

**PERSPECTIVES ON CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL PLAN**

Anne O' Gara

**A dissertation submitted to the Education Department at
University of Dublin
Trinity College
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D.**

March 2005

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at any other university and that it is entirely my own work.

I agree that the library may loan this thesis upon request.

Signed:

Anne O' Gara

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Noel in appreciation of his absolute confidence in my ability to complete this task.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and patience of my husband Noel and sons Martin and Ronan.

I owe a sincere debt of gratitude to my supervisor Ms. Ann Fitzgibbon, Senior Lecturer, for her guidance, expertise and support.

To the principals of the schools in my district who took the time in their busy schedules to complete the questionnaire, I am extremely grateful.

I am indebted also to the members of the Boards of Management, Parents' Association representatives and other parents, principals and teachers of the three case study schools for their participation and contribution at interview.

I am grateful to my data analyst, Deirdre Hackett for her knowledge and efficiency and to Marie Fleury, Clodagh O' Gara, Catherine O' Neill and Anne O' Sullivan for proof reading the script.

My thanks to my good friend Anne Tyndall, for listening and for insightful comments as this research began to take shape.

The Inspectorate Professional Development Programme in conjunction with the Staff Training and Development Unit of the Department of Education and Science supported me in undertaking this research. For this opportunity, I am very grateful.

SUMMARY

Perspectives on Consultation with Parents in the Development of The School Plan.

This dissertation traces the development of a more centralised role for parents in primary education. The *Education Act, 1998* emphasises the importance of a partnership approach to the development of the school plan. Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications encourage consultation with parents in the development of aspects of school policy. The introduction of Boards of Management has offered opportunities for consultation between parents, teachers, patrons' representatives and community representatives in the task of managing the local school. Parents' Associations also aim to foster co-operation between the partners in education at local, national and European level. This study aims to provide new knowledge with respect to the current level of parental participation in the process of school development planning in consultation with the Board of Management, the principal and the teachers.

The literature review documents research, which indicates that there are significant educational, social and behavioural gains for children where partnership between parents and teachers exists. Data relating to the important role that school planning can play in promoting school effectiveness and improvement are reviewed. Particular reference is made to initiatives relating to parental participation in education for children in disadvantaged areas. Research, which describes models of parental involvement in school, and in particular, parental involvement in policy development and decision-making is outlined. The theory of change within the context of educational reform provides a framework, which facilitates deeper engagement with the data obtained.

In designing a research methodology a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of collecting data is selected. The quantitative research consists of a detailed questionnaire to the principals of the schools in the sample. Information is sought on various themes such as, the purpose of involving parents in school development planning, awareness of the implications of current legislation, engagement with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary, current status of the Parents' Association and the involvement of the Board of Management in school development planning. Practice with respect to the process used in developing policies is explored. Perceptions of the various education partners in relation to factors which facilitate or inhibit consultation with parents in the development of the school plan are elicited.

For the purposes of gleaning further insights into the research problem a case study design approach is used. In this research the cases, or units of study are three school communities, identified following analysis of data drawn from the questionnaires. Focus group interviews with the education partners explore themes selected as a result of the synthesis of data obtained from the questionnaire to principals. This process contributes to the development of a deeper understanding of the complex issues involved in consulting with parents in the development of the school plan.

This research concludes that there is a difference between the aspiration of partnership, as espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy documents and publications and the process by which parents are currently consulted in school development planning. The hypothesis that partnership with parents remains a relatively new concept for Board of Management, principals, teachers and parents themselves is substantiated. It establishes that support is required to encourage school communities to develop from an acceptance of parental representation on the Board of Management and the establishment of Parents' Associations to more accountable, diverse, participatory partnership which should involve parents in a central way in school development planning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	(i)
Declaration	(ii)
Dedication	(iii)
Acknowledgements	(iv)
Summary	(v)
Table of Contents	(vii)
Tables in the Text	(xviii)
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE – PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION	6
1.1 Background to the Research	6
1.1.1 Partnership with Parents	
1.1.2 Partnership in Ireland	
1.1.3 Consultation with Parents in School Development Planning	
1.1.4 The Nature of Parent/Teacher Partnership in School Development Planning - Perspectives and Challenges	
1.2 Preliminary Research Questions	15
1.3 Justification for the Research	16
1.4 Research Problem	19
1.5 Hypotheses	21
1.6 Methodology	22
1.7 Definitions	23
1.8 Delimitations of Scope and Key Assumptions	29
1.9 Conclusion	34

CHAPTER TWO – PARENTS IN EDUCATION	36
2.1 Introduction	36
2.2 The Role of Parents in Irish Education	37
2.2.1 Parents in Education	
2.2.2 An Historical Outline	
2.2.3 The National Board of Education	
2.2.4 Article 42, Constitution of Ireland 1937	
2.2.5 Signs of Change	
2.2.6 Administrative Change	
2.2.7 Variety of Educational Provision	
2.2.8 Consultation to Legislation 1992-1998	
2.2.9 A Legal Framework for Education – Education Act, 1998	
2.2.10 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000	
2.2.11 Concluding Comments	
2.3 The Inclusion of Parents in Policy Formation – An Overview of Some Recent Department of Education and Science Circular Letters, Policy Guidelines and Publications	56
2.3.1 Department of Education and Science Publications – Parents and Policy	
2.3.2 Department of Education and Science Publications – Parents and Curriculum	
2.3.3 Department of Education and Science Publications – Parents and Planning	
2.3.4 Department of Education and Science Publications – Parents and Pupils with Special Educational Needs	
2.3.5 Department of Education and Science Publications – Parents and Evaluation of Schools	
2.3.6 Concluding Comments	

2.4 Towards a Rationale for Parental Involvement in Education	66
2.4.1 Introduction	
2.4.2 Perceptions of School Effectiveness	
2.4.3 A Sample of Five Studies Relating to School Effectiveness	
2.4.3.1 Rutter et al. 1979	
2.4.3.2 Mortimore et al. 1988	
2.4.3.3 The Halton Effective Schools Project 1986	
2.4.3.4 Levine and Lezotte 1990	
2.4.3.5 Smyth 1999	
2.4.4 Limitations of School Effectiveness Research and Practice	
2.4.5 School Effectiveness Research and the Concept of Parents as Partners	
2.4.6 School Improvement	
2.4.7 School Development Planning – Purpose, Process and Content	
2.4.8 School Development Planning in Ireland	
2.4.9 Concluding Comments	
2.5 Overview of Frameworks for the Development of Parental Involvement in Schools	88
2.5.1 Introduction	
2.5.2 Models of Parental Involvement in Schools	
2.5.3 Impediments to Parent/Teacher Partnership	
2.6 Models of Partnership in School Development Planning	99
2.6.1 Introduction	
2.6.2 The School Development Programme (SDP)	
2.6.3 Partnership in Policy Formation – The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme Experience	
2.7 The Dynamics of Change	106

2.8 Concluding Comments	111
CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	113
3.1 Introduction	113
3.2 Conclusions from Previous Research	115
3.2.1 School Effectiveness, School Improvement, School Development Planning Research	
3.2.2 Models of Parental Involvement in Schools	
3.2.3 Irish Legislative and Administrative Context	
3.2.4 Partnership	
3.2.5 The Process of Change	
3.2.6 Conclusion	
3.3 Quantitative Phase of the Research – Questionnaire for Principals	121
3.3.1 Overview of Initial Stage	
3.3.2 The Sample	
3.3.3 Development of Questionnaire for Principals – Pre-Pilot Study	
3.3.4 Design – Pilot Study – Validity and Reliability	
3.3.5 Analysis of Pilot Questionnaire	
3.3.6 Responses to the Questionnaire	
3.4 Qualitative Phase of the Research – A Case Study Approach – The Schools	133
3.4.1 Why a Case Study Approach?	
3.4.2 Checklist to Support the Claim that this Enquiry meets the Criteria for an Educational Case Study	
3.4.3 The Selection of Cases and Boundaries to the Case Studies	
3.4.4 Focus Groups	
3.4.5 Topics for Discussion – Validity and Reliability	

3.4.6 Analysis of Focus Groups	
3.5 Presentation of Data and Concluding Comments	141
CHAPTER FOUR – THE QUESTIONNAIRE	143
4.1 Introduction	143
4.2 Response Rate	144
4.3 Questionnaire Description	144
4.4 Engagement with School Development Planning	146
4.4.1 School Development Planning and Current Education Legislation	
4.4.2 Engagement with Primary Curriculum Support Programme	
4.4.3 Engagement with School Development Planning Initiative – Primary	
4.4.4 Parents and School Based Planning Days	
4.4.5 Summary	
4.5 Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning	155
4.5.1 Summary	
4.6 Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development Planning	160
4.6.1 Introduction	
4.6.2 Process of School Development Planning	
4.6.3 Parents and School Development Planning	
4.6.4 Summary	
4.7 Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas	168
4.7.1 Introduction	
4.7.2 Mission Statement	
4.7.3 Uniform Policy	

4.7.4 Code of Behaviour	
4.7.5 Enrolment Policy	
4.7.6 Pupils with Special Educational Needs	
4.7.7 Homework Policy	
4.7.8 School Attendance Policy	
4.7.9 Named Policies in the Development of which Parents have been Consulted	
4.7.10 Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy	
4.7.11 Parents and Involvement in Curriculum Policy Development	
4.7.12 Summary	
4.8 Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association	184
4.8.1 Introduction	
4.8.2 Board of Management and School Development Planning	
4.8.3 Parents’ Association and School Development Planning	
4.9 Relationships – Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors in School Development Planning	189
4.9.1 School Development Planning – Facilitating Factors	
4.9.2 School Development Planning – Inhibiting Factors	
4.10 Conclusion	192
CHAPTER FIVE – A CASE STUDY APPROACH – THE SCHOOLS	195
5.1 Introduction	
5.2 Case Studies	197
5.2.1 Introduction	
5.2.2 Case Study 1	
5.2.3 Case Study 2	
5.2.4 Case Study 3	

5.3 Focus Groups	204
5.3.1 Focus Groups – Boards of Management	
5.3.2 Focus Groups – Representatives of Parents	
5.3.3 Focus Groups – Teachers	
5.4 Overview of the Focus Group Responses	207
5.5 Case Study 1: Focus Group Data	207
5.5.1 Case Study 1 – Introduction	
5.5.2 Case Study 1 – Engagement with the School	
5.5.3 Case Study 1 – Engagement with School Development Planning	
5.5.4 Case Study 1 – Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities Under the Law	
5.5.5 Case Study 1 – Experience of Training and Support	
5.5.6 Case Study 1 – Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning	
5.5.7 Case Study 1 – Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development Planning	
5.5.8 Case Study 1 – Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas	
5.5.9 Case Study 1 – Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association	
5.5.10 Case Study 1 – Relationships – Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors to Partnership in School Development Planning	
5.5.11 Case Study 1 – Concluding Comments	
5.6 Case Study 2: Focus Group Data	220
5.6.1 Case Study 2 – Introduction	
5.6.2 Case Study 2 – Engagement with the School	
5.6.3 Case Study 2 – Engagement with School Development Planning	
5.6.4 Case Study 2 – Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities Under the Law	

5.6.5 Case Study 2 – Experience of Training and Support	
5.6.6 Case Study 2 – Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning	
5.6.7 Case Study 2 – Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development Planning	
5.6.8 Case Study 2 – Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas	
5.6.9 Case Study 2 – Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association	
5.6.10 Case Study 2 – Relationships – Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors to Partnership in School Development Planning	
5.6.11 Case Study 2 – Concluding Comments	
5.7 Case Study 3: Focus Group Data	235
5.7.1 Case Study 3 – Introduction	
5.7.2 Case Study 3 – Engagement with the School	
5.7.3 Case Study 3 – Engagement with School Development Planning	
5.7.4 Case Study 3 – Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities under the Law	
5.7.5 Case Study 3 – Experience of Training and Support	
5.7.6 Case Study 3 – Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning	
5.7.7 Case Study 3 – Process of School Development Planning with particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development planning	
5.7.8 Case Study 3 – Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas	
5.7.9 Case Study 3 – Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association	
5.7.10 Case Study 3 – Relationships – Partnership in School Development Planning: Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors	
5.7.11 Case Study 3 – Concluding Comments	
5.8 The Three Cases Studies – Observations and Implications	249
5.8.1 Introduction	

5.8.2 Board of Management Members Interviewed	
5.8.3 Parent Representatives Interviewed	
5.8.4 Teachers Interviewed	
5.9 Case Studies – Summary of Main Findings	257
5.9.1 Engagement with Schools	
5.9.2 School Development Planning – Policy Areas	
5.9.3 School Development Planning – Process	
5.9.4 Awareness of Implications of the Law and Training and Support	
5.9.5 Relationships – Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors	
5.9.6 School Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association	
5.10 Conclusion	261
CHAPTER SIX – LINKING THE STRANDS	263
6.1 Introduction	
6.2 The Literature Review	263
6.3 Engagement with School Development Planning	268
6.3.1 School Development Planning and Current Education Legislation	
6.3.2 Experience of Training and Support	
6.4 Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning	276
6.5 Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Policies Developed in Consultation with Parents	279
6.5.1 The process of school development planning	
6.5.2 Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas	
6.6 School Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association	282
6.6.1 Introduction	

6.6.2 Board of Management and School Development Planning	
6.6.3 Parents' Association and School Development Planning	
6.7 Relationships – Facilitating or Inhibiting Factors to Parental Involvement in School Development Planning	289
6.7.1 School Development Planning – Facilitating Factors	
6.7.2 School Development Planning –Inhibiting Factors	
6.8 Concluding Comments	294
CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	299
7.1 Introduction	
7.2 Conclusions about Hypothesis 1	300
7.3 Conclusions about Hypothesis 2	302
7.4 Conclusions about Hypothesis 3	303
7.5 The Research Problem	304
7.6 Implications for Policy and Practice	306
7.6.1 The Context of Change	
7.6.2 The Nature of Partnership	
7.6.3 The Establishment of a National Consultative Committee on Home/School Relations	
7.6.4 The Development of Field-Based Projects	
7.8 Limitations	315
7.9 Concluding Comments	317
APPENDICES	319
1. Questionnaire	319
2. Case Studies – Focus Group Topic Guide	325
3. Correspondence	328

4. Sample Focus Group Interview Transcript	333
5. Overview of Case Studies	345
BIBLIOGRAPHY	348
Books	348
Journal Articles	355
Government Publications	357
Unpublished	360

TABLES IN TEXT

Table 2.1: School Development Planning Initiative – Primary and involvement of Boards of Management and parents	62
Table 3.1: Ordinary national schools – national figure – sample numbers	124
Table 4.1: Size of school	145
Table 4.1(a): School size – national figures	145
Table 4.2: Schools – designated disadvantaged – Q.2	136
Table 4.3: Involved in the school development planning process prior to the enactment of the Education Act, 1998 – Q.3	147
Table 4.4: Knowledge of the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process – Q.4	148
Table 4.4(a): Comparison between responses to Q.3 and Q. 4	148
Table 4.5 Engagement with Primary Curriculum Support Programme – Q.5	150
Table 4.5(a): Comparison between responses to Q. 5 and Q. 3	150
Table 4.6 Engagement with School Development Planning Support – Q.6	151
Table 4.6(a): Comparison between responses to Q.6 and Q.3	153
Table 4.6(b): Comparison between responses to Q. 5 and Q. 6	153
Table 4.7: Attendance of parents at school based planning days – Q.9	154
Table 4.8: Reasons offered for parental consultation on aspects of school development planning – first preference – Q.10	156
Table 4.8(a): Reasons offered for parental consultation on aspects of school development planning – second preference – Q.10	156
Table 4.8(b): Overview of reasons offered for parental consultation on aspects of school policy – Q.10	157
Table 4.9: Involving parents in school development planning will ultimately benefit the pupils – Q.18	158
Table 4.10: Describe how policy is generally formulated in your school – Q.9	161
Table 4.10(a): School size and process of policy formation – Q.1 and Q.9	163

Table 4.11: Consultation with parents regarding school development Planning – Q.11	165
Table 4.11(a): School size and consultation with parents regarding school development planning – Q.1 and Q.11	166
Table 4.12: Consultation with parents with respect to policy regarding pupils with special educational needs	175
Table 4.13: Effectiveness of the process used in drawing up a Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy – Q.15	179
Table 4.14: Contents of The School Plan – Q.8	182
Table 4.15: Role of the Board of Management in policy formation – Q.20	185
Table 4.16: Parents’ Association – Q.7	187
Table 4.17: Role of the Parents’ Association in policy formation – Q.20	188
Table 4.18: Enabling factors that facilitate partnership in school development planning – Q.22	190
Table 4.19: Factors that inhibit partnership in school development planning – Q.23	192
Table 5.1: Openness to parental involvement in school development planning	198
Table 5.2: Overview of Case Study 1	208
Table 5.3: Overview of Case Study 2	221
Table 5.4: Overview of Case Study 3	236
Table 6.1: Theories of education and change	266
Table 6.2: Transformational change	267
Table 6.3: Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas	282
Table 6.4: School development planning – inhibiting factors – frequency of selection when three choices are included	292
Table 6.5: Educational reform – partnership in management and planning	297
Table 7.1: The paradigm of change – implications for policy and practice	314

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to provide new knowledge with regard to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan and to elicit insights into the current situation which may inform future development. It seeks to establish whether the perspective of parents is included in the collaborative effort which underpins the school planning process and what procedures are used to obtain that perspective. Initially base-line data is gleaned through a questionnaire to forty-two principals in selected national schools. This data provides the themes which are developed in focus group interviews with Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives or other parents who are actively involved in the selected schools and teachers. Through this process of triangulation new knowledge and understanding of the issues involved and the perspectives of the education partners with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan is obtained.

The *Education Act, 1998* Section 21 requires all schools to draft and regularly update a school plan. Furthermore, schools are required to involve parents in the process of developing the school plan and to ensure that all parents get a copy of the school plan. Many Department of Education and Science policy guidelines, circular letters and publications provide a framework for encouraging partnership in school development planning and for engaging the whole-school community in a dialogue which is responsive to the emerging and changing needs of pupils. Participation in this dialogue, it is suggested fosters 'local' commitment to and real ownership of school development planning and school improvement.

This research has as its focus a research problem which seeks to establish whether

the aspiration of partnership espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is being realised through the process by which parents are currently consulted in the context of school development planning.

Three hypotheses are proposed and outlined in Chapter One. The first hypothesis proposes that

there is a difference between the aspiration of partnership in the development of school policies as espoused in education legislation and Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications and the process by which parents are currently consulted in school development planning.

The second hypothesis proposes that

partnership with parents remains a relatively new concept for Boards of Management, principals, teachers and parents themselves.

The final hypothesis proposes that

support is required to encourage school communities to develop from an acceptance of parental representation on the Board of Management and the establishment of a Parents' Association to more accountable, diverse, participatory partnership which should involve parents in a central way in school development planning.

In exploring ways the research problem could be better understood, subsidiary but related research questions are identified, including

- What is the purpose of involving parents in school development planning?
- How are school communities engaging parents in the process of developing the school plan?
- What policy areas are currently being developed in consultation with parents?
- What is the role of the Board of Management and Parents' Association in the development of the school plan?
- What factors enable or inhibit partnership in school planning?

These questions set an agenda for the research which is developed over seven chapters.

Chapter One provides an overview, an introduction to the reader of the study to be undertaken. Initially it outlines the background to the research and explains briefly

how this study will contribute new knowledge regarding parental involvement in school development planning. It introduces some of the complexities relating to the concept of partnership between parents and teachers. The purpose of the research, the core research problem and the hypotheses are described, and a short summary of the research methodology is provided. Definitions used in the study are explained and the delimitations of scope and key assumptions outlined.

Chapter Two expands on the research problem and hypothesis arising from the body of knowledge developed during previous research. It explains recent Irish education legislation with specific reference to the principle of partnership and shared responsibility as enunciated in the *Education Act, 1998* and the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*. Guideline documents issued by the Department of Education and Science on the development of school policies with respect to national initiatives in education, are described.

School effectiveness Mortimore et al. (1988), Reynolds & Cuttance (1992), Sammons et al. (1995), school improvement (Reynolds et al. 1989), (Stoll & Fink 1996), MacGilchrist (1995) and school development planning (Hargreaves et al. 1996), Comer et al. (1996) research is also detailed in Chapter Two and indicates that salient parental involvement is one of the characteristics of an effective school. Previous research relating to parents as partners in education is reviewed Macbeth, (1989), Atkin & Bastiani, (1988), Bastiani, (1989), Comer et al. (1996). However, while recognising that some reference to parental involvement in decision-making and planning is made in research such as, Conaty (1999) and Mac Giolla Phádraig (2002), there is a dearth of Irish educational research which has focused specifically on the role of parents in school development planning.

Research relating to the change process is discussed as implicitly this research is reviewing an aspect of educational reform which recognises the importance of consultation with parents as partners in education. Chapter Two further identifies research questions about which data are collected in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three takes the reader through the research methodology used to provide data to investigate the research question. It aims to provide assurance that appropriate procedures were followed. It includes the definition of the research problem, the preliminary knowledge base, the formulation of hypotheses, the selection of samples, the tools of research and the data analysis procedures. Having explored and evaluated possible methods of gathering data, it was decided that an approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods should be utilised. Chapter Four describes the results of the quantitative phase while Chapter Five elaborates on the qualitative phase of the research.

Chapter Four provides the results of applying the quantitative methods described in Chapter Three. Patterns of data for each research question or hypotheses which emerged from the initial stage of the research are recorded and analysed. This data informed the qualitative phase of the research, the results of which are outlined in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five builds on the quantitative data described in Chapter Four and explores the research question in greater depth through an analysis of the focus group interviews with the partners in education. The need to obtain data from several specific categories of persons within the group being sampled was identified as being crucial in gaining different perspectives with respect to the research problem. Data relating to each of the three case-study schools are outlined separately to provide an

overview of current practice with respect to consultation with parents in the process of school development planning in the selected schools. The use of a variety of procedures also facilitates understanding of a complex field situation.

Chapter Six links the data as outlined in Chapters Four and Five, and provides an in-depth analysis of the themes central to this research. Having interpreted, described, critically evaluated and analysed the data, new understandings and possible generalisations will be drawn.

Chapter Seven describes the conclusions about the hypotheses and research problem. It outlines the implications for policy and practice within the context of the paradigm of change. It reviews limitations to the research that became apparent during the progress of the study and concludes by referring briefly to aspects of new knowledge gleaned from this research.

This introduction to the research provides a brief overview of the

- background to the research
- some of the research literature
- the rationale for the research
- the research problem, hypotheses and subsidiary but related questions and an
- outline of the chapters of the research.

Chapter One will develop the above in greater detail.

CHAPTER ONE – PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION

1.1 Background to the Research

1.1.1 Partnership with Parents

The importance of building partnerships in education is becoming more widely recognised. Parents generally want to become more involved in their children's schooling and to understand the educational process more fully. Governments, too, are beginning to recognise that high standards of achievement depend, to a certain extent, on parental support. Many countries are currently adopting policies to involve families and more specifically parents, more closely in the education of their children. Co-operation between families and schools in nine OECD countries, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom (England and Wales) and the United States is reviewed in an OECD report, *Parents as Partners in Schooling*, (1997).

