement, learning and teaching	50	10	52	10	63	7	28	15
School attendance rates	7	20	6	19	7	20	7	18
School budget	11	18	12	18	11	18	6	19-
Feedback from any surveys of parents or learners during the year	16	17	16	17	16	17	9	17
School inspection reports	42	12	46	11	48	12	16	16
School achievements e.g. Eco award, Health accreditation	24	16	21	16	27	16	41	11-

How pupil achievements are recognised, celebrated e.g. weekly news, certificates at assembly, work displayed on monitors	39	14	40	14	34	15	35	14
How you can complain if you need to	35	15	34	15	35	13-	41	11-
My own idea, please specify	8	19	6	20	9	19	6	19-

Annex A2 – Full List Of Other Responses For Q2(A)

Table A2: All other responses to Q2a)

Q2a) What information do you think your own school should provide you with?	
Other suggestion	No.
	<i>Base 170</i>
School calendar/timetable	31
Information about parent council/how parents can get involved with the school	30
Include essential information and provide links to additional info	17
Exam/ qualification/ assessment info	15
School performance and statistics (including comparison to other schools/national average)	15
Links with CfE/how CfE will be implemented	12
School policies on issues such as homework, uniform, transport, school meals , truancy, mobile phones etc	12
Staff absence rates/turnover/vacancies and staff qualifications and achievements	12
Basic admin requirements e.g. how to report a child's absence, opening times. Lost property, etc	10
Information on Additional Support Needs (ASN)	9
School development/improvement plan, progress	9
Communication channels -how school will normally communicate with parents /how frequently	8
Links with other schools, educational institutions, businesses and with wider community	8
Child protection policies/safety/security	7
Extra Curricular/ Out of school activities / how pupils' achievements outwith school are recognised	7
Health policies	7
Legislation/SG/LA policies relevant to education	7
Provision of before/after school care/holiday care	7
School budget	7
Curriculum/Subjects	6
Music tuition /sports	6
School history/traditions, vision, values and ethos	6
Volunteering/fundraising	6
Detailed information on bullying	5
Details of school management team/governance arrangements	5
Links with church/religious affiliation/policies on religious studies (including policy on withdrawing from)	5
Severe weather arrangements/school closure/emergency contact procedures	5
Skills/level children should be aiming for in each year	5
Support available for parents/families (including for specific groups e.g. travellers, those new to the country)	5
Information about school trips	4
Information on classes e.g. sizes, whether composite/staff pupil ratio	4
Next steps if your complaint isn't resolved	4
Playground Policy /Play policy/outdoor learning	4
What Parents can do to help their children learn outside of school	4
Costs, e.g. school dinners, trips etc	3
Exclusions	3
Information about pupil council/how pupils can make their views heard	3
Information about services other partners provide in school, e.g.. Career IAG and national training programmes.	3

Information for new pupils on what to expect	3
Regular feedback on how child is performing	3
Transitions between key stages (e.g. nursery to primary, primary to secondary) & info on schools child will feed into	3
Behaviour management	2
Equality and inclusion	2
Information from pupils - about their views of the school	2
Infrastructure - information about school building and grounds	2
More information on pupil choices at key stages	2
Photos of key staff	2
Discipline policies	1
Information about familiarising very young children with school/nursery	1
Information about streaming	1
Information on any buddying or peer support	1
Information supplied by parents	1
Local economic information	1
Map of school	1
Names and roles of all support staff	1
Provision of foreign language teaching	1
Pupil turnover	1
Results of pupil surveys	1
Staff email addresses	1
Other	5

Annex A3 – Full List Of Other Responses For Q2(B)

Table A3: All other responses to Q2b)