These shifts in policy are partly in response to research findings which suggest that parental involvement is associated with high achievement in school, partly due to pressure from parents themselves, and partly because many governments are currently aiming to decentralise their administrations, and make schools more accountable at the local level to those who use them. (OECD, 1997, p. 3)

This report, *Parents as Partners in Schooling*, (1997), raises questions about the new meaning of the word partnership, which goes beyond involving parents in fund-raising for the school or attending social events:

...the new meaning of “parental involvement” is more complex, representing (in ideal terms) a close working partnership between parents and teachers, which enables both to bring their unique insights and experience to the joint task of educating children. It stresses in particular the fact that parents and teachers can learn from each other. (Morgan et al., 1992, in OECD, 1997, p.16)

Partnership is a key concept in the analysis of relations between home and school, but it is a term which is difficult to define. The word often means different things in different systems and to different people within those systems. Some of the many

interpretations and ways in which a partnership approach becomes a reality in the context of the development of relationships between the partners in education, teachers, parents, members of Boards of Management and Parents' Associations are reviewed in this dissertation.

1.1.2 Partnership in Ireland

The development of a partnership approach to decision-making in Ireland will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. The power structure which excluded all but the State and the churches from the life and work of the school began to be challenged in the course of the second half of the twentieth century. Finally, in 1975 the first significant change in the management of national schools since the establishment of the system in 1831 occurred. A national school is an establishment which provides primary education to its students and which may also provide early childhood education, which has been recognised by the Minister for Education and Science in accordance with Section 10 of the *Education Act, 1998*. Management Boards for national schools were instituted in that year, 1975. For the first time, parents and teachers were involved directly in the management of schools. Some years later, the need to develop a structure to facilitate parental involvement in educational policy and decision-making was recognised. The National Parents' Council - Primary, a body recognised by the then minister, was established in 1985. This body was established by parents of primary school children, with objectives which include representing the views and interests of parents with regard to education and assisting parents in exercising their rights and role in the process of the education of their children. Since it has been established on a national basis, the Department of Education and Science consults with the council on matters of educational development. The council provides representation for parents as partners in education on various government

appointed bodies and on many Departmental committees.

Over the years Ireland administered the education system without a comprehensive legislation system. The *Education Act, 1998* which sets out to provide a statutory basis for the first and second levels of Ireland's education system, was enacted after a protracted process of debate and dialogue. Section 2.2.8 of the literature review in Chapter Two of this dissertation expands on the process which led to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. The first paragraph of this Act (the preamble), summarises the key principles which underpin the Act. These include among other named principles the spirit of partnership. The Act requires the education system to be conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and the community served by the school and the State. Some insight into the thinking behind the principle of partnership as outlined in the *Education Act, 1998* can be gleaned from the *White Paper on Education* published by the Minister for Education in 1995, which states

Effective partnership also requires increasing transparency and accountability, in order to allow the partners to exercise their rights and to be accountable for their responsibilities.
(Government of Ireland, 1995a, p.7)

Partnership remains a rather loosely defined concept and yet the key to partnership appears to lie in involving the education partners in the planning and decision-making processes and structures.

1.1.3 Consultation with Parents in School Development Planning

This dissertation will examine how schools are seeking to reflect the principle of partnership in the school development planning process. It seeks to evaluate the current level of parental participation in school development planning, in consultation with the Board of Management, the principal and the teachers. The methods,

structures and strategies by which parents have been consulted in relation to policy formation, for example through involvement on the Board of Management, consultation with the Parents' Association, through questionnaires to the general body of parents or through working groups of parents and teachers drawing up draft policies together, will be examined. The *Education Act, 1998* requires schools to consult with parents in relation to the development of the school plan. The school plan is defined in Section 21 (2) of the Act which states

The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including equality of access to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs

Consultation with the partners is specifically mentioned in the Act with reference to an enrolment policy / admissions policy, including the policy of the school relating to expulsion and suspension of students, S.15(d) and in relation to the school plan as stated previously S.21. The *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* requires the Board of Management of all primary schools to prepare a statement of strategies and measures that it proposes to adopt in order to foster school attendance. This statement of strategies must be developed in consultation with the partners. Both these pieces of legislation and some of their implications will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

This research will attempt to ascertain what policy areas are currently being developed in partnership with parents and what processes are being applied.

Emer Smyth in her book entitled *Do Schools Differ?* states that

teachers in the more effective schools are less likely to complain about the lack of parental support .
(Smyth, 1999, p.200)

Research relating to school effectiveness, school improvement and school development planning emphasises the importance of engaging school stakeholders in

the collaborative process.

The promotion of continuous school improvement and the collaborative effort of the school's key educational partners are at the heart of the school development planning process. (O' Dálaigh, C. in Furlong & Monahan, (eds.), 2000, p.142)

Key facilitating or inhibiting factors of partnership between parents and teachers will be identified. Parents constitute a valuable resource to the school. Coleman, (1998), suggests that parents constitute an important resource for school improvement.

Hence, the most important task of the school principal who is concerned about quality is to activate parents as instructional supporters of their children. This work must be done through classroom teachers. (Coleman, 1998, p.61)

However, the wish to keep parents at a distance seems characteristic of educational systems everywhere.

The key characteristic of communication between teachers and parents is that the stakes are perceived as being very high for both parties. Parents may believe that the future of their child is at stake, and teachers often feel defensive. They lead very stressful, demanding and exposed working lives, and schools have not always developed good support strategies which do not depend on closing rank against outsiders. (OECD, 1997, p.53)

A further purpose of this research is to ascertain through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods the attitudes and perspectives of parents, teachers and representatives of the Board of Management to the partnership process in school development planning. The literature describes many forms of parental involvement, including representation on Boards of Management and Parents' Associations, helping teachers in classrooms and supporting their children's learning at home. Some of the most interesting developments relate to initiatives which help parents in areas of socio-economic disadvantage to support their children more effectively. Improving the parents' understanding of the educational process not only enables them to become more involved with the school, but can give them the confidence to encourage their children to continue with further education.

It is important, however, to take cognisance of the very real barriers that exist to involving parents, particularly in relation to policy development and decision-making. There are attitudinal and professional difficulties among some teachers, who may feel threatened by what is seen as parental encroachment in a professional domain. Lack of time and inadequate pre-service and in-service education in the area can compromise teachers' abilities to liaise effectively with parents. Parents also are not a homogenous group and some come to the consultation process with a particular agenda, which may not benefit all children in the school community. Parents have different expectations regarding their relationship with the school and the reason most become involved in education has to do with supporting the education of their own children. Sallis (1998) states

All that most parents want is a system in which they routinely get simple explanations of school policies and methods, a chance to question and even doubt without making a meal of it, some assurance that if a problem develops they will be promptly told and encouraged to help, and they themselves can similarly approach the school if they have worries.

The Canadian Education Association (1979) conducted a nation-wide survey of over 2000 parents at both elementary and secondary levels and found that 'overall 63.4% of the respondents indicated that they would not like to serve as a member of a home school advisory committee' (cited in Fullan, 1991, p.239). Impediments to consultation with parents in policy and decision-making will be discussed further in Chapter Two, Section 2.5.3. This study aims to provide new knowledge on consultation with parents in the development of the school plan and to elicit some insights into the current situation which may inform future development.

1.1.4 The Nature of Parent/Teacher Partnership in School Development Planning – Perspectives, Opportunities and Challenges

The concept of partnership and the process of consulting with education partners is a

rather recent development in education systems as outlined in Section 1.1. It has its origins in effectiveness and school improvement research findings which state that parental involvement is a key correlate of effective schools. An important strategy in structuring and mobilising parental involvement is through school development planning. School planning facilitates a process of planning, review, evaluation and implementation. It is essential, according to MacGilchrist et al. (1995, p.212) that in implementing this strategy teachers do not perceive plans as a threat to their professional autonomy. Rather, they should play an active role in the process, as should other stakeholders, including parents, pupils and members of management boards. This they point out strengthens ownership and commitment to the plan.

Whole-school planning facilitates teachers sharing information and communicating their professional activities with confidence to parents and the wider community. Parents on the other hand can offer schools unique and intimate knowledge of their children. Munn (1993, p.105) in seeking to define the partnership process raises the challenge of the nature of the relationship between parents and teachers and suggests that partnership implies a ‘sharing of power, responsibility and ownership – though not necessarily equally....’. The importance of valuing what each partner can bring to the relationship was recognised by the Department of Education and Science in its publication *Developing a School Plan – Guidelines for Primary Schools*.

The involvement of the partners in this collaborative exercise enables each to make its own special contribution which in turn is complemented by the contribution of the other partners. (1999, p.9)

It is important to recognise that there may be some areas where particular partners have by virtue of training and experience, more expertise and therefore an entitlement to a more significant contribution in such areas. The involvement of parents in curricular planning is for example, an area of contention for teachers. Macbeth and

Ravn (1994, p.5) in writing about the roles and responsibilities of the partners in education pose the questions

Should accountability be *mutual* accountability between parents and teachers? To what extent should parental *obligation* counterbalance parental rights and, if so, how? To what extent are teachers professionals and, if they are, to what extent does that justify a degree of autonomy for teachers?

These questions highlight challenges of a partnership approach and the delicate balance which exists in recognising the training, experience and expertise of the teacher while ensuring that the voice of parents who have primary responsibility for the education of their children is included. School development planning aims to facilitate the introduction and management of change at individual school level. It affords management an opportunity and a challenge to involve the main partners in the system in this planning exercise. This research seeks to analyse the degree to which the consultation process has developed since the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*.

In exploring parental involvement in school policy and decision-making the OECD Report 1997 recognises that ‘in most countries, parents are only slowly growing into their role’ (p.23).

Much successful parental involvement comes down to individual teachers and parents learning how to negotiate, to handle differences of opinion and to understand the importance of each other’s role – without losing confidence in their own. A clearly understood legal framework setting out rights and responsibilities would be helpful; and training – which need not be extensive – is necessary if successful partnerships are to be built. The most fruitful approaches often involve teachers and parents training together. (p.11)

Some broad guidelines on how partnerships are to be managed at local school level and insights into a partnership approach can be gleaned from an analysis of definitions and writings relating to this concept:

- The term partnership is ... a much overused word and subject to a great deal of rhetoric; so there is a need for governing bodies to decide what is the precise nature of that partnership or how it might be achieved. Earley (1994, p.106)

- A survey carried out in 12 countries (OECD, 1995) showed that the public sees 'keeping parents informed and involved' as one of the most important tasks for schools. (OECD, 1995, p.51)
- Epstein and Dauber (1991) in their writing develop the concept of parental involvement to include parents and teachers fostering partnership through such behaviours as collaborating, planning, communicating and evaluating.
- Munn (1993, p.104) suggests that it is 'more appropriate to talk about working towards partnership as being a worthwhile direction, rather than something that is commonplace'.
- The word suggests itself a static, already worked-out relationship, but in reality partnership is more of a process – learning to work together, and valuing what each partner can bring to the relationship. Clarity is important, especially since power in a partnership is rarely equal and ground rules need to be established. (OECD, 1997, p.52)
- School planning is essentially a process in which policy and plans evolve from the ever-changing and developing needs of the school community.....The involvement of all the partners in this collaborative exercise enables each to make its own special contribution which in turn is complemented by the contribution of the other partners. (DES, 1999, p.9)
- Government and parents alike are looking for more parental involvement in the system. The relationship which is being promoted is one of partnership – in which teachers and parents are seen as having essential and complementary roles in children's education, (OECD, 1997, 151)
- An important challenge for educational restructuring and the principles of collaboration contained within it is to articulate, listen to and bring together different voices in the educational and social community, and to establish guiding ethical principles around which these voices and their purposes can cohere. (Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 258-259)
- Building genuinely productive partnerships is a long-term project and requires planning and strategic thinking.(OECD, 1997, p.60)

This research will examine the process of consultation with parents in the development of the school plan and the progress made in involving parents in devising policies. Due regard will be taken of the complexity of the term partnership with particular reference to the issues and challenges identified such as, the complementary roles of parents and teachers, the nature of professional authority as it relates to schools and teachers and the importance of agreed procedures and ground rules to support the development of a whole school approach to policy development.

1.2 Preliminary Research Questions

This research will examine current practice regarding consultation in school development planning, in a sample of schools, from the perspective of the principal, members of the Board of Management, teachers and representatives of the Parents' Association or parents who are actively involved in the school. It will do this by:

- requesting information from the various partners on current strategies for obtaining parents' views on aspects of school policy
- highlighting which policy areas are currently being developed in partnership with parents
- eliciting from the various partners in education, members of the Board of Management, principals, teachers and parents, their perceptions regarding factors which facilitate and inhibit parental involvement in school development planning
- asking the various partners to reflect on their understanding of the term partnership and try to develop a rationale for a partnership approach
- assessing the role of the Board of Management and Parents' Association in relation to school development planning
- gathering information relating to the engagement of schools with the national School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (SDPI) and the Primary Curriculum Support Team (PCSP) with respect to partnership in school development planning

Implicit to this research, which focuses on consultation with parents in the development of the school plan, is a review of an aspect of educational reform. Recent research relating to systems change with particular reference to change in education will provide a backdrop to this research. The data obtained will be analysed within a framework which seeks to understand educational reform.

Some preliminary questions central to this research include

- why involve parents? (rationale)
- the partnership process (how is the process facilitated?)
- policy areas - what policies are currently being developed in partnership with parents and are there policies which parents should be involved in helping to

formulate but have not been included to date?

- what supports are in place for developing a partnership approach to school development planning?
- what are the main facilitating or inhibiting factors?

The above questions will be refined further in the context of the review of the literature in Chapter Two and the initial phase of the research, the questionnaire to principal teachers.

1.3 Justification for the Research

An awareness of research relating to the effect of home background on school achievement was enkindled in the researcher as a result of an elective course, sociology in education, taken as an undergraduate in St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra, Dublin in 1978. The researcher's experience as a primary teacher over almost a twenty-year period reinforced a perception that the home background of children and the community in which they live influence their engagement with the school system. The researcher worked as a teacher primarily in schools serving designated areas of disadvantage. In December 1990 the Department of Education and Science set up a pilot project, the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme, in a small number of schools in disadvantaged areas. The researcher's school was invited to join the scheme in 1994 and the researcher worked as a Home/ School/ Community Liaison Co-ordinator, in her own school and in neighbouring schools. She later worked with the scheme at national level as Assistant National Co-ordinator for a further number of years. The Home/School/ Community Liaison Scheme is based on the principle of partnership between homes, schools and communities. Central to this scheme is the importance of each party recognising the special skills and knowledge of the other. This partnership is characterised as:

A working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability. (Pugh, 1989)

The researcher facilitated policy groups of parents and teachers when she worked as a Home/School/Community Liaison coordinator. The sessions included:

- sharing perspectives on the role of parent and teacher,
- examining the centrality of the shared concern for the spiritual, moral, physical, emotional and intellectual well-being of children and
- developing an understanding of the concept of team.

These sessions were the highlight of her years in the role. They were extended, once a shared understanding of the complementarity of roles was established, to addressing aspects of policy of mutual concern to both parents and teachers. The most significant experience of partnership in practice for this researcher were the opportunities provided to facilitate joint policy formation between parents and teachers on issues such as homework, Code of Behaviour, school attendance and home/school/ community links. The scheme is discussed in detail in the review of the literature, Chapter Two, Section 2.6.3 of this thesis.

However, impediments to parent/ teacher partnership remain. This research seeks to facilitate a more in-depth understanding of issues relating to partnership in school development planning and to add significant new data to the body of knowledge developed during previous research which is reviewed in Chapter Two. The component elements relating to consultation between parents and teachers in the context of school planning which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two were uncovered as a result of an analysis of

- documentation relating to the development of a more centralised role for parents in educational decision-making in Ireland
- recent Irish education legislation with specific reference to the principle of

partnership and shared responsibility as enunciated in the *Education Act, 1998* and the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*

- Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications issued with respect to the development of school policies
- literature on school effectiveness, school improvement and school development planning, and
- literature relating to parental involvement in schools with particular reference to parental involvement in policy formation.

In recent years education legislation, as outlined previously, Department of Education and Science circular letters such as Circular Letters 18/99, 34/00 and 05/02,

documentation and guidelines including recent *Guidelines for Developing a School Substance Use Policy* (2002a), encourage partnership in educational planning.

Education research, as will be described in Chapter Two, relating to school effectiveness, school improvement and school development planning includes parental involvement as one of the characteristics of an effective school.

Virtually every reform effort has placed a heavy emphasis on parental involvement in schools. Some reforms have given parents governance roles, whereas others such as Ontario, Nova Scotia and Ireland have legislated an advisory function for parents. These initiatives are based on the premise that involved and interested parents contribute significantly to a pupil's success in school. (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p.134)

However, research relating to parental involvement in schools suggests that, while changes over the years represent considerable progress towards a parent-participative education system, such progress can often be uneven, inconsistent and difficult to evaluate:

Perhaps, it is more helpful to see partnership as a process, a stage in a process or something to work towards rather than something that is a fixed state or readily achievable. (Munn, 1993, p.113)

This research which is set against a legal background, will examine aspects of the partnership in policy formation process in a sample of recognised national schools under the Department of Education and Science. This is an area within education which has been under-researched in the past.

“Partnership” is a key concept in the analysis of relations between home and school (see Wolfendale, 1992); but it is a slippery term and often means different things in different systems – and sometimes to different people. The word itself suggests a static, already worked-out relationship but in reality partnership is more of a *process* – learning to work together, and valuing what each partner can bring to the relationship.

(OECD, 1997, p.52)

Previous researchers have analysed among other topics, stages of parental involvement in schools, parental involvement in the context of school effectiveness, school improvement and school development planning and the development of a more centralised role for parents in education. Moreover, the relative neglect of research in the area of understanding the process of consulting with parents in the development of school policy and the factors which inhibit or facilitate that process is, in part, justification for the current research. The critical evaluation of related research in Chapter Two, together with the use of a combination of research methodologies as described in Chapter Three, will contribute to an in-depth analysis of the current situation and will seek to uncover new knowledge, ideas and theories in the field of understanding of partnership in school development planning.

However, this research recognises as stated previously, that in exploring consultation with parents in the development of the school plan from the perspectives of the various education partners, it is reviewing an aspect of educational reform. This reform reflects a move towards a more consultative model in school management and decision-making. Research relating to system reform and the change process will provide a framework, within which the data gleaned through this research can be further analysed and implications for future reform identified.

1.4 Research problem

In the past, schools held the educative role and as outlined in Chapter Two, Sections 2.2.2– 2.2.4, were slow to partner parents and the community. Sarason (1995, p.39)

proposes a political principle for the governance of schools: ‘the decision-making process should reflect the views of all those who will be affected by the ultimate decision’. The *Education Act, 1998* in Part IV, Boards of Management, provides some insight into the responsibilities of Boards of Management of national schools in Ireland, with respect to their role in facilitating the development of partnership with parents. It recognises that the membership of Boards of Management must be agreed among the education partners and that:

It shall be the duty of the patron, for the purposes of ensuring that a recognised school is managed in a spirit of partnership, to appoint where practicable a Board of Management.....
Section 14 (1)

The *Education Act, 1998* does not specifically define what is meant by ‘ensuring that a recognised school is managed in a spirit of partnership’, however, Section 20, Report and Information, links the concept of partnership with the provision of information to parents while Section 21, The School Plan requires compliance with directions given by the Minister relating to consultation with parents and others in relation to school plans. Section 20 states that the Board is required to establish procedures for informing parents of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school.

a Board shall establish procedures for informing the parents of students in the school of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school and such procedures may include the publication and circulation to parents, teachers and other staff and a student council where one has been established of a report on the operation and performance of the school in any school year, with particular reference to the achievement of objectives as set out in the school plan provided for in Section 21

Section 21, as discussed previously, outlines the responsibilities of the Board with respect to the school plan and gives guidance in Section 21 (4) in relation to who should be involved in the preparation of the school plan

The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans.

The background to this research is the *Education Act, 1998* and other education legislation and specifically the requirement to consult with parents in the development of the school plan. The literature review in Section 2.3 provides an overview of some recent Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications focusing on the inclusion of parents in policy formation.

This research has as its focus a research question which seeks to establish,

whether the aspiration of partnership as espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is being realised through the process by which parents are currently consulted in the context of school development planning.

It seeks, through a process of engagement with the partners, to provide new data and knowledge with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

1.5 Hypotheses

Three hypotheses are central to this study. The first hypothesis proposes that:

there is a difference between the aspiration of partnership in the development of school policies as espoused in education legislation and Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications and the process by which parents are currently consulted in school development planning.

The research will be conducted and the research instruments designed to detect anything that might challenge this hypothesis. The second hypothesis proposes that:

partnership with parents remains a relatively new concept for Boards of Management, principals, teachers and parents themselves

while the third hypothesis suggests that:

support is required to encourage school communities to develop from an acceptance of parental representation on the Board of Management and the establishment of a Parents' Association to more accountable, diverse, participatory partnership which should involve parents in a central way in the school development planning process.

This research, in attempting to make a claim to knowledge, on the basis of systematic

and critical enquiry, has identified a research problem to be explored and three core hypotheses to be tested. A number of subsidiary but related questions have been identified which set a preliminary agenda for the research which include:

- why should parents be consulted in the development of the school plan?
- what processes are currently being used to engage parents in the school development planning process?
- is the perspective of parents sought on all policy areas or on particular policies?
- what is the role of the Board of Management and Parents' Association in school development planning?
- what are the facilitating or inhibiting factors which effect how policy is drawn up within a school community?

It was clear from the outset that to develop a deeper understanding of issues relating to parental involvement in school development planning would require extensive research involving all the partners in the process, principals, teachers, members of Boards of Management, representatives of the Parents' Association or other involved parents and teachers. In order to become more informed with regard to the realities of parental involvement in school development planning, it was decided that an approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods should be utilised. A rationale for the above hypotheses will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Research Methodology.

1.6 Methodology

The preparatory phase of the study involved a review of the literature on school effectiveness, school improvement, school development planning, parental involvement in schools with particular reference to parental involvement in policy formation and a review of the development of a more centralised role for parents in Irish education. This literature is described in detail in Chapter Two. Current research

literature relating to research methodology was also examined and carefully considered. It was decided to use a broad research strategy initially to provide a clear foundation for discussion and critique. The survey approach was selected to provide the basic research evidence, to facilitate a deeper understanding of the research question and to indicate themes and new knowledge which could be explored further at a later stage in the study. A structured questionnaire was constructed, for principals, with the purpose of enabling patterns to be observed and comparisons to be made. Details relating to the construction of the questionnaire, the pre-pilot and piloting of the questionnaire, together with information regarding the sample of principals chosen will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The analysis of this initial phase of the research provided rich data. The issues and patterns were further explored through a process of triangulation involving the qualitative phase of the research. During this phase, a case study approach was selected because of the necessity to focus on relationships and processes and the importance of gathering data from multiple sources. Focus group interviews were conducted with members of the Board of Management, representatives of the Parents' Association or parents who were centrally involved in activities in the school and teachers in three schools. A purposive approach, involving the identification of specific criteria based on the responses of forty-two principals to the questionnaire, was used in identifying the three schools for in-depth study. The education partners were interviewed with respect to the themes and new knowledge which emerged from the quantitative phase of the research.

1.7 Definitions

In this section to aid interpretation, words used frequently in the research are defined.

- **National School** – An establishment which provides primary education to its students and which may also provide early childhood education, which has been recognised by the Minister for Education and Science in accordance with Section 10 of the *Education Act, 1998*.
- The **Patron** is the person or body of persons recognised as such by the Minister for Education and Science as defined by Section 8 of the *Education Act, 1998*. The Patron may manage the school personally or may nominate a suitable person or body of persons to act as manager. Subject to the provisions of Section 16 of the *Education Act, 1998*, the Patron may at any time resume the direct management of the school or may nominate another manager.
- The **Board of Management / Manager** is the body of persons or the person nominated by the Patron and recognised by the Minister as defined by Section 14 of the *Education Act, 1998*. For schools having a recognised staff of more than one teacher the Board of Management consists of:
 - (i) Two direct nominees of the Patron.
 - (ii) Two parents of children enrolled in the school (one being a mother, the other a father), elected by the general body of parents of children enrolled in the school.
 - (iii) The principal (or acting principal) of the school.
 - (iv) One other teacher on the staff of the school, elected by vote of the teaching staff.
 - (v) Two extra members proposed by those nominees, described at (i) – (iv) above
- All Boards of Management of Catholic primary schools are members of the **Catholic Primary School Managers' Association (CPSMA)** which organises various meetings for Boards of Management, provides support and advice and

issues a newsletter a number of times each year.

- The **Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)** is the trade union representing teachers in primary schools.
- The definition of **parent** for the purposes of this study is as outlined in the *Education Act, 1998*, "parent" includes a foster parent, a guardian appointed under the *Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997*, or other person acting in *loco parentis* who has a child in his or her care subject to any statutory power or order of a court and, in the case of a child who has been adopted under the *Adoption Acts, 1952 to 1998*, or, where the child has been adopted outside the State, means the adopter or adopters or the surviving adopter. It must be noted, however, that when we speak of parental involvement in education "it is more accurate to speak of mothers than of parents" Ryan, (1995, p. 21). Also, it is also important to recognise, as described in *Parents as Partners in Schooling*, that "parents are not, of course, a homogeneous mass" OECD, (1997, p.16), with some parents becoming actively involved in parents' councils, parent-teacher associations, parent advisory groups and various types of parent-based fund-raising bodies, while others, far from demanding their rights to participate, believe that education is the school's job. This thesis will seek to elicit the views of a sample group of involved and uninvolved parents in a selected number of schools.
- **Parents' Association** means an association of parents of students of a recognised school established to promote the interests of the students in a school in co-operation with the board, principal, teachers and students of a school. Section 26 of the *Education Act, 1998* outlines the functions of a Parents' Association
- **National Parents' Council – Primary** is a body, recognised by the Minister for

Education and Science, established by parents of primary school children, with objectives which include, representing the views and interests of parents with regard to education and assisting parents in exercising their rights and role in the process of the education of their children.

- **Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP)** – The revised Primary School Curriculum was launched on September 9th 1999. The Primary Curriculum Support Programme is the agency of the Department of Education and Science with responsibility for a national programme of support through the provision of curriculum in-service seminars, which is complemented by school-based plans for implementation.
- **School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (SDPI)** - The School Development Planning Initiative was launched in May 1999 by the Minister for Education and Science to support schools in the challenging task of development planning. The support team at primary level is known by the acronym SDPS: School Development Planning Support. It comprises a national coordinator, regional coordinators and a team of full-time school development planning facilitators. School Development Planning Support has sought to provide a phased national framework of support at primary level, within which new material and professional resources for planning have been made available to schools. Schools have received a grant specifically for planning activities, together with the opportunity to avail of a planning facilitator. The role of the facilitator is to engage with them on school-based planning days identifying and working on their planning needs.
- **Disadvantaged Area Schools Scheme** – This scheme, first established in 1984, offers two forms of additional support to schools of disadvantaged areas with

large numbers of pupils from designated areas of disadvantage. Inclusion in the scheme entitles the school to additional finance and to additional staffing.

Specified indicators to determine inclusion of schools have been in place since 1990 including parental possession of a medical card, type of housing and receipt of unemployment assistance

- **Home/School/ Community Liaison Scheme** – The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme began in 55 primary schools serving designated areas of disadvantage in November 1990. It was established as a pilot initiative to encourage active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children. In January 2002, 278 primary schools and 166 schools at second level had joined the scheme.
- **Partnership** – The term partnership as described previously in this chapter is widely used and yet complex and difficult to achieve or evaluate. For the purposes of this research the definition of partnership is that which reflects a process which implies as outlined in Munn,
 - A sharing of power, responsibility and ownership – though not necessarily equally
 - A degree of mutuality, which begins with the process of listening to each other and incorporates responsive dialogue and ‘give and take’ on both sides
 - Shared aims and goals, based on common ground, but which also acknowledge important differences
 - A commitment to joint action, in which parents and professionals work together to get things done
Munn, (1993, p.105)
- **The School Plan** has the meaning assigned to it by Section 21 in the *Education Act, 1998*. This section requires the Board of Management of a school to ‘make arrangements for’ a school plan which must set out the school’s objectives and how the school proposes to achieve these objectives. There is a duty on those preparing the plan to follow any directions ‘relating to consultation with the

parents, the patron, staff and students of the school'. A duty is also placed on the Board to ensure the circulation of copies of the plan to 'the patron, parents, teachers and other staff'. It is within the context of the definition of a school plan outlined in the *Education Act, 1998* that the term is used in this study.

- **Whole School Evaluation** – Whole school evaluation involves collaboration between the inspectors undertaking the evaluation and the schools being evaluated. The outcomes of the school's own self-review, development and planning activities feed into the evaluation. Context factors inform the inspectorate's evaluation of the school. The whole school evaluation process evaluates the operation of the school under the headings of management, planning, curriculum provision, learning and teaching and student support. The reports provide schools with an external expert view on their operation and make recommendations on areas in which development ought to take place. They also acknowledge and affirm existing good practice. Whole school evaluation is a means of providing objective, dependable, high quality data on the education system. Based on this information, existing education policies can be modified as appropriate, following discussions with the partners in education.
- **Primary District Inspector** – Provisions in Section 13 of the *Education Act, 1998* define the evaluative and reporting function of the Inspectorate whose role is:
 - to identify, acknowledge and affirm good practice in schools
 - to promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools
 - to promote self-evaluation and continuous development by schools and staffs

- to provide an assurance of quality in the educational system as a whole, based on the collection of objective, dependable, high quality data.

The researcher in this instance is a primary district inspector with responsibility during the academic year 2002-2003 for 45 primary schools and 484 teachers. The size of the schools and other factors will be discussed in the context of the sample used in this research in Chapter Three, Research Methodology.

1.8 Delimitations of Scope and Key Assumptions

The purpose of this section is to describe the scope of this research beyond which generalisation of the results is not intended. This section builds on the limitations and key assumptions established in the previous section about definitions. Within the context of this study the focus is specifically on investigating parental involvement in school development planning within the national school system. In 1831 the National School System, which could be described as a state-funded primary education system was established nationwide. This system, *inter alia*, was given a legislative base when the *Education Act 1998* was enacted. In 2001/2002 there were 3,157 national schools in the country, 125 special schools aided by the Department of Education and Science and 47 non-aided primary schools which provided the Department with statistical returns of their enrolment (Department of Education and Science, 2003, Statistical Report 2001/2002, p.10). Special schools and private primary schools were not included within this study due to the very particular relationship that exists between schools, which cater specifically for pupils with special educational needs and their parents and also the different position of parents who pay fees to send their children to a private school. In choosing to limit this study to national schools the researcher was conscious that this system caters for the vast majority of pupils being educated at primary level in this country. In 2001/2002, 424,707 pupils were enrolled in ordinary

classes in national schools with 6,982 pupils enrolled in special schools and 6,381 pupils attending private primary schools, (Department of Education and Science, 2003, Statistical Report 2001/2002, p.15).

However, within the national school system there are exceptions also which are not included within the scope of the current study. Multi-denominational schools and gaelscoileanna were omitted as both evolved from significant parental initiative. With the aim of addressing the need for multi-denominational education, a group of parents came together in the 1970s. They founded the first multi-denominational school in Dalkey, County Dublin in 1978. The number of multi-denominational is increasing with new schools opening each year. These schools cater for children of many different faiths and for children with no faith. Gaelscoileanna have also evolved from parental initiative with the aim of ensuring a united voice in the education system for schools teaching through the medium of the Irish language. By 2002, the number of gaelscoileanna had risen to 224 schools. Given the level of parental involvement necessary to sustain the development of both multi-denominational schools and gaelscoileanna it was decided that a narrower focus, to include only regular national schools, the type of school attended by the vast majority of pupils in the country would be most appropriate in the context of developing an understanding of the core research problem of this study.

Another factor taken into consideration in deciding to investigate only national schools in the context of the current study, was an awareness that there had been a tradition of school development planning for a number of years in some schools prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. Summer courses to support a growing awareness of the school development planning process for primary school principals

and teachers were co-ordinated by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and Education Centres. Also supplementary resource material was published INTO, (1996 & 1999), Diggins, Doyle & Herron, (1996)

The scope of this research is confined to eliciting the perspectives of teachers, members of Boards of Management and representatives of Parents' Associations or parents who are involved in school activities in a sample of national schools. At present, there is one national association of parents which represents parents of pupils at primary level, the National Parents' Council – Primary, the second-level sector which includes voluntary secondary schools, vocational schools, community and comprehensive schools and community colleges, being more complex. All parents/guardians of children in a school make up the Parents' Association. The Parents' Association is however, more often taken to mean the elected committee which serves the association. Under Section 26(2) of the *Education Act, 1998* a Parents' Association shall 'promote the interests of students in a school in co-operation with the board, principal, teachers and students of a school...' The rights of parents to consult at national and local level about issues relating to the education of their children are clearly established in legislation. The Department of Education and Science is developing procedures to include the perspective of parents for example, during the academic year 2003-2004 the Department of Education and Science included the views of parents, in an agreed manner, in the case of all schools scheduled for Whole School Evaluation. The Parents' Association was invited to nominate a maximum of three officers of the Parents' Association to meet formally with the inspector(s) carrying out the evaluation. In the absence of an affiliated Association, the inspectors met with the parental representative on the Board of

Management. The purpose of the meeting was to gather information and parental views on topics of a whole-school nature. One of the central purposes of this research is to ascertain the current level of parental involvement in school development planning. It was decided for the purposes of this research, that it was appropriate to focus on ascertaining the views of elected parent representatives and parents who actively support and participate in a range of school initiatives. The parents therefore who participated in the focus group interviews were parent members of the Board of Management and representatives of the Parents' Association. In the school serving a designated area of disadvantage which currently does not have a Parents' Association the parents who participated in the focus groups were elected members of the Board of Management and parents who participate in a variety of school programmes and activities.

Section 27, *Education Act, 1998* entitled Information to Students and Student Council encourages the Board of Management to establish procedures for the purposes of informing students in a school of the activities of the school which facilitate the involvement of students in the operation of the school, having regard to the age and experience of the students, in association with their parents and teachers. The *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*, Section 22 promotes, in so far as is practicable, consultation with bodies engaged in the provision of youth work programmes or services related thereto, in the development of programmes of activities designed to encourage the full participation of students in the life of the school. It was also decided however, for the purposes of this study, to confine the definition of partners to teachers, members of the Board of Management and representatives of the Parents' Association or parents who are active participants in school activities in the school serving a designated area of disadvantage which does not have a formal Parents'

Association.

The control and management of primary education in Ireland is very complex. Denominational schooling has been the dominant form of schooling in this state since independence. Religious organisations representative of the Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist faiths exercise considerable power over aspects of schooling, including ownership, administration and the appointment of teachers. In addition, they control the education of primary teachers to a degree, through their involvement in and management of denominational colleges of education. In recent decades Irish society has been experiencing changing patterns in religious belief and practice with the schools to cater for children of the Muslim and Jewish faiths. Support and training for members of Boards of Management has to date, primarily been provided by school management organisations under the patronage of the Catholic Bishops and Protestant Churches. New provisions governing Boards of Management of national schools issued in 1997, however, confirm a move towards more representative Boards involving Patron's nominees, parents, principals, teachers' representative and community representatives agreed by the other Board members. The OECD Report *Reviews of National Policies for Education Ireland* (1991) found that Ireland has arrived at a watershed in its educational history when the control and management were being progressively and ineluctably secularised (1991, p.37).

The *Education Act 1998*, also has significant implications for the control and management of schools. It requires recognised schools to be managed in a 'spirit of partnership' Section 14 (1), however as yet, the implications of this statement have not been agreed between the education partners at national level – Department of

Education and Science, management bodies, National Parents' Council-Primary and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation. Previous research has shown that:

There seems to be no apparent realisation that partnership may involve changes in work practices. (Cluskey, M.S. 1996)

This research recognises changes with respect to engagement between the partners at a national level, however, the scope of the research is confined to investigating the consultation process with parents in the context of the development of the school plan at a local school level.

The literature review Section 2.5.2 will describe models of parental involvement in schools highlighting a progression in the development of home/school relations from, an approach which tries to improve communication with parents and create opportunities for involvement in their own child's learning, to a deeper level which requires involving parents in the uncertainties of change and in decision-making processes. This research documents the development of a more centralised role for parents in education in general, however, the main focus is to seek to understand the facilitating and inhibiting factors to involving parents in the school development planning process, a research topic previously rarely explored.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter described an overview of the research. It introduced the research problem, research questions and hypotheses. Justification for the research was offered, definitions presented, the methodology briefly described, the report outlined and the limitations given. Chapter Two will review the relevant literature to contextualise the study within the wider body of research relating to parental involvement in planning in schools and to refine the research problem in light of work

other researchers' work.

CHAPTER TWO – THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MORE CENTRALISED ROLE FOR PARENTS IN EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

The concept of giving a formal voice to parents in the education of their children is still very new in Ireland. This research seeks to examine current practice regarding consultation with parents and teachers in the development of the school plan. The component elements relating to partnership were uncovered as stated in Chapter One, Section 1.3 as a result of an analysis of

- documentation relating to the development of a more centralised role for parents in educational decision-making in Ireland
- recent Irish education legislation with specific reference to the principle of partnership and shared responsibility as enunciated in the *Education Act, 1998* and the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*
- Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications issued with respect to the development of school policies
- previous school effectiveness, school improvement and school development planning research
- literature relating to parental involvement in schools with particular reference to models of partnership in school development planning
- research which outlines the change process and provides insights into the dynamics of education reform

This chapter expands on the research problem and hypotheses arising from the body of knowledge developed in previous research and further identifies research questions about which data are collected in Chapter Three.

2.2 The Role of Parents in Irish Education

2.2.1 Parents in Education

The purpose of this introductory section of the review of relevant literature is

- to trace the development of the role of parents in Irish education with particular reference to changes since 1975
- to identify certain trends relating to the involvement of parents in educational decision-making at national, regional and school levels
- to note policy areas where collaboration with parents and the wider community is required, with particular reference to the development of the school plan
- to highlight the lack of substantive legislation underpinning the school system and review recent developments towards creating a modern legislative framework for education based on the principle of partnership.

2.2.2 An Historical Outline

The recent emergence of the voice of parents as participants in the debate relating to Irish education represents a welcome return of schools to parents and to local communities. Irish social history indicates that previous generations of parents placed a high value on education. There are frequent references to the tradition of learning and particularly references to parental support of the hedge schools in the writings of travellers in Ireland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Latocynaye, for instance, said that the people were too poor to build a decent schoolhouse, so they ran up a wretched building without doors or windows about five feet high; but when the weather was fine the pupils were taught in the open air which was better, he thought, than sitting in a stuffy classroom however well appointed.

(Dowling, P.J. 1971, p.87)

The hedge school owes its origin to the Penal Code which imposed a ban on education for Catholics, under severe penalties, both at home and abroad. It owes its name to the practice of keeping school under the sunny side of a hedge.

The hedge schools were all pay schools; they had to be, otherwise the schoolmaster could not exist. They might be regarded as a joint effort of parent and teacher; the one wanted his children taught, the other was prepared to teach them for a modest return.

(Dowling, P.J. 1971, p.97-98)

Coolahan in his address to the National Parents' Council 21st May 1988 entitled *The Evolving Primary School System and Parents' Role Within It*, states

Despite the extremely harsh political and socio-economic circumstances, a vast network of schools, up to 11,000, were provided of the people, by the people and for the people. Particularly in the context of the huge numbers of hedge schools, parents sought the service of school-masters, built the schools, paid the teachers in coin or in kind, provided what books and resources they could and got their children to attend. Although the masters were directly accountable to the parents, to a large degree cordial and intimate relationships were soldered between teachers and parents in the common cause of promoting learning in the local community. (p.1)

2.2.3 The National Board of Education

In 1831, the British government decided to provide a system of elementary education for Irish children and sought to get the acceptance of the Churches to the new system of national schools. The National Board of Commissioners of National Education in Ireland was established, not by statute but as the result of a letter addressed by the British Chief Secretary, Mr. E. G. Stanley to the Duke of Leinster, stating that the Government had empowered the Lord Lieutenant to constitute a Board to superintend a system of national education in Ireland. The system developed strictly on denominational lines, although in the Rules and Regulations for National Schools there was no mention of Protestant or Catholic schools. The Rules and Regulations for National schools, issued at intervals by the Commissioners of National Education, gave the manager complete control of the national school. He was responsible for the heating, cleaning, and general upkeep of the school. A grant was provided from state funds, but the grant was never adequate and the manager had to find funds to meet the excess costs. If a new school was needed the manager bought a site from his own funds and he also contributed to the cost of erection of the school. He appointed

teachers, subject to official approval, and could terminate their services under the conditions of the official contracts entered into with the teachers.

The alliance of priest and teacher, though disturbed by occasional differences and hostilities, was a very successful one and extended beyond school affairs into other parochial activities. One unhappy result of the alliance was that lay folk in the community, while sending their children to the national system and contributing as little as shame allowed to the school's upkeep, were shut out of all responsibility for the direction of the school. (O' Connor, S. 1986, p.5-6)

The power structure which operated at the turn of this century, therefore, excluded all but the State and the Churches from the policy process.

Reports on national schooling in the early decades of this century now emphasised and bemoaned the lack of interest of parents and local communities in their schools. The Dale Report of 1904 and the Killanin Report of 1919 laid heavy emphasis on how much the system suffered through the lack of more local involvement by parents and the general public in the work and upkeep of their national schools. (Coolahan, J. 1988, p.2)

2.2.4 Article 42, Constitution of Ireland 1937

The Treaty of December 6, 1921 was the foundation stone of an independent Ireland. A *Constitution for the Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann)* was enacted in 1922. It included an article on education, Article 10 which stated that 'All citizens of the Irish Free State have the right to free elementary education'. The framers of the 1937 Constitution, which was adopted by the people in a plebiscite on July 1st, 1937, did not include a right to free primary education. Article 42 of the *Constitution of Ireland, 1937* enshrined the rights of parents in relation to the education of their children. The 1922 Constitution had done no more than prescribe a right to free elementary education. Article 42 goes much further, by establishing a complex network of relationships between parents, children and the State. The underlying philosophy is clearly that of Catholic social theory; the family (based on marriage) is the primary unit group of society; parents have the responsibility, and right, to educate their children and to establish the value-system by which they will be reared; the State has

a subordinate role, to provide for free primary education and to intervene when parents neglect their obligations to their children. Article 42.1 states

The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.

Farry (1996), commenting on the rights and duties of the family and parents with respect to education in *Education and the Constitution*, writes

This was not in the first drafts and is undoubtedly of clerical origin, Rev. Cahill S.J. in response to a letter from Eamonn De Valera in 1936, asking for his ideas of what should be in the new Constitution suggested as a fundamental principle that: “primary responsibility and control of the education of the young belong inalienably to the parents and the Church, it is a function of the State to assist where necessary and supplement their efforts...” (De Valera Papers 1095/29 in Farry, 1996, p.56)

Though Article 42 emphatically acknowledged the priority of parents in the education of their children, parents and the laity were not afforded up to recent times any role in administration or the development of policies of schools.

Parents, to whom Churches and State accord primary rights in education, were effectively barred from taking any part in the policy process until very recently; in 1934 the bishops of the Catholic church had decided that ‘no lay committee of any kind is to be associated with the manager in school management’. In answer to a written query from a New York educationalist in 1953 as ‘to what extent parents participated in school activities’, de Valera replied:

There are few parent associations as such and parent participation is therefore usually in accordance with the desires of individual parents in this respect. The Constitution of Ireland however, lays down that the primary rights and responsibilities in education are those of the parents and our system of education is based throughout on this principle.

(Ó Buachalla, S. 1988, p.320)

It is evident that the practice adopted by both Church and State with regard to parents’ rights differed greatly from the principles enunciated.

2.2.5 Signs of Change

However, the power structure which excluded all but the State and the Churches from the life and work of the school, began to be challenged in the course of the second half of the twentieth century. The period 1960-1980 witnessed a dramatic increase in

government and public interest in education and there were signs of forthcoming change:

In November 1960, Dr. Noel Browne asked the Minister would he consider the setting up of parent-teacher organisations in all national schools so as to create more active interest by parents in the schools. In reply the Minister, said that, under the system then prevailing, the managers were the persons charged with the direct government of national schools, that he did not propose to change this system, and that he therefore had no function in the setting up of parent-teacher organisations.

(Dáil Reports, 1960, Vol. 182 in O' Connor, S. 1986, p.55-56)

In 1969 following Vatican II, the Catholic bishops proposed that lay people should become involved in the management of the schools. Coolahan has remarked that the Catholic Church Bishops' pastoral letter of 1969 was

a landmark in publicly recognising the right of parents to consultation about the education of their children and the value of good parent-teacher relationships.

(Coolahan, J. 1988, p.3)

Small changes in the perceived attitude of the State to the involvement of parents in their children's education began to emerge. In 1969 the government issued a booklet on the education system to parents *Ár nDaltaí Uile*. Two years later, Padraig Faulkner, Minister for Education in the preface to the new primary curriculum 1971, *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, stated:

Tá súil agam go ndéanfaidh sé méar ar eolas go speisialta do na tuismitheoirí agus go spreagfaidh sé iad le tuilleadh suime a chur ina bhfuil ar siúl ag a gcuid páistí ar scoil agus le comhoibriú faoi bhá agus faoi thuiscint a dhéanamh leis na múinteoirí. (*I hope that it will enlighten people, especially parents and that it will encourage them to take more interest in what their children are doing at school, and to co-operate with understanding and empathy with teachers.*)

(Department of Education, 1971, p.7)

2.2.6 Administrative Change

Finally in 1975, came an important change in the administrative structure of national schools. It was the first significant change in the management of national schools since the establishment of the system in 1831. Management Boards for national schools were instituted in that year. For the first time, parents and teachers were

involved directly in a minority position with the patron's nominees in the management of schools. The size of the Board was determined by the size of the school: for example for schools having a recognised staff of not more than six teachers:

- (i) Three members appointed by and representative of the Patron
- (ii) Two members, parents or legal guardians of children enrolled in the school (one being a mother, the other a father), elected by the general body of parents of children attending the school
- (iii) The principal teacher of the school

(INTO, 1995, p.247)

The composition of the Board has continued to be a contentious issue with the National Parents' Council (Primary) making a strong case at the National Education Convention in 1993 in favour of equal representation with other partners on Boards of Management. Initially, the inclusion of parent and teacher representation on the Board of Management would not appear to have represented a serious or significant departure from the old model which excluded all but the state and the churches. The major portion of the system at first and second levels still lay within the direct sphere of influence and managerial direction of the churches and was funded mainly by the state. This situation continued to yield dominant roles for the state and churches. Mungovan, (1994, p.117), in a study of the Board of Management in a second level community school in rural Ireland, found that

Parents nominees on a secondary school Board of Management felt that they had very little influence on the Board. They were constantly critical of their inability to influence matters concerning curriculum or pedagogy.