2 b) Thinking again about the information you would like your own school to provide you with – please indicate which <u>10</u> things you feel are <u>your top priorities</u>.	
Other suggestion	No.
	<i>Base 53</i>
Provision of before/after school care/holiday care	5
School calendar/timetable	5
Staff absence rates/turnover/vacancies and staff qualifications and achievements	5
Communication channels -how school will normally communicate with parents /how frequently	3
Information about parent council/how parents can get involved with the school	3
New - suggestions for size/style - e.g. including photos	3
School performance and statistics (including comparison to other schools/national average)	3
Equality and inclusion, especially in relation to ASN	2
Exam/ qualification/ assessment info	2
Health policies/health therapy provision	2
Links with CfE/how CfE will be implemented	2
Links with church/religious affiliation/policies on religious studies (including policy on withdrawing from)	2
New - who to contact to share a concern/educational difficulty about your child & how the concern will be addressed	2
School development/improvement plan, progress	2
Severe weather arrangements/school closure/emergency contact procedures	2
Basic admin requirements e.g. how to report a child's absence, opening times. lost property, etc	1
Child protection policies/safety/security	1
Exclusions	1
Include essential information and provide links to additional info	1
Information about pupil council/how pupils can make their views heard	1
Information about services other partners provide in school, e.g.. career IAG and national training programmes.	1
Local economic information	1
New - a summary only of key policies	1
New - all information is important, shouldn't have to choose	1
New - details of bursaries/awards available in specific areas	1
New - frequently asked questions and answers about the school	1
New - value added attainment	1
What parents can do to help their children learn outside of school	1
New -curriculum choices	1
Next steps if your complaint isn't resolved	1
Play policy/outdoor learning	1
School history/traditions, vision, values and ethos	1
Volunteering/fundraising	1

Annex A4 – Full List Of Responses For Part 4 "Final Comments"

Table A4 – responses to part 4 "final comments"

Responses	No.
	<i>Base 221</i>
Question 1 – The current situation	32
Practical implications/cost of producing handbooks	7
The role of the handbook	7
View of current info received (Happy with it)	5
View of current info received (not particularly happy with it)	4
Utilising national resources	3
Avoid repetition across different sources of info	2
Who should get a handbook	2
<i>All parents should get a handbook, not just incoming parents</i>	1
<i>Children should have a school handbook too</i>	1
Question 2 - type of information wanted	33
<i>General comments on information</i>	
Less stats /shouldn't just be about statistics	5
Relevant/useful info	4
Info needs to be comprehensive - more detail not less	4
Type of info required might be different for secondary schools and primary schools	2
Provide statistical / performance information separately	2
Say which policies are statutory (SG), which come from the LA and what comes from the school	2
Handbooks of faith-based schools should reflect the faith based education they give	1
What shouldn't be included in handbook	1
Info that focuses on academic progress	1
Info specific to own child's performance	1
School info should demonstrate good practice	1
Include legally required information clearly	1
<i>More detailed responses on specific topics</i>	
Additional support for learning /ASN(more detailed response)	5
Bullying (more detailed responses)	3
Out of school care (more detailed response)	1
Question 3 -how receive info - format/timings etc	136
Info should be mainly online	32
Regularly updated and accurate info	30
Parent -friendly information simple to understand, short /info on how to access info	25
Encouraging parental/parent council involvement /communication	11
Suggestions for format of info	10
Access - language (including Gaelic) /BSL issues	8
Hard copies required	5
Review timing of info to parents	5
Face to face communication /easy access to school if have a concern	3
Give parents a choice of formats	2
More engaging style for handbook	2
Pupils should be involved in providing info	2
Show sensitivity to parents' circumstances	1
Question 4 - the level of information respondents want	4
Question 5 - guidelines on standardisation	51
SG guidelines plus school freedom to add more	26
National standardised approach/consistency	9
2 handbooks – LA or SG produce core info, school more personalised	5

Info specific to individual school rather than generic	4
Central guidelines require input from schools and parents to make them relevant	1
Could be issues ensuring all parents get a voice	1
If standard information is required ensure it is of a high standard	1
Information should demonstrate that minimum standards are being met	1
Regulations should allow as much flexibility as possible for schools	1
SG core info plus LA core info plus school flexibility	1
Standardisation at LA level	1
Comments on the consultation	13
Not impressed with consultation	6
Liked the consultation / glad to contribute	4
What's the point of the consultation?	3
MISCELANIOUS (comments about education but not specifically related to information for parents)	12
Teacher performance /training/staff policy	4
Concerns about education system	2
Role of parent councils	2
Consult with parents more about changes in education	1
Role of inspection	1
SG should develop a guide to volunteering for schools	1

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