However, new management boards have undergone re-structuring, following negotiations in the context of a position paper on school governance '*The Governance of Schools*' (1994a), a *White Paper on Education* (1995), the *Education Bill, 1997* and the *Education Act, 1998* giving a more even representation between the parties. The *Education Act, 1998*, Section 14 provides that it is the duty of the patron to appoint,

where practicable, a Board of Management, the composition of which is agreed between the partners in education and the Minister. Section 8 defines the term 'patron' essentially recognising as patrons of a school those persons or bodies in control of all recognised schools at the date of the commencement of Part 11 of the Act. The following are those who have been recognised as patrons of primary schools:

- (a) Mainstream primary schools: bishop of the diocese;
- (b) Gaelscoileanna: The bishop of the diocese or Foras Patrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge;
- (c) Multi-denominational schools: the board of the company limited by guarantee which establishes the school;
- (d) Model schools: the State.

No doubt the composition of Boards of Management will evolve further in changing circumstances and due to changing demands. It is interesting to note the concept of parental representation on Boards of Management had been recommended by the Powis Commission over a century earlier.

Every school in the State should be managed by a local Committee regularly appointed, andevery school fund should have a Treasurer who we think should as a general rule be a layman.

(Powis Commission, 1870)

The development of a structure to facilitate parental involvement in education policy and decision-making was heralded in The Programme for Action in Education 1984/87 which stated

that in recognition of the primary role of parents in education parents would be facilitated in organising themselves into a National Parents' Council through which the view of parents would be expressed and that once established on a national basis, the Department of Education would consult with the council on matters relevant to educational development.

The National Parents' Council was established in 1985 by the then Minister for Education Ms. Gemma Hussey T.D. under Circular 7/85 from the Department of

Education. The aims of the council can be described briefly as:

- to represent the views of parents at local, national and European level
- to keep parents informed about educational issues
- to offer training for parents
- to foster cooperation between the partners in education at local, national and European level

Since it was established the council has provided representation for parents as partners in education on various government appointed education bodies and on many Departmental committees. Parents, therefore, were being recognised as full partners in the consultative process between the Minister, the Department and the other partners in education. In the context of policy development Circular 7/88 of the Department of Education and Science relating to the development of Codes of Discipline in schools was welcomed as enshrining “for the first time the right of parents to be involved in the drawing up and approving of the content of any school’s code” (Cúram 5, 1989, in Irish National Teacher’s Organisation, 1997, p.7). Formal recognition of the National Parents’ Council as the representative body for parents at first and second levels has been given statutory confirmation in the *Education Act, 1998*, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. It should be noted however,

when advisory committees are mandated, they work in a very small proportion of cases. (Fullan, 1991, p.238)

Also, Mortimore et al (1988) found that

Parents’ Associations were not necessarily positive, in that they could form a ‘clique’ for particular groups of parents and thus present a barrier to the involvement of others. (Cited in Mortimore, 1994, p. 23)

Fullan (1991, p.240) is careful to point out that ‘these findings do not lead to the

conclusion that advisory or other forms of parent involvement in governance should be abandoned.'

2.2.7 Variety of Educational Provision

While the majority of parents would seem to retain a preference for denominational education for their children, there are minorities which seek alternative schooling provision. A striking example of this is the emergence of a parental movement which favours multi-denominational education for their children.

With a view to addressing the need for multi-denominational education, a group of parents came together in the 1970s. They founded the first multi-denominational school in Dalkey, County Dublin in 1978 (the Dalkey School Project hereafter). This school was placed under the management of a limited company without share capital. The establishment of this school was a landmark in Ireland as it was the first time in more than a century that a State-funded school had been set up independently of church control and management other than a special school for the mentally handicapped.

(Glendenning, D. 1999, p.31-32)

Parents who favour a multi-denominational education for their children have grouped together in the Educate Together movement, whose role it is to articulate the perspective and views of parents of children attending multi-denominational schools.

Another group of parents who have been successful in getting schools reflective of their preference established, are parents who choose to have their children educated through the medium of the Irish language.

In 1973 a group of parents organised with the aim of ensuring a united voice in the education system for schools teaching through the medium of the Irish language. Shortly afterwards they established Gaelscoileanna, as the co-ordinating body for Irish medium schools, with the dual objective of assisting parents to set up Gaelscoileanna, and the safe-guarding of existing Irish medium schools. This voluntary body, which has been in receipt of grant-aid from Bord na Gaeilge since 1978, has facilitated parents wishing to establish further schools.

(Glendenning, D. 1999, p. 32)

Irish education is profoundly influenced by the long commitment of the Catholic and Protestant Churches and other religions in the provision of education. Denominational

schooling has been the dominant form of schooling in this state since independence and continues to be the choice of the majority of parents. In recent decades a more pluralist Irish society is emerging which will require a greater variety of educational provision.

2.2.8 Consultation to Legislation 1992-1998

The proposals for reform outlined in the Green Paper 1992 were intended

to initiate a wide national debate – among education professionals, parents, and all who have a commitment to the quality of education.

(Government of Ireland, Green Paper, 1992, Forward)

One of the challenges of change discussed in that document was the need to reflect the right of parents to be informed about, and involved in, the education of their children. A shortcoming of the system identified was that

The system as a whole lacks openness. Very little information is shared with parents, and they are also involved very little in running the system.

(Government of Ireland, Green Paper, 1992, p.2)

In responding to change the Green Paper stresses as one of its key aims the need to ensure greater openness and accountability throughout the system, and to maximise parent involvement and choice. The development of a School Plan which would set out the school's policy objectives in consultation with the partners is identified as an important vehicle for openness. It is suggested that

the publication of the School Plan would allow parents to understand the aims of the school, while the annual reports would provide a means for assessing performance against the plan.

(Government of Ireland, Green Paper, 1992, p. 25)

The Green Paper acknowledges the parent as the primary educator, complemented by the efforts of the State. The school, therefore, must have due regard for the rights and wishes of parents. Boards of Management are encouraged in a Department of Education and Science Circular Letter 24/91 Parents as Partners in Education to include a formal home/school liaison policy outlining the school's approach to links

with the home and the actions being taken to foster such links in the School Plan . The involvement of parents in developing a behaviour and discipline policy or inclusion in the School Plan is also proposed:

Close consultation with parents in the development of each school's behaviour and discipline policies, emphasising the role of parents in the development of agreed standards and the importance of good communications between parents and teachers on matters of behaviour and discipline.(Government of Ireland, Green Paper, 1992, p.124-125)

Particular emphasis is placed in the Green Paper on the need to engage parents of children who live in designated areas of disadvantage in the education process.

Reference is made to the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme which was launched in late 1990 in certain designated urban areas that suffer a high degree of disadvantage. This initiative will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The Green Paper, in describing a framework for development also highlights the need for a comprehensive and up-to-date legislative structure. It raises questions relating to the adequacy of the current legal basis for the education system. The publication of the Green Paper in 1992 was followed by a period of consultation and debate which led to The National Education Convention, which took place in Dublin Castle from 11th to 21st October 1993.

The National Education Convention brought together representatives from forty-two organisations – educational bodies, the social partners and the Department of Education – to engage in structured discussion on key issues of educational policy in Ireland. Participants, while acknowledging the contribution of religious in the provision and management of schooling in the past, noted that the older model of the patron “acting on behalf” of parents is coming under challenge. The Report of the Constitution Review Group 1996, in reflecting on the discussions at the Convention relating to the views of parents states

In the 1930s when the Constitution was framed, it was generally accepted that the church leadership was acting on behalf of parents in negotiations relating to education. This is no longer the situation In submissions in relation to the control and management of schools at both primary and second level the views of parent bodies (National Parents' Council – primary and post-primary tier) did not coincide with the views of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, particularly in relation to the structure of Boards of Management. Parents in the 1990s expect to be consulted in their own right and not to be consulted through intermediaries. The Minister for Education has accepted this and structures for consultation with parents are now in place. (p. 345)

The Report on The National Education Convention, 1994, however, notes that extra support would be needed, particularly in areas of disadvantage, where parents could sometimes be alienated from schools or reluctant to get involved. (p.26)

One of the central proposals in the Green Paper, as outlined previously, which was aimed at assisting schools in providing a quality education, is that which states that all primary and second-level schools should develop school plans. The plan would be prepared in consultation with the partners and approved by the Board of Management, subject to the approval of the patron, in relation to matters concerning the school's values and ethos. Involving the various partners in drawing up school plans is regarded as a valuable mechanism for promoting a collaborative culture in schools through engaging patrons, management, staff, parents, and, where appropriate, the wider community, in defining the school's goals and policy objectives as well as key strategies in relation to curriculum provision, approaches to teaching and learning, assessment practices, home/school/community liaison and enrolment policy.

There was some disagreement about the degree to which the various partners within the school community should become involved in this exercise. Involvement would depend on the particular task or element of the plan being developed. Parents would play a more significant role in the formulation of the general aims of the school and in the development of programmes in areas such as health and social education, and religious education, in drawing up discipline and homework policies and in promoting home/school/community links. The professional staff in the school would have responsibility for that part of the plan concerned with the delivery of the curriculum and the implementation of policy; parents would have a consultative role in these matters. (Report on the National Education Convention, 1996, p.57)

The White Paper on Education published in 1995 was the culmination of a lengthy consultation process. The White Paper described a comprehensive agenda for change and development. It also indicated the manner in which an appropriate legislative framework would be provided for key aspects of educational provision in the future. The principle of partnership is one of the educational principles, which the White Paper suggests should underpin the formulation and evaluation of educational policy and practice.

Effective partnership involves active co-operation among those directly involved in the provision of education and the anchoring of educational institutions and structures in the wider communities they serve.....Effective partnership also requires increased transparency and accountability, in order to allow the partners to exercise their rights and to be accountable for their responsibilities. (p.7)

The right of parents to be consulted and informed on all aspects of their child's education at school level, and their right as a group to actively participate in the education system at school, regional and national levels is outlined in Chapter 9 – Role of Parents. The White Paper outlined the commitment of Government to formal recognition by way of statutory confirmation of

- the National Parents' Council as the representative body for parents at first and second levels,
- the right of parents to parental representation on each school Board
- the duty to be placed on Boards of Management to promote the setting up by parents of a Parents' Association in every school in receipt of Exchequer funding.

Policy formation within the context of the development of the school plan is a key component of the strategy for the implementation of change described in the White Paper. As a result of the reservations and concerns expressed at the National Education Convention, however, it is suggested that the plan would consist of two components. The first component should include the relatively permanent features of

school policy, for example, ethos, aims and objectives of the school, curriculum provision and allocation, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and policies on home/school/community liaison, homework, discipline and enrolment. The second component of the plan, which might be described as the development section, would outline and report on specific planning priorities which the school would undertake. The development plans would not be published on a wide basis as they would be of a professional and technical nature and mainly of relevance to the staff and Board of Management. The White Paper, therefore, states that in practice, most of the development work will be devolved to the principal and staff in the schools. Boards will publish the policy section of the school plan to inform parents and others about school policies (p.158-159). Specific reference is, however, made to the role of parents in consultation with teachers and Boards of Management in the formulation, updating and implementation of certain policies, for example, policies on behaviour and bullying (p.163). Collaboration with parents in the development of school policy for the promotion of health and well-being is also encouraged (p.162). In this context it should be noted that in 1995, the same year as the White Paper on Education was published, a national Department of Education and Science Initiative, relating to Relationships and Sexuality Education gave specific guidance in relation to the process to be used and the partners to be involved in the development of a Relationships and Sexuality Policy. Questions relating to the development of the Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy development are addressed in the data gathering questionnaire to be completed by the principal teachers in the sample. Boards of Management will also be required to develop a formal home-school links policy, outlining the school's approach to links with the home and with the general body of parents, and stating the actions which will be taken to foster such links, as

part of its school plan (p.141). The White Paper in its concluding chapter indicates the manner in which an appropriate legislative framework will be provided for key aspects of educational provision in the future. The *Education Act, 1998* was enacted after a long process of intense debate and dialogue. This Act has provided, at last, a comprehensive legislative framework for Irish education.

2.2.9 A Legal Framework For Education - Education Act, 1998

The Green Paper on Education 1992, drew attention to the fact that the adequacy of current legislation, particularly at first and second levels, has been the subject of debate over many years.

The current legal basis for Ireland's education system has been as a patchwork of legislation and regulation, with much of the existing legislation stemming from the nineteenth century. Ireland is probably unique among European countries in the degree to which it administers an education system without a comprehensive and up-to-date legislative structure. (p.27)

The *Education Act, 1998* which sets out to provide a statutory basis for the first and second levels of Ireland's education system, had a long gestation period which included, as outlined previously, the publication of a Green Paper on Education 1992, a National Education Convention 1993 and a White Paper in 1995 leading ultimately to the *Education Bill, 1997* which fell with the dissolution of the 27th Dáil, (meaning parliament), and finally the *Education (No. 2) Bill, 1997* which was introduced in the Dáil in February 1998. The spirit of partnership is one of the key principles which permeates the Act – the Act requires the education system to be conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and the community served by the school and the State.

In his speech at the launch of the Education (No. 2) Bill on 12 December, 1997, Mr. Michael Martin T.D., Minister for Education and Science, referred to a “simple overriding premise: we need legislation that supports and enables the efforts of the partners in education,” and the Act sets out to do this. While it might be said that some of the partners are more advantaged than others, it could also be said, justly, that this only compensates for the years when the education system was largely exclusive of parents

and the wider community. *S.6 (e)* affirms ‘the right of parents to send their children to a school of parents’ choice; *S.6 (g)* lists parents specifically as people, with whom schools must liaise and consult, and *S.6 (m)* commits the education providers to the enhancement of ‘transparency’ in educational decision-making. If we add to these general *S.6* objectives the specific provision for parental involvement and consultation that is to be found in *S.26* (Parent Associations), *S.28* and *S.29* (Grievance and Appeals Procedures), *S.13(3)(a)(v)*, *S.13(4)(a)* and *S.13(4)(d)* (the duty of an inspector to advise parents), *S.30(2)(e)* (a conscience clause for parents), *S.23(2)(c)* (the involvement of parents in the creation of a supportive school environment), *S.14* (Boards of Management) and other parts of the Act too numerous to recite, it will be seen that the parents are being brought very much centre-stage in the statutory scheme.

(Mahon, O. 2000, p.9)

The significance of the statement of the principle of partnership, as one of the key principles central to the Act, is that it underpins a rationale for which every person concerned with the implementation of the Act must have regard. Accordingly, any policies agreed as part of the implementation of the Education Act are required to reflect, as appropriate, the principle of partnership, together with the other key principles enunciated. This has serious implications for the process by which the Board of Management collaborates with the partners in the context of school development planning. The Act also stipulates certain policy areas which the Board must draw up following consultation with the partners – its enrolment / admissions policy, including the policy of the school relating to expulsion and suspension of students, *S.15(d)*, the school plan which will include the objectives of the school relating to equality of access, participation in the school and provision for students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs, *S.21*. The spirit of partnership and shared responsibility, the obligation to provide for the education of every person in the State, equality of access, with specific reference to ensuring provision for persons with disabilities or other special educational needs, accountability and transparency and respect for diversity are recurring principles which permeate the Act.

The main provisions provide for

- the recognition of schools for the purposes of funding by public funds;
- the establishment of the inspectorate on a statutory basis;
- the establishment of Boards of Management of schools;
- the functions of principals and teachers;
- the establishment and role of Parents' Associations;
- appeals by students or their parents;
- the making of regulations by the Minister;
- the establishment of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment; and
- regulation of the State examination system.

The current act, the *Education Act, 1998* is reflective of a long process of consultation, as outlined previously, involving all the partners in education. While it is not radical legislation, it does, at last, provide a legislative framework to underpin Irish education.

2.2.10 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

The process of planning and developing new legislative provisions in relation to school attendance was heralded in the Green Paper on Education 1992. It stated that “a review of the working of the *School Attendance Act* of 1926, including an examination of the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved, will form part of the preparatory work for new legislation in education.” (p. 47). A Department of Education working group was set up and the results of their research and deliberations were published in the *School Attendance/Truancy Report* in April 1994. In an article published in the *Irish Times*, Tuesday September 2nd 1997, Education and Living, the education correspondent spoke to the Minister for Education, Mr. Micheál Martin, about his plans and priorities for his first year in office. On the legislative front together with the *Education (No. 2) Bill, 1997* discussed previously, the Minister stated that he hoped to present to the Cabinet a *School Attendance Bill* which will raise the school-leaving age to 16 and set up new structures for tracking and enforcing attendance. The development would be in

harmony with what was stated in the White Paper on Education (1995), on school-leaving age. “At present, the compulsory school-leaving age is fifteen. In future, the school-leaving age will be sixteen or the completion of three years of junior cycle education, whichever is later” (p.63). The *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* was enacted by the Oireachtas on the 5th July 2000. Part 1, Section 1(3) states “This Act shall, in so far as it is not in operation, come into operation 2 years after the date of its passing.” Essentially, the Act is about promoting school attendance. It also focuses on the issue of participation in school, specifically in terms of matters such as suspensions and expulsions. The Act also includes provisions in relation to children who are educated at home and in relation to young people in employment.

For the purpose of this thesis a number of sections are of particular importance as they require the Board of Management to consult with the partners in developing school policy. The enrolment policy S.19(1), the “statement of strategy” in relation to school attendance strategies S.22(1) and guidelines with regard to developing a Code of Behaviour S.23 (1) are required to be drawn up by the Board of Management after consultation with the principal, the teachers and the parents of students registered at the school. Schools are also encouraged to foster, promote and establish contacts with “bodies engaged in the provision of youth work programmes or services related thereto, or engaged in the organising of sporting or cultural activities” S.22(2)(d)(i). O’ Sullivan and Gilligan (1997), in reflecting on the re-conceptualisation of non-attendance at school state:

the enforcement of school attendance has moved ideologically from a model of punishment for non-attendance to one which views the non-attendance of children at school as a symptom of a more deep rooted socio-economic or psycho-social problem which requires a new form of intervention based on child-care principles, rather than those based on the threat of criminal proceedings (p.iii)

The need to encourage parents, particularly parents who left school early themselves,

to participate positively in the processes of the education of their children is central to the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board. This need is balanced by the requirement

to promote and foster, in recognised schools, an environment that encourages children to attend school and participate fully in the life of the school (S.10)(1)(b).

2.2.11 Concluding Comments

The review of the literature relating to parents in education indicates, that although Article 42 of the *Constitution of 1937* emphatically acknowledged the priority of parents in the education of their children, a notable tradition in Irish education up to recent times has been the lack of direct involvement by parents and the general laity in the policies and administration of schools. Compared with previous decades, the period 1975-2000 witnessed the development of a more inclusive attitude to the involvement of the partners in education in the power structure of the schools. As a direct result of a lengthy and broadly based consultation process, structures have been put in place at national and local levels to facilitate dialogue among all the major partners in education on crucial issues affecting the development of education. An appropriate legislative framework has also been provided which emphasises the principle of partnership and shared responsibility. Some policy areas, which are required to be drawn up in a consultative manner include the mission statement and vision for the school, ethos, aims and objectives of the school, enrolment policy, Code of Discipline, home/school/community liaison policy, homework, school attendance and health and social education policies. Involving the various partners in drawing up the school plan is regarded as a valuable mechanism for promoting a collaborative culture in schools. The planning process can also, contribute to the improvement of the quality of education in schools.

2.3 The Inclusion of Parents in Policy Formation – An Overview of Some Recent Department of Education and Science Circular Letters, Policy Guidelines and Publications

Section 2.2, Chapter Two traced the development of a more centralised role for parents in Irish education. Signs of change with respect to partnership with parents named include administrative change, for example, parental representation on Boards of Management and the establishment of Parents' Associations. A further indicator of changing times is the recognition of the importance of home/school relationships in many Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications. Many of the above make reference to the importance of consultation with parents and are worth reviewing as they give further insight into how the peripheral role of parents in education is changing. Some recent Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications will be discussed under the following headings:

- Policy areas 2.3.1
- Parents and curriculum 2.3.2
- School development planning documentation 2.3.3
- Children with special educational needs 2.3.4
- Evaluation of schools 2.3.5

Section 2.3.1 Department of Education and Science Publications, Parents and Policy

Circular Letter 24/91 Parents as Partners in Education, states that partnership for parents in education is a policy aim of the Government.

Through the Programme for Economic and Social Progress the Government and the Social Partners have formally recognised the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children as an essential strategy of educational policy and practice. This Circular is concerned with ensuring that partnership for parents is positively pursued at local level by each national school.

This circular emphasises the importance of developing a home/school links policy.

Each national school will be required to establish as part of its overall school policy /

plan, a clearly defined policy for productive parental involvement.

In regard to school discipline Circular 33/91 of the Department of Education and Science (Department of Education and Science, 1999) states that it is important that parents “be involved in drawing up a Code of Behaviour and Discipline”.

The inclusion of parents in the consultation process with respect to policy formation became a feature of guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Science to schools, particularly in relation to Social, Personal and Health Education. In 1993, *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools* were issued to schools. These guidelines include parents as one of the groups to be consulted in the formulation of the policy.

The managerial authority of each school in developing its policy to counter bullying behaviour must formulate the policy in co-operation with the school staff, both teaching and non-teaching under the leadership of the principal, and in consultation with parents and pupils. (p.9)

In encouraging consultation with parents in the development of an anti-bullying policy the Department of Education and Science is recognising the special knowledge and understanding parents have of their children and their concern for their development and welfare. Through involvement in policy development and the circulation of aspects of school policy, parents become more aware of school procedures and confident that problems will be dealt with and feedback given.

MacBeath (1999), describes a practical approach to identifying what makes a good school and the part that pupils, parents and teachers can play in school improvement. Parents, school governors, teachers, senior management, support staff and pupils were asked to identify indicators concerned with links between home and school, and between teachers and parents. At the sessions with parents, the importance of hearing the voices of parents in school consultation and decision-making was highlighted.

There were also some strong feelings expressed by parents on the subject of bullying and racial harassment. They felt that these issues could not be tackled unless there were strong supportive links between home and school, and regular communication and agreement on how bullies and the bullied should be dealt with. It was a discussion that touched on one of the more sensitive areas of home, school and community relationships, and conflict of values. It illustrated again that parents come to issues such as this with a different perspective and different proposed remedies' (p.57).

MacBeath highlights the importance of informing parents about what the school is doing and conducting training sessions for parents which put the issue into a broader context. He states

It is a salutary to be reminded that a decade or so ago many schools denied or underestimated the existence of bullying and racial or sexual harassment within the school, while pupils and parents were fully aware of what was really happening (p.57)

The Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and Sexuality Education, (1995), outlines in detail the consultation process involving all the partners, teachers parents and management for policy development (p.11). More recently, in May 2002 the Department issued guidelines to all primary and post-primary schools to assist them in the development of substance use policies. Step 1 as outlined on page 3 of the guidelines is to establish a core committee to develop the policy.

Structures for developing a school substance use policy should ideally be based on existing school structures for planning and curriculum change and should involve the participation of management, principal, teachers, parents/guardians, students and other relevant groups. It is recommended that a core committee representative of the whole school community be established to develop the policy.

(Department of Education and Science, 2002a, p.3)

Recent research involving two national surveys, one of parents of primary school children and one of primary school teachers (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2002), sought to determine values and perceptions in relation to the involvement of parents in the process of school planning.

In the survey five areas of school policy were covered; general school policies, information brochures, Codes of Discipline, formal curriculum and special programmes (such as Stay Safe and RSE etc.)

(Mac Giolla Phádraig, in *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Autumn 2003, p.37)

Both parents and teachers “were more affirmative of parental involvement in Codes

of Discipline and special programmes rather than in the other areas.” (Ibid. p.42)

There was also evidence to suggest that in some cases parents receive a final copy of policies in these areas. However, overall there was no evidence to suggest that parents perceive themselves to be actively involved in any area of school policy. (Ibid. p.43-44)

Section 2.3.2 Department of Education and Science Publications, Parents and Curriculum

Yet another indicator that the peripheral role of parents in education is changing is the inclusion of parents in policy making at national level. While the focus of this thesis is parental involvement in policy formation at school level, it is important to note that, Circular 24/91, states that the National Parents’ Council provides representation for parents, as partners in education, on various Government-appointed educational bodies. Parents, for example, are represented on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, a corporate body established under Section 39, of the *Education Act, 1998*. The function of the Council is to advise the Minister on matters relation to –

- (a) the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools, and
- (b) the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum. (Section, 41(1))

Parent representatives were members of all the curriculum committees set up to review the curriculum for primary schools. The Primary School Curriculum, which acknowledges the central role of parents in their children’s education was issued by the Minister for Education and Science in September 1999. A booklet, *Your Child’s Learning, Guidelines for Parents*, was distributed to all parents of primary school children to help them contribute in the most effective way to their children’s learning. The launch of *Your Child’s Learning, Guidelines for Parents* was seen as presenting

an opportunity for schools to communicate with parents and inform them about the curriculum and the school's plans for its implementation. This research seeks to glean the perspective of principals, teachers, members of the Board of Management, representatives of Parents' Association and other parents who are actively involved in the school with regard to the involvement of parents in the development of curricular policies. Also, some data relating to the engagement of schools with the national support service to support curriculum implementation, Primary Curriculum Support Service, will be gathered from the various partners.

Teacher returns in recent research referred to in the previous section of this thesis Section 2.3.1 (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2002 in Irish Educational Studies, Vol. 22, No. 2 Autumn, 2003 p. 37-46) suggest that for teachers

informing parents of the formal curriculum is their preferred level of parental involvement. While parents recorded a lower mean score for involvement in the formal curriculum than they did for involvement in general school policies, their score still indicates a desire for consultation on the curriculum among many parents. The area of the formal curriculum is the one area where parents recorded a higher mean score than teachers, reinforcing the point that parents wish for a greater level of parental involvement in the curriculum than teachers do. (p. 43)

2.3.3 Department of Education and Science Publications, Parents and Planning

The other significant national support service to guide national schools in developing a school plan is the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary. *Developing a School Plan – Guidelines for Primary Schools*, was published by the Department of Education and Science in 1999. Yet again the National Parents' Council – Primary had a representative on the consultative committee involved in the design and compilation of this publication. The guidelines are part of a package of supports and resources on school development planning. They place a particular emphasis on collaboration within the entire school community.

School planning is essentially a process in which policy and plans evolve from the ever-changing and developing needs of the school community. An important dimension in this process of planning is the collaborative effort and co-operation that takes place between the principal, the teachers, the Board of Management and the parents of the pupils attending the school. The involvement of all the partners in this collaborative exercise enables each to make its own special contribution which in turn is complemented by the contribution of the other partners. (p.9)

Previous research Nic Craith, 2001 as outlined in *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Autumn, 2003, p.17-33, indicates that there was some delay in the publication of the above guidelines

According to the DES it had been difficult to get agreement around the table on two particular issues – the role of parents and the Board of Management and the issue of assessment. (p.22)

The Department of Education and Science recognised the importance of the need to provide guidelines for schools in relation to school planning and had established a representative committee in the early 1990s to prepare such guidelines.

It appears that schools did not feel ready for self-assessment and self-evaluation or for the involvement of the broader school community at that time. (Ibid. p. 22)

Developing a deeper understanding of the engagement of schools with school development planning is central to this research, however, the focus is specifically related to how schools are engaging parents in the process.

In 2003 the School Development Planning Initiative published a National Progress Report 2002. This publication gives a progress report on the School Development Planning Initiative, Primary and Post-Primary with particular reference to the calendar year 2002. Chapter Six summarises the strengths of the support programmes in 2002 and identifies issues to be addressed in the next phase of the initiative. One of the challenges identified for future development of school planning is the partnership dimension of school development planning.

Stimulation of interest in school development planning has been most successful among teachers. Much more needs to be done to establish the inclusion of the other partners as a normal part of development planning in schools. The low level of involvement of Boards

of Management in the school development planning process needs to be addressed, in cooperation with management bodies, through provision of information and resources dealing with the specific responsibilities, roles and needs of boards. The role of parents in the school development planning process needs to be strengthened and expanded, in cooperation with parent organisations, through provision of information and resources addressing the specific needs of parents. (p.46)

The report highlights the fact that increases in the involvement of parents (an additional 6%) and Boards of Management (an additional 5%) since these schools' inclusion in the initiative have been modest (p.29).

Table 2.1: School Development Planning Initiative and Involvement of Boards of Management and Parents

	Before Inclusion	After Inclusion
Board of Management	18%	23%
Parents	8%	14%

The low level of involvement of Boards of Management has been identified as an issue of concern in the report given the responsibility of the Board in relation to school planning under the terms of the *Education Act, 1998*, Section 21.

Involvement of partners was most common in organisational planning. When Boards of Management were involved in schools' planning activities, 84% of this involvement was in organisational areas, with 12% involvement in curricular planning. Similarly, 90% of parental involvement was in organisational planning. (p.29)

2.3.4 Department of Education and Science Publications, Parents and Pupils with Special Educational Needs

High levels of co-operation are recommended between class teachers, learning-support teachers and parents in the Department of Education and Science publication, Learning-Support Guidelines (2000, b). These guidelines are aimed at ensuring that all children achieve appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy during the course of their primary education. Chapter 3, Partnership in Learning Support outlines the role of the principal with regard to the learning-support programme and the operation of services for children with special educational needs. Among the responsibilities named is

The principal should:
work with teachers and parents in the development of the school plan on learning support
and special needs. (p.39)

Principals are encouraged to

- establish policies and procedures which enable parents to become involved effectively in the provision of learning support
- facilitate the organisation of information sessions for all parents on issues relating to the school's learning-support service and
- support the involvement of other members of the community in contributing to the learning-support programme by inviting them to train and participate in activities such as paired reading, story-telling and library time.

Yet again these guidelines were drawn up following extensive consultations between the Department and representatives of parents, school management and teachers.

2.3.5 Department of Education and Science Publications, Parents and Evaluation of Schools

In December 2002, the Department of Education published *Fifty School Reports: What Inspectors Say*. This report comments on quality and standards in a small number of Irish primary schools. It highlights 'collaborative planning process involving all the partners' as a feature of good practice (p.11). Under the heading parental involvement (p. 10) the report names:

- active parental involvement
- vibrant Parents' Associations
- organisation of parent information events, and the provision of courses for parents

as features of good practice. However, concern is raised regarding two particular issues:

- lack of parental involvement in school development planning and
- absence of effective communication between Parents' Associations and schools.

A more recent publication, *Looking at our School – an aid to self-evaluation in primary schools*, was prepared by the Evaluation Support and Research Unit of the Department of Education and Science Inspectorate. It is designed to assist the school community in reviewing and evaluating the work of their school. This document presents a set of themes through which a primary school may undertake a review and self-evaluation of its own performance. These themes encompass five broad dimensions, or areas, of the operation of the school, as follows:

1. school management
2. school planning
3. curriculum provision
4. learning and teaching in curriculum areas
5. support of pupils.

A number of the themes identified as a basis for evaluation highlight the importance of hearing the voice of all the partners:

- The extent to which the Board's decision-making in the areas of policy, planning, resources and staffing is characterised by openness, accountability, clarity of communications, and sharing of responsibility
- The extent to which continuous self-review is integral to the practice of the Board of Management and incorporates the views of all groups within the school community
- The extent to which the school engages in regular review, on a partnership basis, of its relationship with parents and the wider school community, including outside agencies
- The involvement and collaboration of patrons or trustees or owners, school management, teaching staff, support staff, pupils, parents and the wider school

community in the development of the school plan

- Communication between the school and parents (and pupils where appropriate) regarding the content of the school plan.

2.3.6 Concluding Comments

The above review of some recent Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications shows a commitment in theory to partnership for parents in education. This as stated previously is a policy aim of the Government. This study has as its focus a research question which seeks to establish, whether the aspiration of partnership espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is being realised through the process by which parents are being currently consulted in the context of school development planning. In the context of this research the partners in education in the sample schools will be asked to review current practice with respect to:

- who is currently consulted with respect to school development planning?
- what process is used to develop policy?
- what policy areas have parents been involved in developing to date, and
- what supports are in place for developing a partnership approach to school development planning?

This review of Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications will facilitate the development of suitable questions for the initial phase of this research, together with themes to be discussed with the partners in the qualitative phase of this research.

2.4 Towards a Rationale for Parental Involvement in School Development Planning

2.4.1 Introduction

In order to clarify the rationale for parental involvement in education this section of the literature review will trace briefly, the emergence of the school effectiveness movement, with particular reference to research which has identified home-school partnership as one of the key factors found to be associated with effective schools. It will describe school effectiveness research, focussing particularly on the importance of partnership with parents, from a variety of educational systems. It will trace the development of school effectiveness research from the early identification of effective schools, to the identification of characteristics or correlates associated with effective schools and finally, to the development of guidelines and strategies for school improvement.

School effectiveness remains a dynamic research area with evolving methodology, new insights and increasing theory building. From the perspective of teachers and principals, school effectiveness research will be little more than an interesting intellectual activity unrelated to the daily work of schools and of little significance in the various reform agendas unless it is tied to proved approaches to effecting change in the structures and cultures of schools. Fortunately, the rich field of school improvement has evolved separately but simultaneously. While different in theory, methodology and purposes, in many countries it has only been in recent times that school improvement has been linked with school effectiveness to bring about meaningful change in schools and school districts. (Stoll L. and Fink D., 1996, p.41)

The processes of school improvement and the relevance of research in the field of school improvement to the development of fundamental conditions which facilitate school planning will be discussed. The changing relationship between schools and parents, which fosters a partnership approach to including parents in meaningful school decisions will be outlined.

2.4.2 Perceptions of School Effectiveness

What do we mean by the statement that a school is 'effective'? School effectiveness

researchers' aim to ascertain whether differences in resources, processes and organisational arrangements affect pupil outcomes and if so, in what way. It is concerned with the extent to which schools differ from one another in the levels of pupil achievement, when intake characteristics are controlled for, and the identification of the school characteristics to which these differences can be attributed. Ultimately, school effectiveness research seeks to describe what an effective school looks like. In educational discussions the term 'effective' is often associated with the quality of education. One of the educational principles enunciated in *Charting Our Education Future*, White Paper on Education, (1995), is an entitlement 'to the highest possible standard of teaching and to be facilitated in the attainment of the highest quality of learning' (p.7).

Quality is brought about by maximising the efforts of all those responsible for the education of students and by co-ordinating all the structures of the system so that centres of education, from pre-school to university, are effective – that is, places where effective teaching, learning and research take place and where the highest standards of achievement are obtained by every student, appropriate to their ability.

(Government of Ireland, 1995a, p.8)

The emergence of research relating to school effectiveness resulted from social science findings that argued that home background had a far greater influence on a child's development than the school attended (Coleman et al. 1966; Plowden 1967; Jencks et al. 1972). There was widespread acceptance among academics that schools made little impact on children's development and that which school a child attends really did not matter.

To combat this view, a wide range of research efforts on separating the impact of family background from that of the school, and ascertaining whether some schools were more effective than others, and if so, what factors contribute to the positive effects (for example, Brookover et al. 1979; Rutter et al. 1979). The title of the British study *School Matters* (Mortimore et al. 1988) illustrated the intent of school effectiveness researchers to demonstrate that schools, indeed made a difference.

(Stoll L. and Fink D., 1996, p.27)

A brief description of some of the research projects and their findings taken from

different education systems will provide some insights into what the effectiveness-promoting school characteristics so often stated really mean and an understanding of the central questions which school effectiveness research seeks to address.

2.4.3 A Sample of Five Studies Relating to School Effectiveness

2.4.3.1 Rutter et al. 1979

The first major study conducted in Britain was by Michael Rutter and a team from the University of London (1979) who compared the 'effectiveness' of ten second level schools in inner city London.

A variety of studies in both Britain and the United States have clearly indicated that the main source of variations between schools in their effects on the children does not lie in the factors such as buildings or resources. Rather, the crucial differences seemed to concern aspects of school life to do with its functioning as a social organisation. Observers had noted differences between schools in morale, climate and atmosphere but little was known about what staff actions or activities lay behind these intangible but important features. Accordingly, it seemed important to study schools in some detail over a prolonged period of time in which the many facets of school life could be assessed by direct observation as well as by interviews with staff and pupils. This we sought to do.
(Rutter et al., 1979, p.20-21)

Over 2,000 pupils were followed throughout the whole of their secondary schooling and data collected on their attendance, exam results, behaviour in school, and delinquency outside. Although they served an inner-city area of chronic social disadvantage some of the schools seemed, nevertheless, to have provided a positive influence on their pupils' development, while others were less successful. This investigation clearly showed that children benefit from attending schools which set good standards, where the teachers provide good models of behaviour, where the children are praised and given responsibility, where the general conditions are good and where lessons are well conducted.

The findings of Rutter's 15,000-hours study could be reinterpreted as saying that schools where demands, constraints and choices were more clearly marked out seemed to be more effective.
(Handy C. and Aiken R. 1986, p.63)

2.4.3.2 Mortimore et al. 1988

The research of Rutter et al. was used as a reference point for a major study commissioned by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), which was carried out among a sample of 50 schools from the 600 primary schools that were under the control of ILEA. The main author was a member of the research team that under *Rutter's* supervision published the report *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, discussed previously.

The central questions that were intended to be answered by Mortimore et al. (1988) were:

- Are some schools or classes more effective than others when controlled for variance in pupil intake?
- Are some schools or classes more effective for certain groups of pupils?
- If some schools or classes are more effective than others what factors could account for this?

(Scheerens J., 1992, p. 130-131)

From this study of school and class characteristics that could explain why one school is more effective than another, twelve factors emerged, which are listed and briefly explained:

1. Purposeful leadership of the staff by the head. This occurs where the head understands the school's needs, is actively involved in the school but is good at sharing power with the staff. He or she does not exert total control over teachers but consults them, especially in decision-making such as spending plans and curriculum guidelines.
2. Involvement of the deputy head. Where the deputy was usually involved in policy decisions, pupil progress increased.
3. Involvement of teachers. In successful schools, the teachers are actively involved in school curriculum planning. Consultation with teachers about decisions on spending was also important.

4. Consistency among teachers. Pupils benefit from continuity in teaching staff and from all teachers following common guidelines.
5. Structured sessions. In effective classes the work is clearly arranged and organised by the teachers, who ensured there was plenty for them to do yet allowed some freedom within the structure. Negative effects were noted when children are given unlimited responsibility for a long list of tasks.
6. Intellectually challenging teaching. Not surprisingly, pupil progress was greater where teachers were stimulating and enthusiastic. The incidence of 'higher order' questions and statements was seen to be vital - that is, where teachers frequently made children use powers of problem-solving.
7. A work-centred environment. This was characterised by children enjoying their work and being eager to start new tasks. The noise level was low, and movement around the class was usually work-related and not excessive.
8. A limited focus within sessions. It appeared to be more beneficial to centre learning material on a clear core theme than allow pupils to work in groups on several themes.
9. Maximum communication between teachers and pupils. Children performed better the more communication they had with their teacher about the content of their work. In practice this means that traditional teaching, where the teacher addresses the whole group, works better than being very busy with individual pupils.
10. Record keeping. Both for competent educational administration by the head and for competent teaching by staff, maintaining records on pupils appeared to be important.

11. Parental involvement. Parental involvement with school policy, curriculum and what takes place in the classroom appeared to go hand-in-hand with better results.
12. A positive climate. A positive climate is mainly characterised by the giving of frequent positive feedback to pupils. Other aspects that were regarded as important were the teacher's interest in the 'whole' pupil – interest in what happens to the child outside school hours – and good cooperation among teachers.

The above 'characteristics' can be grouped into factors that concern school policy (1-4), those that relate to classroom policy (5-9), and finally, aspects of relevance to both school and class policy (10-12).

To sum up, we can say that an 'effective school' according to the study of Mortimore et al. is characterised by: educational leadership at a distance, in which maintaining records on pupils' progress is an important resource; a positive and enthusiastic atmosphere backed up by the involvement of the head and parents; and structured and well-regulated teaching. (Scheerens, 1992, p.135)

Mortimore et al. having gathered data on the attainment, social class, sex and race of pupils on entry to the junior schools, still found that this detailed individual information was a poor predictor of what progress the children would make over their next four years, without the addition of further data on the organisational character of their schools.

2.4.3.3 The Halton Board of Education, Toronto, Effective Schools Project, 1986

The purpose of the project was to enhance the quality of the system and schools' performance through the application of the characteristics of effective schools. The Halton effective schools approach developed a model which has twelve characteristics. These characteristics fall into three broader categories which include:

1. A common mission which is a shared and a communicated vision of school goals and priorities. The principal plays a major role in the encouragement of teachers', parents' and students' involvement in, commitment to and responsibility for the vision.

2. An emphasis on learning, characterised by teachers who have and convey high expectations to their students. Teachers also use a variety of teaching and monitoring strategies and work together to create curriculum materials linked to the school goals.
3. A climate conducive to learning, where morale and self concept are high, due to active involvement and responsibility on the part of students, recognition and incentives, and fairness and consistency with regard to student behaviour. The learning environment is attractive, with work displays and attention paid to comfort. It is also inviting to parents and members of the community who are also involved in school life.

(Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.16)

During the project it was found that developing shared values, ensuring a climate for change and maintaining a collaborative culture throughout the growth planning process, not only fostered the success of the planning process but also determined the longevity of the changes within the plan. Collaboration with parents and the wider community in the development of a common mission together with an awareness of the importance of involving all the stakeholders in education in the life of the school were key concepts in the Halton Board's project. Stoll and Fink (1996) in commenting on the involvement of parents in the project state:

One of the compelling messages from our effective schools work with parents in Halton is their desire to know what is going on in schools. They know schools have changed. Most thinking parents recognise that change is natural and predictable, but they ask, why 'these' changes? It is ironic that in an age of information and communication this is such a pervasive problem. Part of it results from the 'psychological moat' which many parents feel exists around the schools. They are invited in on festive occasions for a 'show and tell', but kept quite separate from the ongoing life of the school. Parents who feel cut off from schools are prepared to believe the worst and accept aberrations as the norm.

(Stoll L. and Fink D., 1996, p. 163)

The Halton Board's Project which began as an investigation and application of effective schools characteristics, evolved through a process called school growth planning, to the point where activities are now taking place in schools which are impacting significantly on the classroom. This process of school growth planning will be discussed in greater detail later in the section of this research which deals specifically with school development planning.

2.4.3.4 Levine and Lezotte (1990)

In the United States, Levine and Lezotte, (1990), examined numerous large and

small-scale studies of unusually effective schools and identified the following characteristics or correlates, which almost coincide with the factors espoused by Mortimore. They emphasise that the correlates constitute a set of characteristics identifying considerations, all or most of which must be addressed, if a school is to be effective in producing student achievement.

- (1) Productive school climate and culture
- (2) Focus on student acquisition of central learning skills
- (3) Appropriate monitoring of student progress
- (4) Practice-oriented staff development at the school site
- (5) Outstanding leadership
- (6) Salient parent involvement
- (7) Effective instructional arrangements and implementation
- (8) High operationalized expectations and requirements for students

(Levine and Lezotte 1990, cited by Reynolds and Cuttance, 1992, p. 30)

2.4.3.5 Emer Smyth, (1999), Do Schools Differ?

The Department of Education and Science in Ireland funded research which sought to identify the key schooling processes associated with enhanced academic and development outcomes among second-level pupils. This study arose from a concern by the Department of Education and Science to inform policy development with information on the specific nature of second-level schools in Ireland. It sought to test whether factors in the international literature relating to school effectiveness have an impact on pupil outcomes in second-level schools in Ireland. In contrast, however, to many previous studies, a multidimensional view of school effectiveness is adopted, focusing not only on academic outcomes but also on absenteeism and drop-out and on other non-academic outcomes such as self-image and stress levels among

pupils. The study draws on both quantitative and qualitative data, using a national survey of over 100 schools and elaborating the general pattern through detailed case-studies of six schools. Some of the significant school factors identified associated with particular dimensions of academic and personal/social development among pupils include:

- Class organisation – the system of class allocation used has important consequences for a number of pupil outcomes (p.219)
- Curriculum and subject choice – a more open approach to subject choice has positive consequences for pupils (p.220)
- Pupil involvement –pupils tend to do better academically and are less likely to drop out when they are more integrated into the school....(p.221)
- Parental involvement – the limited information available on parental involvement in the sampled schools indicates a positive association between the extent of such parental involvement and pupil outcomes (p.222)
- Disciplinary climate – pupils tend to do better academically in schools which are “strict but fair” and where there is less disruption of learning time through pupil misbehaviour (p.222)
- Teacher-pupil interaction – the research indicates a strong relationship between the quality of teacher-pupil interaction and academic and development outcomes among pupils (p.223)
- School management – less academically effective schools appear to be characterised by less staff involvement in decision-making in the school, less emphasis on formal staff meetings, less positive relations between management and staff, and less supportive relations among colleagues (p.224)
- Staff development – more academically effective schools have had a greater emphasis on whole school development with in-house programmes specifically tailored to address the needs of the particular school (p.225)
- School development – less academically effective schools tend to be characterised by less consultation between management and staff and lower levels of parental involvement (p.226)

It is interesting to note that one of the recommendations of the study is that schools should be given support to involve parents in the formal and informal life of the school. Information gleaned from the case-study schools indicates that schools vary in the extent of parental involvement.

The role of the formal Parents' Association ranges from fund-raising to involvement in policy development in the school. Parental participation in events tends to be higher for practical activities (such as fund-raising and book loans schemes) and information sessions than for more policy-oriented tasks. In addition, representatives of Parents' Associations report difficulties in involving other parents in such activities.
(Smyth, 1999, p.222)

The study has identified school effectiveness factors which are associated with enhanced academic and personal/social development among pupils, which can be used as a basis for developing models of good practice for all second-level schools.

The effective school movement has progressed from initially, the identification of effective schools, to the description of the more effective schools through identifying clusters of correlates of effectiveness, to the point where the processes and context implications of school effectiveness models are recognised.

There is room for further models of school effectiveness but these must pay attention to the practical needs of education and the processes of school improvement.
(Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.40)

2.4.4 Limitations of School Effectiveness Research and Practice

There has been much debate regarding school effectiveness research. Criticisms include:

- a concern that approaches to school effectiveness tend to provide checklists of characteristics which do not give a clear, holistic sense of what makes an effective school and how one might be established
- school effectiveness research is quite strong on school environments or climates but weak on the organisational arrangements that are associated with effective school environments
- the research findings generally depend on cognitive outcomes in basic school subjects

Schools which are effective in these conventional and restricted terms might not be at all effective in terms of the demands of the postmodern, postindustrial world. We do not know, for instance, what effective schools which created success in problem-solving, creativity, risk, flexibility, or learning-how-to-learn would look like.

(Hargreaves, 1994, p.59)

- recent research to improve quality in educational outcomes is challenging many of the simplistic certainties of school effectiveness which explained variations in children's growth. It would appear that the great majority of variation between schools is in fact due to classroom variation according to Scheerens (1992), p.70.
- there is also mounting evidence that effective schools do not necessarily remain stable over time. The difficulty of sustaining school effectiveness still remains.
- in some instances understandings of effectiveness are culturally and contextually specific, for example, cultural expectations of leadership differ between leadership styles associated with success in American as against schools in other jurisdictions.

However, despite concerns regarding the limitations of school effectiveness and practice, this review of literature has revealed that an analysis of the lists of characteristics which have emerged from school effectiveness studies internationally has shown a remarkable level of correspondence in the characteristics or correlates of effective schools. It has provided the researcher with an understanding of the contribution this research can make to selecting themes for example, shared vision / goals, school climate, democratic decision-making, professional development and relationship with parents, for review. These emergent themes, gleaned from the literature will inform the researcher in the context of the development of a suitable research methodology which will facilitate a deeper understanding of the central theme of this study – parental involvement in policy formation in schools.

2.4.5 School Effectiveness Research and the Concept of Parents as Partners

School effectiveness research has encouraged schools to reach out to parents. It is generally accepted that some schools are better at involving parents and have a more positive attitude towards their potential contribution. As a result of surveying parents in Halton whose children attended schools participating in the Halton Effective Schools Project outlined previously, it was concluded that

There is a high degree of uncertainty and in some cases misinformation about contemporary education and what is going on in schools.... Perhaps the major message of this study is the need to communicate meaningfully with parents, not only on the progress of their child but also in terms of educational issues. Parents want an opportunity to provide an input into the educative process. A number of schools were praised by parents for their inclusionary approach. It would appear that elementary schools because of their size and the age of their students, have an advantage. Parents feel somewhat uneasy about changing curriculum and unsure of what is going on in the classrooms of Halton. This uneasiness is no doubt the product of general societal unrest with its social institutions, but there is no question that the parents of Halton students have many questions to which the system must respond in meaningful ways. Parents need to be involved in schools in major decisions such as staffing, budget and curriculum. The traditional approach to parents is no longer satisfactory.

(Halton Board of Education 1993c: 20-1, as cited in Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.135)

School effectiveness research indicates that the best schools have built true partnerships with parents but in many schools, particularly ineffective schools the gulf is wide and increasing. The history of schools reaching out to parents and parents trying to understand and influence schools has often been fraught with misunderstanding and wariness. Parents are often blamed for unsatisfactory school performance and in some instances 'pushy' parents can be seen as a threat. However, a recent study by Sammons et al. (1997), demonstrated that parental involvement is important not only for pre-school and primary school children but also at the secondary level.

Parents have an important role in encouraging and supporting their children's efforts right through secondary school. Many, however, would welcome clear advice from, and encouragement, by the school concerning practical strategies for helping their children. The more effective schools in our case studies tended to harness parents, encouraging them to monitor students' homework, such as by signing a diary on a regular basis, sent home regular newsletters, and provided regular feedback about students' progress and achievements. They are also likely to be proactive about enlisting parental support

concerning any behaviour or attendance problems at an early date. Celebrating students achievements (by letter or certificate) is just as important as involving parents when things go wrong. More effective schools tend to be better, as MacBeath (1994) has argued, in making demands on parents as well as providing them with opportunities for involvement and ensuring a welcoming atmosphere in the school.

(Sammons et al., 1997, p.214)

Further details relating to types of parental involvement and frameworks for involving parents will be discussed later in this research in a review of the literature together with data pertaining to strategies for facilitating home-school partnerships in schools.

2.4.6 School Improvement

School effectiveness models do not address adequately the process by which a school might develop itself, the influence of the culture of a school and how a school interconnects with external agencies. In recent years, school improvement has been linked with school effectiveness with the aim of putting school effectiveness knowledge into improvement practice.

While residues of the modernistic legacy of effective schools still remain as surrogate purposes for a number of educators, the faith in generalized and scientifically known principles of school effectiveness has begun to be superseded by commitments to more ongoing, provisional and contextually sensitive processes of school improvement.

(Hargreaves, 1994, p.59)

The school improvement process is about how the process of change takes place, how that process can be facilitated, how it may lead to improvement and how that process can be managed

successful school improvement.....depends on an understanding of the problem of change at the level of practice and the development of corresponding strategies for bringing about beneficial reform.

(Fullan, 1992, p.27)

School improvement is concerned with two primary purposes, which are the enhancement of the quality of pupil learning and the development of structures and the creation of conditions which encourage collaboration and which, in turn, lead to empowerment of individuals and groups. It is

.....a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. In this sense school improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it.

(Hopkins et al., 1994, p.3)

Careful planning, management and organisational conditions, a teaching and learning focus together with the capacity to take charge of change are central to improvement practice. Each school's context is unique and therefore, school improvement is unique to each school.

Although it is important to recognize that schools are in many ways non-rational organizations that are resistant to external pressure for change, we believe that by focusing on the different components of the school's culture and by monitoring student progress, departmental and whole-school performance, educational standards can be raised. Involving students and parents, seeking their views and addressing their concerns is equally important. Where expectations are high and all participants share the view that their school is primarily a place for teaching and learning, where student progress is encouraged, celebrated and seen as the 'touchstone' for evaluating school, departmental and teaching practices, our research suggests that improvement will follow.

(Sammons et al., 1997, p.215)

The paradigm of knowledge on school improvement, in the early 1970s, involved a bias towards focusing innovation on the individual teacher and had a strongly quantitative orientation. Later, a focus on school self-evaluation and review developed as a result of widespread dissatisfaction with the fragmentation and individualised strategy of teacher development, together with an apparent lack of teacher commitment to government-initiated 'top-down' reforms. These factors contributed to a new improved paradigm in the 1980s, which celebrated a 'bottom-up' approach to change. This approach enabled schools to accommodate and respond to 'top-down' reform in a coherent way.

The 1980s were times when school improvement attempts sought to produce internally generated school change. Indeed the whole 'ownership' paradigm was based upon the need for school teaching staffs to own the improvement attempt so that it would be able to pass from the implementation to the institutionalization phases without hindrance.

(Reynolds & Cuttance, 1992, p.182)

The concept of enabling schools to improve themselves has involved the need to focus on obtaining a better understanding of the social organisation of schools and

how they create their particular cultures. The process orientation of school improvement places particular emphasis on consensus-building and participatory decision-making. Schools need to address internal conditions that maintain and support improvement. These conditions need to be in place for real improvements in terms of pupil outcomes to occur and include shared vision, joint planning, leadership, partnership, staff development and monitoring and evaluation. School improvement in the 1990s according to Reynolds & Cuttance, (1992),

.....must deal with the culture of schools, as well as with their structure. It must concern itself with the informal world of the school, as well as the formal world. It must concern itself with the deep structure of values, relationships and interpersonal processes, as well as with the world of behaviour. It must ensure that it takes account of the need to manage the interaction between the body of improvement knowledge and the collective psyche of the school.
(p. 182)

School improvement studies, therefore, tend to be more action-oriented than the effective schools research. It is an amalgam of broad strategies such as self-review, action planning and staff development which link together the classroom and the school, as well as the more dynamic aspects of the change process.

Compared to the rather meager body of research on the context and substance of educational change, there is now a rich store of literature, research and practical understanding on the change process. In the field of school improvement, many maxims have been gleaned from this research and applied as a result of it. These include the observations that change is a process not an event; that practice changes before beliefs; that it is better to think big, but start small; that evolutionary planning works better than linear planning; that policy cannot mandate what happens; that implementation strategies which integrate bottom-up strategies with top down ones are more effective than top-down or bottom-up ones alone; and that conflict is a necessary part of change.
(Hargreaves,1994, p.10)

Development planning can be regarded as a strategy for school improvement. While models of school improvement exist, there is a preference for frameworks, processes and guidelines, many of which are variants on the school development planning process.

The two areas of research that relate in particular to development planning are: the research on school effectiveness, the 'what'; and the research on school improvement, the 'how'.
(Hargreaves, & Hopkins,1991, p.109)

2.4.7 School Development Planning – Purpose, Process and Content

School development planning derives from various origins including school self-evaluation and school-based review, curriculum development and the push for greater accountability. The purposes of school development planning can be summarised as :

- a strategy for school improvement
- to help schools manage extensive national and centrally driven change
- to empower schools to take control of their own development
- to support whole-school planning and encourage shared decision making
- to enhance pupil achievement through the improvement of the quality teaching and learning
- to enable schools to be more publicly accountable

Development planning creates a partnership between the school's key educational partners in which there is a shared commitment to the school's improvement, and a shared responsibility for the school's progress and success in achieving such improvement.

Development planning is more than a development plan, the document: it is the process of creating the plan and then ensuring that it is put into effect. The plan is a statement of the intentions which reflect the school's vision for the future. The process involves reaching agreement on a sensible set of priorities for the school and then taking action to realize the plan.

(Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991, p.3)

An example of a process for development planning is the school growth plan developed by the Halton Effective Schools Project. The substantive areas this project focuses on, lie at both organisational level (cooperative planning) and the instructional level (for example, classroom management and instructional skills). There were four stages of development that correspond to four key questions:

Where are we now? (assessment)

Where would we like to be in the future? (planning)

How best can we move in that direction? (implementation)

How do we evaluate the changes we are making? (evaluation)

(Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.17)

The assessment stage involves compiling systemic evidence through various methods including informal observations, interviews, discussions, notes of activities, surveys and results of assessments, tests or examinations. This stage is often referred to as an audit. Development priorities are then selected having looked at all the evidence. During the planning stage timelines and target dates are also developed, together with resource and staff development needs and success criteria. It is during implementation that the school has to follow through with the plan and carry out all actions necessary to ensure its fulfilment. The importance of review and monitoring is stressed so that the rhetoric of the planning stage becomes reality. Evaluation is central to the whole process and evaluation methods need to be planned early on and relevant baseline assessments carried out.

School development planning – involves needs assessment; priority setting; decisions about responsibilities, timelines, staff development needs, required resources and success criteria; implementation activities; and monitoring and evaluation strategies.

(Stoll and Fink, 1996, p.47)

Successful schools realise that development planning is about creating a school culture which will support the planning and management of a rolling programme of priorities to be addressed.

School culture is difficult to define, but is best thought of as the procedures, values and expectations that guide people's behaviour within the organization. The school's culture is essentially 'the way we do things around here'.

(Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991, p.17)

The process of change, the management of innovation, the development of a collaborative culture within the school, partnership, the importance of vision, the identification of key targets and action plans, review and monitoring and accountability are themes which reoccur consistently in the literature relating to school development planning. More recent research would appear to indicate that schools that exhibit best practice in development planning now use it as a strategy to enhance directly the progress and achievement of students. In an article published in

1998, Hopkins and MacGilchrist suggest an approach to development planning that focuses on student learning and achievement as distinct from previous approaches that focussed on the management of external change and the development of school-wide policies.

After setting targets for student learning, progress and achievement, the plan focuses on developing a strategy for enhancing teaching and creating powerful learning experiences and then on the management arrangements required to support such changes in classroom practice.

(Hopkins & MacGilchrist, 1998, p. 421)

Yet again the schools that have responded successfully to this challenge appear to have a number of common characteristics including a shared vision, effective leadership, strategies for involving of all the stakeholders in the development of the school, systems in place to develop, maintain, monitor and evaluate school-wide policies and practices and staff development linked to priorities for development in the plan is a high priority, according to Hopkins and MacGilchrist, (1998, p.421).

Reynolds and Packer, in their article published in Reynolds and Cuttance, (1992), suggest

The capacity to relate to parents and the capacity to find sources of support in local communities have been identified as new managerial skills which will be needed for effective leadership in the 1990s. (p. 177)

In reviewing the level of consultation and collaboration that characterised various types of school plans, a study by MacGilchrist and Colleagues (1995), identified at least four different types of school development plans.

- (1) The rhetorical plan was characterised by the lack of a shared sense of ownership and purpose among the staff. The written plan was not a working document and no budget or staff development opportunities were linked with the plan.
- (2) The singular plan was owned by the headteacher and enabled the headteacher to be accountable to the governors. It was used as a means of improving the efficiency of the management and organisation of the school as a whole but had

little or no impact on teachers and pupils.

- (3) The focus for improvement in the cooperative plan (found in 5 out of the 9 schools in the study) was school-wide efficiency and effectiveness, along with teachers' own learning. The plan was characterised by a general willingness by the staff to be involved in the identification of whole-school priorities, although not all staff felt a sense of ownership over the priorities chosen. This plan had a positive impact on the management and organisation of the school, on teachers' professional development and on their practice in the classroom. There was limited evidence, however, of improvements for pupils.
- (4) Most effective was the corporate type of plan, the key characteristics of which were a sense of ownership and purpose, shared leadership and management, resource management and staff development, focus on teaching and learning and pupil achievement and systemic monitoring and evaluation.

An awareness of the different types of development plans can focus the researcher to distinguish between plans which have a positive impact on the culture of the school in respect of professional relationships, organisational arrangements, opportunities for teachers' own learning and improvements in learning opportunities for pupils and those which inhibit such development. The research relating to development planning yet again highlights the importance of a partnership approach to school improvement.

Teachers are more accountable than in the past to governors and parents. This is easily seen as threatening, a crude 'calling to account'. Development planning creates a partnership between teachers, governors, parents, LEA officers and others in which there is a shared commitment to the school's improvement, and a shared responsibility for the school's progress and success in achieving such improvement. This partnership of mutual support and accountability is a prerequisite of effective development planning and school improvement. (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991, p.7)

2.4.8 School Development Planning in Ireland

The important role that school planning can play in the development of a collaborative culture within the entire school community and in promoting effective schools has been recognised in Section 21 of the *Education Act, 1998* as outlined previously in Section 2.1.9 of this thesis:

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

In 1999 the Department of Education and Science disseminated School Development Planning Guidelines for both primary and second-level schools (Government of Ireland, 1999a, 1999b). Circulars on school development planning outlining the key components of the process were also issued to school at both levels during 1999. Both the guidelines and circulars stress that the essential purpose of developing a school plan is the achievement of school effectiveness as well as being a significant support for school improvement.

School development planning (SDP) is a relatively new concept for many schools. It is new from four key perspectives:

- (1) its overarching emphasis on continuous improvement and development
- (2) its recognition of schools as unique learning organisations
- (3) its planned, systematic nature
- (4) its reliance on collaborative school-stakeholder involvement and empowerment.

(Ó Dalaigh, in Furlong & Monahan, eds., 2000, p. 141)

The process of planning described suggests that an important dimension in this process is the collaborative effort and co-operation that takes place between the principal, the teachers, the Board of Management and the parents of pupils attending

the school.

The School Development Planning Initiative was announced in a Press Release by the Minister for Education and Science on 20th May 1999, (Department of Education and Science, 1999a). It aims to support and develop a vibrant capacity for school planning within primary and second level education and to provide a national framework of support within which new material and professional resources for planning would be made available to schools over a four year period (1999-2002). Since September 1999 primary schools have been included for development planning support on a phased basis:

- 1999/2000: Schools largely serving areas designated as disadvantaged (442)
- 2000/2001: All remaining 1,2,3 and 24+ mainstream classroom teacher schools (1332)
- 2001/2002: 840 medium schools plus continued support for other schools
- 2002/2003: All remaining schools (692)

All schools involved in the School Development Planning Initiative have received a grant to assist them in defraying costs associated with school planning. They have also been granted school based days free from teaching duties to engage in school development planning. To date it is disappointing however to note that, despite the fact that participation in a collaborative dialogue fosters 'local' commitment to and ownership of school development planning and school improvement, only a small number of parents, Board of Management representatives, relevant community personnel or the pupils have attended planning days facilitated by school development planning facilitators (School Development Planning Support Initiative – Primary, Annual Report, September 1999 - August 2000a, p.22). Many of the policies developed have been drawn up by working groups of staff members only –

principal and teachers. This is in spite of the fact that schools identified topics such as discipline and bullying, assessment and record keeping, vision, homework and parent / school issues as organisational issues which needed to be addressed in the school plan. Schools will require further support to fully comply with the underlying principle so central to the *Education Act, 1998*, the principle of partnership. The School Development Planning Initiative, National Progress Report 2002, indicates that the inclusion of Board of Management and parents in the development planning process has been most successful among schools in their third year with support from the initiative. Involvement of the partners was most common in organisational planning. When Boards of Management were involved in planning activities, 84% of this involvement was in organisational areas, with 12% in curricular planning. Similarly, 90% of parental involvement was in organisational planning (p. 29). An initiative which specifically focuses on developing partnership between parents and teachers living and working in designated areas of disadvantage and the process by which parents are encouraged to contribute to a partnership approach to policy formation will be described briefly in Section 2.6.3 of this thesis.

2.4.9 Concluding Comments

Traditionally, schools have not been organised and managed to allow for the empowerment and full participation of parents and teachers as true partners in addressing the needs of children. A number of significant programmes and school reform initiatives have been developed which have included a broader representation on school development planning teams. However, prior to looking at models of partnership in school development planning, it is important to review frameworks for understanding types of parental involvement in schools and the developmental nature of partnership in children's learning.

2.5 Overview of Frameworks for the Development of Parental Involvement in Schools

2.5.1 Introduction

An issue of concern to many researchers in education, particularly those whose area of research involves investigating the role of parents in education, is that “as teachers, we have hi-jacked the word education to the point where ‘education’ is equated with ‘schooling’ in many people’s minds” Macbeth, (1989, p.2). For the purposes of this thesis, the term education is used in its broadest sense, to include the social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, cultural and physical development, in other words the holistic development of the child. Education involves school learning, home learning and community learning. Schooling specifically relates to institutional provision for children. It is important to note, however, that “from birth to 16 years less than 15 per cent of a child’s waking life is spent in school” Macbeth, (1989, p.3). Research worldwide, as indicated by reports given to the seminar organised by the Bernard van Leer Foundation on *The Parent as Prime Educator: Changing Patterns of Parenthood* which took place in Lima, Peru in May 1986, shows that where there is partnership between teachers and parents there are significant educational, social and behavioural gains for children. Research evidence as previously indicated in Section 2.4.5 also shows that the most effective schools are those where parents and teachers come to share common goals and values. Influential work on school improvement such as Mortimore et al., (1994) shows clearly that the most effective schools, regardless of the age of pupils or differences in pupil entry, have certain characteristics. In every case, good quality home-school collaboration is a key ingredient Bastiani, & Wolfendale, eds., (1996, p.4).

2.5.2 Models of Parental Involvement in Schools

Parental involvement in schools in Great Britain was encouraged in both the Plowden Report (GB. Department of Education and Science, 1967) and the Bullock Report (GB. Department of Education and Science, 1975). There was a growing awareness of the importance of involving parents in their children's education and a shift in expectations and attitudes to parents on the part of educationalists. Gordon (1969) outlines a five-point scale which recognises the role of parents as learners and teachers of their own children, but also the role of parents as organisers, committee members, policy-makers, as well as consumers.

- (1) Parents as supporters – service givers – facilitators – clerical, custodial, maintenance, fund-raising, family nights
- (2) Parents as learners – parents education courses, observation of children with explanation
- (3) Parents as teachers of their own children – taking home toys and books for use with children
- (4) Parents as teacher aides and volunteers in the classroom – prepare materials, read stories, work with children
- (5) Parents as policy-makers and partners – policy-makers, advisory board members
(Gordon, 1969, in Bastiani, 1988, p.49)

Earlier (1970s) intervention projects applied an essentially 'deficit' model to the relationship between parents and teachers. The focus was on parents supporting schooling. Widlake has suggested that there might have been three recent stages in thinking about the relations between parents and teachers:

- (1) The compensatory model. In this, the school was expected to compensate for the disadvantages of home background.
- (2) The communications approach. In this, the role of parents was recognised and it was hoped that home-based actions might support the school if the level of communications increased.
- (3) The participatory model. This does not replace good communications, but goes beyond them to recognise that not only do parents and teachers both have contributions to make to the education of the child, but that there has to be cooperation with regard to action both at home and in the school.
(Widlake, 1986, in Macbeth, & Ravn, eds. 1994, p.9-10)

The simplistic 'deficit model' has given way to a to a model of intervention in which home background is valued, where parental expertise is seen as equivalent and

complementary to that of professionals and where parents, as the primary educators, are perceived as cooperating partners in the educational enterprise. Schools, however, vary in the extent of parental involvement and in the existence of formal structures or initiatives to encourage such involvement. Some teachers remain sceptical about parental participation in their child's learning. They expect parents to provide an extra pair of hands in an emergency and to carry out peripheral tasks such as helping out at social events, open days, extracurricular activities involving parents and fund-raising and a variety of other activities but would prefer to keep parents at arm's length in relation to education. Atkin et al., (1988) draw our attention to the fact that most education happens outside school and suggest that the parental dimension of schooling is central to our professional performance as teachers.

.....it is necessary to acknowledge the view that the effective education of the next generation requires us to recognise the needs, wishes and experience of children and families. Put another way, it is both an educational and a professional nonsense for schools (or individuals within them) to operate in ignorance of, and in isolation from, families they serve and the neighbourhoods in which they have been located.

Such a claim has considerable roots in evidence and experience. More recently, it has been possible to show, sometimes dramatically, that when parents

- understand what the school is trying to do,
- identify with its main goals and support its efforts,
- understand something of their role as educators,
- take an active interest in, and provide support for their children's school work,

then the effects can be both dramatic and long-lasting. (p.6-7)

In a review of national initiatives during the 1970s and 1980s which stressed the importance of parents and a supportive home in children's learning, Cairney et al (1995) identified 261 major initiatives and overall 100 small-scale projects in Australia.

Overall, 76.3% of these projects were initiated by schools and were largely designed to fulfil school purposes and transmit information about schooling.

He indicated however, that there is little evidence that these early efforts were motivated by a desire for genuine partnership between home and school.

New kinds of parent/teacher partnerships are becoming more widespread due to a

recognition that environments for children's learning will become more favourable when parents and teachers act as partners in the learning process.

There is a growing acceptance of, and support for, the view that when professionals and parents share some of the same goals and work together in an active partnership, things can really begin to happen! A most striking contemporary example, which can draw upon powerful evidence from Haringey, Coventry, Sheffield and elsewhere, concerns the involvement of parents in their children's reading. For the evidence shows conclusively that where parents and teachers work together, the gains that children make are both dramatic and sustainable, even when those children have started from a position of serious under-achievement. (Atkin et al., 1988, p.12)

Many interventions have been developed to involve parents in their own children's learning at pre-school and early years education Tizard et al., (1984), Pugh et al., (1989), Paz, (1990), Whalley et al., (2001) and in the formal education system including:

- reading and writing initiatives, Tizard et al., (1982), Topping et al., (1985), Wolfendale et al., (1995)
- shared maths, Merttens et al., (1993 and 1996)
- language development for bilingual families, Tizard et al., (1988)
- and specific programmes for involving parents of children who live in designated areas of disadvantage Kelleghan, (1977), Widlake, (1986), Conaty, (2002)

Macbeth et al., (1984), have suggested four broad stages of progression in the growth of home-school partnership.

Stage 1: The self-contained school stage is characterised by teachers regarding the school as a closed institution which is neither influenced by or affected by families outside.

Stage 2: The second stage, is that of professional uncertainty when some teachers come to acknowledge home factors, while others remain entrenched, although they may blame home background for low attainment.

Stage 3: The features that characterise the growing commitment stage include school leadership increasingly encouraging liaison with parents and some adaptation of the system.

Stage 4: This stage anticipates the signing of the school and family understanding, a document which outlines the obligations of parents relating to the schooling process, with a view to committing all parents and teachers to working together for the benefit of the children. (p.195-9)

Many schools have accepted the obligation to inform parents about the life and work

of the school. This thesis will investigate the extent to which schools have progressed in their styles of communication and relationship

- to a commitment to consultation / participation in some instances, largely on school's terms and within existing ways of doing things
- or still further along this route to a style characterised by joint partnership, which acknowledges not only the right but the value of parents taking a full and active part in their children's education and development, on equal terms, albeit in different ways.
(Atkin et al., 1988, p.106-107)

Schools that are aiming to develop more effective relationships with parents have to communicate not only to parents but with them as well. They have to give information, but they also need to create opportunities for parents to express their viewpoints, ask questions and make comments, in other words they have to create a situation in which dialogue between listeners can take place. Atkin et al. (1988)

acknowledge in their research that

the steady evolution of home/school experience has been practice rather than policy-led; it has been pioneered by teachers and parents in individual schools, rather than imposed by politicians and administrators. (p.112)

In attempting to explore the concept of a home/school programme, Bastiani (1989), provides some useful headings:

- communication of information
- arrangements to discuss problems of individual children
- involving parents in their children's learning
- help with the running of the school
- developing an interest in, understanding of, and support for the work of the school
- use of parental skills, interests and experience
- providing opportunities for parents' own education and development
- enlisting parents views in decision/policy making (both formal and informal)
- active involvement with, and support for, family and community life (p.36)

The headings listed above could be used by a working group of parents and teachers to review existing home/school practice with a view to affirming existing arrangements for home/contact and providing an opportunity to set targets for future development. These headings will provide the researcher with a framework to glean data from schools relating to current home/school practice.

Epstein (1995) also provides a useful framework to understand types of parental involvement in schools. She lists:

1. Parenting – helping each home to create an environment which supports learning, such as the school providing advice on supportive learning practices which can be carried out at home.
2. Communicating – developing two-way, jargon-free, meaningful communications about school programmes, practices and pupil progress.
3. Volunteering – recruiting and supporting parental and community help in the school.
4. Learning at home – helping parents to support their children’s homework, and other curriculum and school-related activities.
5. Decision making – including parents in meaningful school decisions as well as encouraging parental leadership on important school issues.
6. Collaboration with the community – identifying and integrating appropriate resources and services from the community to support the family and the pupils
(Epstein, 1995, p.701-712)

Developing strategies to address Epstein’s six involvement patterns provides a basis for partnership between parents and teachers. Involving parents in the uncertainties of change and in decision-making processes, in collaboration with the other partners, helps develop parent leaders and will promote a supportive context for relationships. Both Bastiani (1989) and Epstein (1995) appear to indicate that there is a progression in the development of home/school relations from an approach which tries to improve communication with parents and create opportunities for involvement in their own child’s learning, to a deeper level which requires teachers to enter a dialogue with parents, which ultimately may lead to radical change in schools.

2.5.3 Impediments to Parent / Teacher Partnership

The aim of some of the interventions outlined was to ‘convert’ as many individual parents as possible to supporting the goals of the schools. This was achieved through strategies in home school relations which were directed by professionals and placed parents in the broad supporter / learner category. Their function was to support the professionals by assimilating their values and behaviours. Many of these strategies are fundamentally flawed because although they propose a ‘partnership’, a set of ‘mutual

obligations' between school and parent, the balance of power remains weighted on the school's side. Parental involvement in reading and maths for example, continues to render parents passive in their relationship with the school, as they carry out those functions which the school prescribes.

At the heart of the problem is the nature of the communication which takes place between teachers and parents. Teachers may fear parents are going to become 'interfering'. They may also find parents threatening, especially teachers who have become accustomed to functioning without parents being central to their work. The essence of good communication is that it is a two-way process in which each participant can seek and give information and each is attentive to what the other is saying.

In the words of one headteacher, though, much contact 'is like the dialogue of the deaf', in which the message is sent with no guarantee it has been received or where there is no genuine willingness to listen or readiness to hear another's point of view.

(Macbeth and Ravn, 1994 p.123)

The importance of anticipating difficulties which may arise between parents and teachers and the value of drawing up a home / school liaison policy has been highlighted in the research. Mortimore and Mortimore (1991), state

The parent-teacher relationship is a partnership..... This is not to say that all difficulties have been overcome: there can still be problems where a school has not established a clear policy for dealing with problems when they arise – when there is a clash of personality or when one party upsets the other, for example. But in general, where clearly thought-out policies have been formulated and agreed, the benefits to pupil learning are clear. Research has demonstrated this link and has shown (as in the famous Haringey study by Jack Tizard and colleagues) that parental reading schemes can be more effective even than extra teaching. (p. 129-130)

Recent Irish research (Nic Craith, 2001) which reflects on the changing role of the teacher in policy action, notes that the involvement of the school community in the school development planning process is a challenge for teachers.

In many cases, teachers' reluctance to involve parents or the broader community in the work of the school stemmed from a lack of professional confidence and a fear that parents may interfere with teachers' professional responsibilities.

(Irish Educational Studies, Vol.22, No.2, Autumn, 2003 p. 30)

Many educational researchers and government ministers for education have focused on the issue of change in education. Teachers are constantly under pressure to alter the content of teaching and their working methods. Changes in technology, economic and industrial expectations and political demands are current examples. In April 1992 while addressing the Annual Conference of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, the Minister for Education, Mr. Seamus Brennan, T.D. stated, 'Change is precisely what the Green Paper is all about'

This is not a time for tidying up the system, for fiddling about at the edges. It is a time for root-and-branch reform – so as to equip the system properly for the new world that is staring us in the face, so as to ensure that the system performs as superbly in the future as it has done in the past. To reflect this reality, I have called the Green Paper 'Education for a Changing World'.
(p.2)

At a time of change, priorities have to be established for the implementation of changes. Parents tend to get low priority. Some teachers may feel that they have enough child-centred work and mounting professional strains without the additional pressures of entering a genuine partnership with parents. Some teachers may be unaware of all the reasons why parents are educationally central to their work. This study will strive to ascertain together with the impediments to partnership previously outlined, further blocks to partnership with parents, such as:

- attitudinal and professional difficulties among teachers,
- the issue of pre-service and in-service training
- teachers' contracts and hours of work
- and physical difficulties which include a lack of suitable accommodation, for example a parents' room in many schools for working with parents.

The key to partnership appears to lie in the decision-making structures and processes.

However, partnership is likely to remain an empty concept unless the nature of the power that schools are perceived to have is understood and unless parents feel able to participate in decision-making structures and through their participation challenge that power. Vincent, (1996) suggests that a sizeable proportion of parents, some as a result of deliberate decision or due to circumstances, have minimal contact with the school (p.54). She describes a model of parent as participant which is the least common role identified to be open to parents with children in school

.....parent as participant, is the least common and also the only option to offer opportunities for the exercise of individual and collective voice. It is clear that the formal inclusion of parents in the existing systems of representative democracy is patchy and uneven. Even where there are systems for formal parental representation in place, problems still remain, notably the need to try and ensure that the various associations attract as wide a membership as possible, the difficulties of representation such a sprawling, diverse group as 'parents' and the risk of representatives and groups being marginalised by local authority officers, teachers and politicians. (p.55)

Adler and Gardner (1994) believe that many professionals have a commitment to partnership, but this is not easily translated into practice, particularly when it means relinquishing power and status. Hargreaves (2001), in elaborating on the concept of emotional geographies, identifies five key emotional geographies of teaching which can affect distance or closeness in people's interactions. Drawing largely on reports of teachers' reports of their interactions with parents sociocultural, moral, professional, political and physical distance were identified.

All too often, teachers look at students and parents with growing incomprehension. They are physically, socially, and culturally removed from the communities in which they teach and do not know where students and parents are coming from. (p. 1062)

Hargreaves (2001) suggests that

Threat and anxiety emerge when teachers' and parents' purposes are dissonant, cultures are different, power relations are ambivalent, and interactions seem too physically close. (p. 1075)

In commenting on teacher professionalism, Hargreaves suggests the need to redefine teacher professionalism from a "classical" stance of professional autonomy from

clients to a stance of openness with them where parents become partners at the core of teachers' work (Hargreaves & Goodson 1996).

It is also be recognised that parents are not, of course a homogeneous mass. The commitment of individual parents to their own children does not mean that their views would necessarily lead to a fair and effective education system, meeting the needs of all. Groups of parents often have conflicting interests, and the demands of some parents may impinge on the rights of others. This is particularly clear with regard to various forms of selective, streamed or segregated schooling.

Undoubtedly one of the reasons for grouping, a reason that is less politically palatable than the knowledge stratification argument, is that of pressure from advantaged parents. Once privileged parents have invested in a school, either through fees, voluntary contributions, fund-raising or signing the school charter, they can and do press schools into providing advance tracks or streams (Kariya and Rosenbum 1999; McGrath and Kuriloff 1999; Wesselingh 1996). Economically advantaged parents know they can opt out of schools that do not track to the advantage of their children, and this threat alone is sufficient to reinforce a tracking culture. (Baker et al, 2004, p.148-149)

Pressure groups of parents and others may form with the view to influencing school ethos, curriculum, teaching and learning. In the United States members of the Christian Right, a substantial proportion of whom identify themselves as Evangelical Christians for example,

are often visible and vocal at school board meetings, textbook adoption meetings, and other community forums where issues of family, youth and schooling arise. (Berliner, in Teachers College Record, 1997, p.382)

This group according to Berliner, is well organised, well funded and politically active and have expressed their intention of closing down public education or modifying it to conform to their vision of how schooling should be conducted. In recent years also, some parents of children with special educational needs, have been proactive in demanding an appropriate education for their children.

The success of such pressure groups is partly as a result of the fact that articulate middle class parents with professional knowledge and useful political contacts can have children with disabilities and they then proceed to fight for their rights. Parents who are

marginalised by the school system for socio-economic, cultural or ethnic reasons – especially those whose children are deemed "at risk" - are in a much weaker position. (OECD, 1997, p.50)

Many parents of children with special educational needs would like to have them educated in mainstream schools along with their peers. Yet the parents of other children may prefer children with disabilities to be educated separately. Similarly, some working class parents may want their children educated in middle class schools; middle class parents may not feel the same way. It would be virtually impossible to develop a coherent education system on the basis of exactly what parents say they want at any given time in their children's development.

However, a policy based on the notion of empowerment would concentrate on developing a participatory ethos within schools so that parents could share decision-making powers with educational professionals. Many writers advocate attempts to achieve lateral home-school relations, for example Atkins et al, (1988), Conaty, (2002). Yet, the dominance of strategies which place parents as supporters and learners within the education system persists. Lysaght (1993) suggests that parental involvement is not such an established feature of the education system as rhetoric would suggest.

One element of this research will be to identify factors relating to

- school leadership
- school culture and climate
- teacher and parental attitudes and behaviours
- opportunities for parental participation at different levels
- organisational structures within the school
- skills, attitudes, knowledge of the partnership process

which inhibit or facilitate parental involvement in school planning from the

perspective of teachers, members of Boards of Management and representatives of Parents' Associations and those parents who are actively involved in school initiatives.

2.6 Models of Partnership in School Development Planning

2.6.1 Introduction

Many researchers, including Bastiani, (1987, 1988, 1989, 1996) and Epstein, (1995), Stoll and Fink, (1996) who have studied parental involvement in education have indicated a broad agenda of activities which range from parental support for their own child's learning, to involvement in activities in the classroom and school environment, to participation by some parents in more formal activities such as policy groupings, Parents' Associations and Boards of Management. Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, (1996) suggest that

Schools gain more support from communities when they involve them in the uncertainties of change, rather than informing the community later once professionals have decided for themselves (Ainley, 1993). Multiple informal relationships with community members work better than occasional bureaucratic meetings. (p.69)

The stage at which the views of parents are sought in relation to policy development is significant. Some principals and teachers continue to develop policies on issues which are critically important to parents such as homework and anti-bullying and only when policy is in draft form is it presented to parents through the Parents' Association and ultimately to the Board of Management for ratification.

Our own evidence from studies of schools attempting restructuring indicated that schools which involve parents with them in the uncertainties of change achieve much more empathy and support from parents than schools that discuss and create change as an insulated group of closeted professionals who only inform parents once all the decisions have been made.

(Hargreaves et al, 1993 in Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996, p.106-107)

The development of a partnership approach to involving parents in their children's learning requires schools to embrace the principles of openness and collaboration

with groups of parents and others in the community.

A variety of strategies and practices are employed in different countries to encourage parental involvement in joint planning and policy making. The Halton Board of Education, Toronto, Effective Schools Project, Stoll and Fink, (1996), suggests the need for the partners to come together to develop a common mission which is a shared and communicated vision of school goals and priorities (p.92). Atkin et al., (1988) also highlight the importance of parents and teachers sharing the same goals and working together in active partnership. OECD 1997, looks at co-operation between families and schools in nine OECD countries: Canada, Denmark, England and Wales, France, Germany Ireland, Japan, Spain, and the United States. It provides an overview of parental involvement in school governance and policy-making bodies at different levels. It highlights for example, the fact that the role of Danish parents on school boards is to establish aims, objectives and policy directions for the school, while managerial and administrative issues have been handed over to the headteacher (1997, p. 85). It notes that a Danish teacher's salary includes an element representing paid hours for working with the class and the parents – in groups and individually (ibid. p.90). Denmark has a long tradition of co-operation and contact with parents, especially when children are younger. In comparison with Denmark parents in the United Kingdom do not have a recognised national voice and at local education authority level they have no legally-endorsed means of influencing local decisions. The report outlines the legal obligation of schools in England and Wales to consult with parents with respect to religion and sex education policy (ibid. p.101) and confirms that many schools are developing policies on pupil behaviour and anti-bullying to which teachers, governors, parents and normally, pupils themselves have contributed (ibid. p.104). In Spain, it indicates that parent participation in school

planning and financial decisions is particularly high, while parents play a less significant role in school decision-making in Greece, Belgium and France (ibid. p. 31). The report also notes that in Denmark, Ireland and Spain, parents are represented on the national curriculum committees which establish or revise the curriculum, while in other countries such as England and Wales, France and Japan, parents have no say in the content or structure of the curriculum at national level (p.38-39). Denmark, Spain and Ireland appear to be more parent-participative education systems than the other participating countries. The report concludes that both policy and practice in relation to building partnerships in education in the nine participating countries are very varied – both between and within countries. It recognises that a key aim of building partnerships in education is

to help schools to become more effective, and to raise the level of achievement of school students, by mobilising the energy of parents – enabling them to support their children’s learning more effectively, and work in partnership with the school. (OECD, 1997, p.9)

There are a growing number of Irish dissertations which have exemplars of involving parents in school development planning. In conducting a school audit the perspective of parents, pupils and non-teaching staff was gleaned through the administration of a survey instrument and the examination of its findings in a study carried out by Cannon, (2000). The author notes that ‘at interview parents, pupils and non-teaching staff who piloted the questionnaire were very positive about their survey and were happy to be consulted on school issues’ (p.49). A survey instrument was also used by O’ Connor (2000), in undertaking a school self-evaluation. The perspectives of parents, teachers, students and adult students were elicited through the administration of a questionnaire. Feedback was provided to parents on the results of the questionnaire and they were consulted concerning areas they felt need to be prioritised. Again the parents expressed gratitude and appreciation that the school had

actively sought their views (p.105). In reviewing the role of the Parents' Association in a second level community school Ryder (2000) found that both parents (86%) and teachers (93%) attach a very high degree of importance to representatives of the Parents' Association meeting with teachers to discuss school policies and procedures (p.77). Ryder (2000) recommends that the

Parents' Association and the teachers establish a permanent committee or forum to monitor the effectiveness of the schools' homework policy and to advise parents regularly on the part which they are expected to play in implementing that policy (p.87)

The importance of creating opportunities for dialogue between parents and teachers together is the central message of the above research. It is evident that the Irish education system has undergone substantial structural reform government and that efforts to develop strong relationships between home and school have been a significant feature of recent policy and practice in Ireland. Recent research provides increased evidence efforts to engage parents in the school development planning process.

2.6.2 The School Development Program (SDP)

The School Development Program (SDP) was established in 1968 in two elementary schools, Baldwin and Martin Luther King Jr., as a collaborative study between Yale Child Study Center and the New Haven Public Schools. The purpose of highlighting this particular initiative is to facilitate an understanding of the staff and parent development needs and the changes necessary in communication patterns and structures to create a school climate based on respect and trust where parents and teachers can engage in developing a school plan together.

The School Development Program (SDP), a school reform initiative, was designed by Dr. Comer in response to the problems and needs that he discerned and that parents, staff and students themselves identified. It is a process that unites, empowers and inspires significant adult caretakers and caregivers, parents and teachers to make an individual and collective difference in children's lives. The program emphasises the importance of

mutual respect and collaboration among and between parents and school staff in creating a positive school climate and developing effective - school and classroom - level activities that support and nurture all children along multiple pathways.

(Comer et al., 1996, Preface xviii)

The hallmark of the School Development Program is an approach which encourages the school staff and the stakeholders to organise themselves into three teams: the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT), the Parent Team (PT), and the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST). The work of the teams is driven by three guiding principles – consensus, collaboration and no-fault – that nurture a positive climate.

The Parent Team and the Student and Staff Support Team provide meaningful input and uphold the members of the School Planning and Management Team as they engage in three primary activities: developing a Comprehensive School Plan, ensuring staff development and monitoring and assessing program implementation and outcomes.

(Comer et al., 1996, p.11)

The program recognises three levels of parental involvement in schools. At the first level, all or most parents support parent-teacher meetings, reinforcing learning at home, and in the school's programs. At the second level, a significant number of parents are actively involved in supporting learning activities. At the third level, some parents participate in collaborative decision making with school staff, students and other members on the School Planning and Management Team.

In order to promote such change, mechanisms must be created that allow parents and staff to engage in a process in which they gain knowledge of systems, of child development, and of individual behaviour and apply it to every aspect of school programs in a way and at a rate that is understandable and non-threatening.

(Comer et al., 1996, p.8)

The need for continuous support and encouragement for school communities to facilitate salient parental involvement is recognised

During the fourth year parents were working effectively in their own parent groups and on governance bodies. But this occurred only after a slow, uneven, often uphill climb.

(Comer, 1980, p.125)

2.6.3 Partnership in Policy Formation – The Home/School/ Community Liaison Experience

Experience with the provision of additional funding to schools in disadvantaged areas led to a decision on the part of the Department of Education (now the Department of Education and Science) to increase its resources for improving home/school relations. A pilot Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme was established in 1990 which would use school-based personnel to increase the involvement of parents in their children's learning.

...local coordinators were appointed from the staff of one of the schools that they served to work on a full-time basis with adults in the home-community and school setting.
(Conaty, 2002, p.67-68)

The scheme seeks to address the development of parent/teacher partnership to enhance the nurturing of the whole child. This implies meeting the personal, educational, curricular and leisure needs of parents to promote their self-confidence and self-esteem so that they might become involved in partnership. Equally it implies the development of staff and teacher attitudes and behaviour so that the school becomes a community resource. The aims of the scheme as outlined in the

Explanatory Memorandum for Schools are as follows

- i. to maximise active participation of the children in the project schools, in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk,
- ii. to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children,
- iii. to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational process and to assist them in developing relevant skills, and
- iv. to disseminate the positive outcomes of the project throughout the school system generally.

The initiatives of local coordinators are based on these aims. The initiatives are concerned with:

- promoting parents' education, development, growth and involvement;
- the participation of parents in their children's education including homework support;
- the provision of a parents' room and child-minding facilities for parents;

- developing principal and teacher attitudes and behaviour on partnership and a whole-school approach;
- engaging the complementary skills, experiences and knowledge of parents and teachers in collaborative effort.

(Conaty, 2000, p.40-41)

Parents living in designated areas of disadvantage in Ireland are encouraged by the local home/school/community liaison coordinator to become involved in activities in their child's school. Home/school/community liaison coordinators visit parents of new pupils when their children start school. Parents are visited by the home/school/community liaison coordinator in their homes. Bonds of trust are established as home is a safer place for parents, who possibly left school early themselves, to share their hopes and fears for their children. The coordinator organises activities including non-threatening classes and courses for parents in the school to encourage parents to come to the school and become more relaxed in the school setting. Some parents become involved in the classroom in 'reading for fun', practical maths, visual arts and computer activities. The home/school/community liaison coordinator also works with the teachers

- to promote and establish a continuity in the children's transfer from home to school, and from primary to second-level
- to develop an understanding of partnership in the context of the parents' role as the primary educators of their children
- to encourage attitudes and behaviours regarding the complementarity of parents' and teachers' skills, knowledge and experiences in the enhancement of children's learning and
- to facilitate joint policy making between parents and teachers on issues such as homework, code of positive behaviour, attendance, substance misuse and home/school/ community liaison.

The *Education Act, 1998* requires schools to consult with parents on aspects of

school policy. Many schools in designated areas of disadvantage would traditionally have had difficulty engaging the interest of parents in formal school processes. In the 1997-1998 school year, however, 94 per cent of the schools in the Home/ School / Community Liaison Scheme brought small groups of parents and teachers through a process of team-building, developing an understanding of their respective roles and the concept of partnership, a review of current home/school/community liaison practice and some target-setting for future development (Conaty 2002, p.99). Together these groups of parents and teachers formulated a draft policy on home/school/ community relationships and practices. The emphasis was placed on the process and not on the outcome.

At nine of the ten “regional cluster” meetings in the Spring of 1998 the following strengths of the policy making process were identified by principals, chairpersons, some parents and coordinators.Participants claimed that fears about policy making between parents and teachers were “dissolved”, that parents and teachers were “relaxed” in each others company and that the experience was “enjoyable” and very “positive”. There was a sense of “enthusiasm” and “equality” among participants and discernible “changes in attitude”, particularly on the part of teachers.

(Conaty, 2000, p. 49)

The success of the process of parents and teachers coming together to develop a draft policy on home/school/community relationships and practices has been documented in Conaty, (1999). The encouragement of joint policy making has been a priority area of work for home/school/ community liaison coordinators for the past number of years. However, certain challenges remain including

- finding the time for this work in the context of the workload of teachers and the multitude of pressures on mothers
- gender implications due to the lack of involvement of fathers to date
- the selection of parents and teachers to participate in the process
- strategies to involve marginalised parents

- the on-going need for development of parents and teachers in the areas of partnership and collaborative approaches
- the role of parents and the development of policies relating to curricular areas

It is interesting to note that it was stated clearly that in the policy making process, the coordinator was the key 'link agent' (Conaty, 2002, p.101).

2.7 The Dynamics of Change

Implicit in this research, which focuses on eliciting the perspectives of Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives and other involved parents and teachers, on consultation with parents in the development of the school plan, is a review of an aspect of educational reform. This reform reflects a move towards a partnership model in management and decision-making within schools. It should be remembered that schools were managed until 1975 by a single manager and that it was only in 1985 with the establishment of the National Parents' Council that parents began to have a more centralised role in Irish education. Partnership and shared responsibility is, as indicated previously, a theme which is fundamental to the *Education Act, 1998*. Department of Education and Science policy documents and circulars encourage the education partners to work together in the development of school policy. However,

Changes can be proclaimed in official policy, or written authoritatively on paper. Change can look impressive when represented in the boxes and arrows of administrators' overheads, or enumerated as stages in evolutionary profiles of school growth. But changes of this kind are, as my Northern English grandmother used to say, *just all top show!* They are superficial.

(Hargreaves, 1994, p.10-11)

Many reforms have led to superficial compliance, because there has been a tendency to think the work is done when policy documents have been circulated. A review of some of the research literature on the change process, provides a framework, a

sequence experienced in working on reform, within which the data gleaned through this research will be further analysed and implications for future policy reform identified.

There is now a significant amount of research literature on the change process.

In the field of school improvement, many maxims have been gleaned from this research and applied as a result of it. These include the observations that change is a process not an event; that practice changes before beliefs; that it is better to think big, but start small; that evolutionary planning works better than linear planning; that policy cannot mandate what matters; that implementation strategies that integrate *bottom-up* strategies with *top-down* ones are more effective than *top-down* and *bottom-up* ones alone; and that conflict is a necessary part of change.

(Hargreaves, 1994, p.10)

Senge in *The Fifth Discipline*, (1990), encourages a holistic approach to change and provides a framework for growth and development, which focuses on building a learning organisation.

The tools and ideas presented in this book are for destroying the illusion that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces. When we give up this illusion – we can build “learning organizations”, organizations where people continuously expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

(p.3)

He provides insights into the connections between personal learning and organisational learning and identifies five dimensions in building organisations which truly learn:

- systems thinking
- personal mastery
- mental models
- building shared vision
- team learning.

(Senge, 1990, p.6)

His thesis is that the organisations which excel are those that discover how to tap into their people’s commitment and capacity to learn at every level of the organisation.

Providing opportunities for parents and teachers through the school development planning process, to discuss their hopes and fears for the children, to listen to each other and begin to understand and respect each other’s roles, is fundamental to

developing a school community that promotes the humanity of everyone.

Within those dramas – the play within the play – is the drama of the individual struggling to be a somebody, learning about themselves through relationships, finding out how to be connected and at the same time to be an individual. (Starratt, 1994, p.26)

The climate and culture of the school, as expressed in the nature and quality of the interpersonal relationships is the key to how a school copes with educational change and how effective it is in providing for the changing needs of its pupils and community. Senge, (1990) in writing about people working together as a team states

Most of us at one time or another have been part of a great ‘team’, a group of people who functioned together in an extraordinary way – who trusted one another, who complemented each others’ strengths and compensated for each others’ limitations, who had common goals that were larger than individual goals, and who produced extraordinary results. (p.4)

Changes of value require new skills, behaviour and beliefs or understandings and so change is exceedingly complex. Fullan, (1993) reiterates the importance of the individual in the change process

It is only by individuals taking action to alter their own environments that there is any chance for deep change. (p.40)

Fullan, (1993) describes a sequence experienced in working on reform in teacher education in Toronto. He outlines a process which began with

a few readiness principles: work on the teacher continuum, link teacher development and school development, commit to some field-based programs, work in partnership with schools, infuse our efforts with continuous inquiry. (p.32)

This work highlights the importance of establishing a number of field-based pilot projects and of not committing to a shared vision until people have some experience of joint action together. When the reform process described by Fullan (1993), was in its third year an opportunity was provided to generate,

images of what we should be striving for which were grounded in people’s experiences through the pilot projects and other ideas. (p.32)

Working towards a shared vision, developed following joint action is a concept

promoted by Fullan, (1993) in his research.

In his later work Fullan (2003), looks at the development of understanding of large-scale reform through complexity theory as applied to social systems, with a view to providing strategies to cope more effectively with non-linear reform.

Complexity theory is the operative paradigm which means that systems can't be managed and that reforms rarely unfold as intended. (Preface xi).

To achieve transformation and to encourage commitment to change, Fullan (2003), suggests that 'we need powerful social attractors'. Fullan substitutes the term strange attractors used in chaos theory for social attractors. He names three sets of social attractors – *moral purpose, quality relationships and quality ideas*. In explaining *moral purpose* he states:

if people believe they are doing something worthwhile of a higher order they may be willing to put in the extra sacrifices and effort. (p.34)

Moral purpose, according to Fullan is not however, enough and there is a need for the enormous power of people working together.

We know that quality relationships, once they do develop inspire great loyalty. (p.35)

The third social attractor is *quality ideas* which is explained in relation to knowledge building, knowledge sharing and constantly converting information into purposeful knowledge use. Complexity theory as described by Fullan (2003) provides a paradigm which facilitates the development of understanding of change and is particularly helpful in investigating system change.

This research seeks to understand and provide new knowledge with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan. Factors which facilitate or inhibit parental involvement in school development planning are investigated. Fullan (2003), in commenting on schools as professional learning

communities states,

One of the interesting by-products of engaged learning communities is that they become more proactive with parents and the public. The dynamic, I think, is that when teachers are working alone, not learning together, they are not as confident about what they are doing.....Lacking confidence in explaining themselves, and being on their own, they take fewer risks, play it safe, and close the classroom door. With the thirst for transparency on the part of the public, this, of course compounds the problem – making parents more suspicious, more insistent, and teachers more defensive.

By contrast, professional learning communities not only build confidence and competence, but they also make teachers and principals realize that they can't go the distance alone. These educators, inevitably, I would say, begin to reach out to and become more responsive to parent involvement and community development. This is a natural extension of learning systems, moral purpose and linking to the bigger picture through more engagement with the environment. (Fullan 2003, p.43-44)

Reform, such as the development of a more centralised role for parents in education, is a journey and we are at the early stages of that journey. To understand the process of partnership between parents and teachers in the development of the school plan, it is necessary to review systematically how this reform is being implemented within school communities and to gain the perspectives of the education partners to this reform. Hoban, (2002), p. 23 in seeking to describe multiple elements of complex educational change quotes the work of Waldrop, (1992), p.12.

Change in a complex system results in dynamic interactions because of a special balance point between chaos and order that has been called the *edge of chaos*, 'where new ideas and innovative genotypes are forever nibbling away at the edges of the status quo.'

Research relating to educational change may provide a framework for drawing together the implications and conclusions of this research, and placing the findings within the wider context of the theory of change.

2.8 Concluding Comments

The relationship between families and school is subtle, complex and ever-changing. The broad aim is that parents, schools and the local community should work together in a partnership which is better understood and planned and therefore, more fruitful than in the past. In Ireland, as outlined previously, parental involvement in education

is a right enshrined in the Constitution of Ireland, 1937. The introduction of Boards of Management, 1975, and Parents' Associations 1985, together with recent legislation relating to educational provision has offered opportunities for partnership between parents, teachers, patrons' representatives and community representatives. It is clear, however, that legal frameworks are not enough to make partnership a reality; much depends on local practices and grassroots experience that are developed in concrete situations.

Education policy has also begun to focus on involving parents as a way of improving educational outcomes for students. The promotion of parental involvement is regarded as a critical aspect of successful schools. Schools are encouraged to engage parents in a partnership which includes supporting the academic work of children and sharing in educational decision-making. Initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage and improve equity encourage the involvement of parents with a view to the raising of individual children's performance by enabling their parents to support them more effectively at home. This rationale is particularly important when there are cultural differences between the education system and the family.

However, as outlined in Section 2.5.3 impediments to parent/teacher partnership exist. This research seeks to evaluate the current level of parent participation in the process of school development planning in consultation with the Board of Management, the principal and the teachers in the primary schools included in the sample. The main facilitating and inhibiting factors of partnership will be examined. Policy areas where the perspective of parents is included, together with possibilities for future policy development will be identified.

CHAPTER THREE – THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter One of this thesis outlines the background to the research, preliminary research questions, justification for the research, the research problem and the three hypotheses central to the study. It explains the preparatory phase of the research which involved a review of literature on school effectiveness, school improvement, school development planning, parental involvement in schools with particular reference to parental involvement in policy formation and an outline of the development of a more centralised role for parents in Irish education. As the engagement of parents in education and efforts to glean the perspective of parents with respect to school policy development is now enshrined in Irish education legislation, some research which provides insights into the process of change is outlined to provide a framework for a review of this educational reform. The literature is reviewed in detail in Chapter Two, which expanded on the research problem, hypotheses and subsidiary questions arising from the body of knowledge developed in previous research. This chapter, Chapter Three, takes the reader through the research methodology used to provide data, to investigate the research problem. It aims to provide assurance that appropriate procedures were followed. It describes:

- how the data required to answer the research question is further identified
- research issues about which data are collected
- possible methods for gathering data with reference to the research problem and the literature review
- sources of data, including reference to deciding the population, the sample and the sample size

- instruments and procedures used to collect data including details of pilot studies and procedures used to handle internal and external validity
- information regarding the administration of instruments and procedures (for example, when, where and who), together with response rates, dates and protocols of interviews so that the research is reliable
- the limitations of the methodology.

The specific and central objective of this research is to ascertain whether there is a difference between the aspiration of partnership in school development planning as espoused in education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications and the process by which parents are currently consulted regarding policy formation in schools. Three hypotheses are central to this research as outlined in Section 1.5 Hypotheses, Chapter One. The first proposes, as stated previously,

that there is a difference between the aspiration of partnership in the development of school policies as espoused in education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications and the process by which parents are currently consulted in school development planning.

The second hypothesis proposes that

partnership with parents remains a relatively new concept for Boards of Management, principals, teachers and parents themselves,

The final hypothesis suggests that

support is required to encourage school communities to develop from an acceptance of parental representation on the Board of Management and the establishment of Parents' Associations, to more accountable, diverse, participatory, partnership which should involve parents in a central way in school development planning.

To provide the essential contemporary contextual framework for this central objective a number of subsidiary, but related topics have been identified as being important and necessary constituents of the study. These include seeking information with respect to:

- the engagement of schools with the national School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (SDPI) and the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) with respect to development planning
- awareness of implications of legislation on the school development planning process
- the purpose or rationale for involving parents in the process of policy formation
- the current level of parental participation in the process of school development
- policy areas where perspectives of parents are currently sought
- the methods, structures and processes by which parents are consulted
- the role of the Board of Management and Parents’ Association and other parents who are actively involved in school initiatives in school development planning
- the main facilitating or inhibiting factors of partnership.

An analysis of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two however, indicated the need to gather data from the key partners in education – teachers, principals, members of Boards of Management, and representatives of Parents’ Associations. The literature highlighted initiatives to encourage parental involvement in schools serving designated areas of disadvantage and so the importance of hearing the voice of parents who are involved in activities and programmes in these schools which may not have a Parents’ Association was recognised. In order to become more informed with regard to the realities of parental involvement in school development planning, it was decided that an approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods should be utilised.

3.2 Conclusions From Previous Research

3.2.1 School Effectiveness, School Improvement, School Development Planning Research

Section 2.3 Chapter Two, traced the emergence of the school effectiveness movement, with particular reference to research which identified home-school partnership as one

of the key factors to be found to be associated with effective schools. These studies including Rutter et al. (1979), Mortimore et al, (1988), Levine and Lezotte (1990), and Smyth (1999) indicate that parental involvement with school policy, curriculum and what takes place in the classroom appear to go hand-in-hand with better results. This review of the literature has revealed that an analysis of the lists of characteristics which have emerged from school effectiveness studies internationally, has shown a remarkable level of correspondence in the characteristics or correlates of effective schools. It has provided the researcher with an understanding of the contribution this research can make to selecting themes for review. These themes include, leadership, shared vision and goals, facilitating and inhibiting factors in the development of partnership between parents and teachers and professional development, training and support. The work of Mortimore and Mortimore (1991), p.129-130 in highlighting the need to anticipate difficulties which may arise between parents and teachers and the value of drawing up a home/school links policy is also noted.

School effectiveness models do not address adequately the process by which a school might develop itself, the culture of the school and how a school interconnects with external agencies. The process orientation of school improvement places particular emphasis on consensus-building and participatory decision-making. School improvement studies tend to be more action-oriented than the effective schools research. In seeking to explore consultation with parents in the development of the school plan, school improvement research and the strategies associated with school improvement, including school development planning provided the researcher with some preliminary questions for eliciting greater understanding and new knowledge of issues such as:

- the purpose of involving parents in school development planning

- the process by which parents are currently consulted regarding school policy development and
- the content or policy areas within the school plan which have been developed using a model which involved consultation with parents.

3.2.2 Models of Parental Involvement in Schools

Literature reviewed in Section 2.5 of Chapter Two looks at models of parental involvement in schools and recognises that the literature Macbeth et al. (1984), Widlake, (1986), Bastiani (1989) and Epstein (1995) suggests levels of parental involvement. Research also indicates that ‘elementary schools because of their size and the age of their students have an advantage’ Stoll and Fink, (1996, p.135). It also acknowledges that

scholars have found quite consistently that parents prefer to be involved in student learning rather than in school governance or other activities that focus on the school in its entirety (Mc Geaney, 1980, Tizard & Hughes, 1984 in Coleman 1998, p.2)

Many strategies for involving parents in the school place parents as supporters and learners within the education system, with some encouraging a deeper dialogue between parents and teachers. Schools that are aiming to develop more effective relationships with parents have to communicate not only to parents but with them as well. A strategy based on the notion of empowerment concentrates on developing a participatory ethos within the school so that parents could share decision-making powers with educational professionals. Vincent (1996) describes a model of parent as participant which offers opportunities for individual and collective voice, however, her research describes this model as the least common role identified to be open to parents with children in school. Mac Giolla Phádraig (2003) states that according to the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary implementation team,

schools differ widely in their practices, approaches and experiences regarding the involvement and participation of parents and the broader school community in the work of the school. (p. 30)

This research highlights the importance of recognising a continuum of parental involvement in their child's school and of placing parental involvement in school development planning at the upper end of this continuum.

3.2.3 Irish Legislative and Administrative Context

The sample for this research includes some teachers, members of Boards of Management, representatives of Parents' Associations and other parents working in and for schools in Ireland. A review of the legislative and administrative context of these schools was deemed to be critically important in seeking to understand the development of a more centralised role for parents in Irish education and in recognising that the promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children is a strategy of educational policy and practice. The review of recent legislation together with Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications provided the researcher with insights into policy areas, consultation processes and procedures and the importance of involvement and collaboration of patrons, school management, teaching staff, support staff, pupils, parents and the wider community in the development of the school plan.

3.2.4 Partnership

Chapter One provides a number of definitions of the term partnership, Morgan et al. (1992), White Paper on Education (1995), Pugh (1989). The many interpretations and ways in which a partnership approach becomes a reality in the context of relationships between the partners in education, teachers, members of Boards of Management and representatives of Parents' Associations and other parents is a

central theme of this research. For the purposes of this research the definition of partnership is, as stated previously in Chapter One, Section 1.8, that which reflects a process which implies as outlined in Munn (1993, p.105)

- A sharing of power, responsibility and ownership – though not necessarily equally
- A degree of mutuality, which begins with the process of listening to each other and incorporates responsive dialogue and ‘give and take’ on both sides
- Shared aims and goals, based on common ground, but which also acknowledge important differences
- A commitment to joint action, in which parents and professionals work together to get things done.

The section in the Literature Review models of partnership in school development planning Chapter Two, Section 2.6, highlights the importance of parents and teachers sharing the same goals and working together in active partnership. This literature focused the attention of the researcher, in selecting an appropriate definition of partnership, on a definition which described a close working relationship.

However, as outlined in chapter Two, Section 2.5.3, impediments to partnership exist. Research such as Berliner (1997) and OECD (1997) indicates that some parents become involved in the school to advance a particular policy or curriculum change to which they subscribe, but which may not be for the benefit of all pupils. Recently The New York Times, published an article ‘*Caught between State and Church*’ which stated that ‘surveys of high school biology teachers have found that avoidance of evolution is common among instructors throughout the nation’, to ‘forestall trouble with fundamentalist parents’.

Potts, (1982 p.185), draws attention to difficulties which can arise when the term partnership is not clearly defined. He

argues that, unless partnership embodies a process of joint decision-making, it becomes a matter of “window dressing on the part of the professional”. This window dressing involves teachers working with parents but actually extending their own role as parents are seen as a resource to be used to support the professional rather than possessing

specialised knowledge in their own right.

(p. 45)

The perspectives of Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives, principals and teachers with respect to factors which facilitate or inhibit consultation with parents in the development of the school plan is gathered through the quantitative and qualitative phases of this research

3.2.5 The Process of Change

The Irish education system as the evidence of education legislation, Department of Education and Science guidelines, circular letters and publications indicates is encouraging schools to consult with parents in planning and decision-making. Some changes have been mandated including the establishment of a system of Boards of Management. Boards must promote contact between the school, parents and the community and facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a Parents' Association and to a Parents' Association when it is established. The Board has responsibility for the preparation of The School Plan and for establishing procedures for informing the parents of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school. To respond to the ever-changing demands of educational reform, the system needs to provide school communities with strategies to create supportive conditions conducive to enabling 'planned change' to be successful. The review of some literature relating to theories of education and theories of change in Section 2.7 provides a framework for reviewing strategies and approaches to including the perspective of parents in the development planning process.

3.2.6 Conclusion

This overview of conclusions from previous research provides some insight into how data required to answer the research problem are further identified. School

effectiveness, school improvement and school development planning research highlighted the importance of investigating the purpose of involving parents from the perspectives of the various partners, the processes and procedures used currently by schools to ascertain the parental perspective on certain policy areas and also the content or policy areas with particular reference to the importance of developing a shared vision for the school. Literature reviewed which gave an overview of frameworks for the development of parental involvement in schools highlighted involvement patterns in relations between home and school. The developmental nature of relationships and the different stages that schools are at in relating to parents and in involving them in policy formulation must be recognised in deciding possible methods for gathering data and also in choosing a research strategy which would involve obtaining data from multiple sources. The review of education legislation and administrative policy documents further supports the identification for the researcher of specific policy areas which require investigation in the context of this research. Finally, the complexity of the term partnership is highlighted. In developing an understanding of partnership in practice, the definitions give some insight into how school practices can be viewed when principles of a partnership approach for example, shared vision, mutual respect, willingness to negotiate, transparency and accountability are understood.

3.3 Quantitative Phase of the Research – The Questionnaire

3.3.1 Overview of Initial Stage

The preparatory phase of the study involved, as stated previously, a review of the literature on school effectiveness, school improvement, school development planning, parental involvement in schools with particular reference to consultation with parents in policy formation and a review of the development of a more centralised role for

parents in Irish education. Research literature relating to research methodology was also examined and carefully considered, together with current legislation and Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications. It was decided to use a broad research strategy initially because:

- implicit in the notion of a 'survey' is the idea that the research should have a wide and inclusive coverage which in this instance involved eliciting data through a questionnaire from forty-three principals serving in a district of a primary district inspector. This district includes suburban, town and rural schools ranging in size from two and three teacher rural schools to large fifteen plus teacher suburban schools. It is a naturally occurring cluster of a cross-section of school sites. Further details regarding the sample of principals selected are included in the next section, Section 3.3.2 of this chapter
- surveys attempt to provide a snapshot of how things are at the specific time at which the data are collected. This snapshot facilitates greater understanding of the research questions and will indicate themes and new knowledge to be explored further at a later stage

The quantitative data is often best suited to providing the basic research evidence while the qualitative data can be used to round out the picture and provide examples
(Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 381, adapted)

- a survey approach yields empirical data on real-world observations which is purposeful and structured. Simple statistics can provide a clear foundation for discussion and critique.

What is distinctive about the survey approach is the combination of a commitment to a breadth of study, a focus on the snapshot at a given point in time and a dependence on empirical data.
(Denscombe, 1998, p.7)

3.3.2 The Sample

As defined in Section 1.8, Chapter One, the researcher is a primary district inspector, with the Department of Education and Science. During the academic year 2002-2003, the district consisted of forty-five schools and four hundred and eighty-four teachers. Two of the schools were Gaelscoileanna and for the reasons outlined previously in Section 1.9, Delimitations of Scope and Key Assumptions, were not included in the current research. The schools included in the research, and the principals included in the quantitative phase of this research are the forty-three principals of the remaining schools in the district of the researcher. In selecting as the sample the district of a primary district inspector, the researcher opted to focus on a naturally occurring cluster of a particular cross-section of primary school sites; the underlying aim being to investigate consultation with parents in the development of the school plan in a broadly representative cluster of national schools, of various types, both suburban and rural and including a number of schools serving designated areas of disadvantage. The school sites therefore, include a range of school types, single sex boys and girls, mixed schools, junior and senior schools, in a variety of settings – suburban, town and rural schools. Communication patterns, however, may vary in schools of different size INTO (1993, p.19) and so, it was deemed necessary to include in the sample a number of schools of differing sizes. In accessing the validity of the target population in this research the following variables were taken into consideration:

- (1) The Statistical Report 2001/2002 of the Department of Education and Science, Government of Ireland (2003, p.28), indicates that there are 3,157 ordinary national schools which can be divided as follows, with respect to school size.

Table 3.1: Ordinary National Schools – National Figure – Sample Number

	National Figure	Sample Number
1-4 Teachers	1,549 Schools	10 Schools
5-9 Teachers	827 Schools	11 Schools
10-15 Teachers	433 Schools	10 Schools
15 Plus Teachers	348 Schools	12 Schools
Total Number of Schools	3,157 Schools	43 Schools

The sample selected includes, as shown above ten schools with 1-4 teachers, eleven schools with 5-9 teachers, ten schools with 10-14 teachers and twelve large schools with fifteen plus teachers. The above indicates that the sample includes a variety of school sizes which was considered important given the profile of ordinary national schools nationally.

- (2) The forty-three schools in the sample are recognised schools under the *Education Act, 1998*, are managed through Boards of Management, and conduct their activities in compliance with regulations made by the Minister for Education and Science. Therefore, circulars and documentation from the Department of Education and Science encouraging partnership in the development of specific school policy is equally relevant to all of the schools.
- (3) National in-career development supported by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and the School Development Planning Support (SDPS) is available to the teachers in all the schools in the sample selected.

The percentage of schools serving designated areas of disadvantage in the sample is 26.2% or eleven schools. This figure is a significantly higher proportion of the sample than the 16% of primary school pupils in the current Disadvantage Areas Scheme Government of Ireland (1999), *The New Deal, A Plan for Educational Opportunity*, (p.10). The importance of identifying patterns of difference in the engagement of parents who live in designated areas of disadvantage with school structures, as against other parents, led to an acceptance of the fact that schools

serving designated areas of disadvantage are over-represented in the sample. This was considered particularly important given that one of the key reasons, underlying parental involvement, given by officials and policy analysts, is tackling disadvantage and improving equity:

This reason.....refers more explicitly to the raising of individual children's performance by enabling their parents to support them more effectively at home. This is particularly important when there are cultural differences between the education system and the family. (European Commission 1995, in OECD, 1997, p. 27)

The selection of the three case studies for the qualitative phase of this research was based on a conscious and explicit choice of cases deemed to be suitable having analysed the data gleaned from the questionnaires completed by the principals. The suitability of the specific cases and the reasons for their selection will be discussed in Sections 3.4.3-3.4.6 of this chapter which will defend in detail the decision to select particular cases. This phase of the research is designed to elicit the perspectives of the various partners in education to parental involvement in school development planning.

Seeing things from a different perspective and the opportunity to corroborate findings can enhance the validity of the data. They do not prove that the researcher has 'got it right', but they do give some confidence that the meaning of the data has some consistency across methods and that the findings are not too closely tied up with a particular method used to collect the data. Effectively, they lend support to the analysis. (Denscombe, 1998, p. 85)

3.3.3 Development of Questionnaire for Principals – Pre-pilot Study

The decision to survey the principals initially was taken with reference to the *Education Act, 1998*, which details the responsibility of the principal in relation to school development planning and partnership with parents. Part V, Section 23(2)(d) states – the principal shall

Under the direction of the board, and, in consultation with the teachers, the parents and, to the extent appropriate to their age and experience, the students, set the objectives for the school and monitor the achievement of those objectives, and Section 23(3)(e) continues by elaborating on the role of the principal in facilitating

the partnership process by stating the principal shall -

encourage the involvement of parents of students in the school in the education of those students and in the achievement of the objectives of the school.

The central role of the principal teacher in facilitating the development of communication systems whereby all the stakeholders in education - members of the Board of Management, teachers, parents including the Parents' Association and students are consulted in relation to policy development was recognised and influenced the decision to gather data from the principal teachers initially.

...parents in the school community constitute the most important resource the school has for school improvement. Hence, the most important task of the school principal who is concerned about quality is to activate parents as instructional supporters of their children. This work must be done through classroom teachers. (Coleman 1998, p.61)

The inclusion of the perspective of class teachers to the development of partnership in school development planning are addressed at a later stage of this research. The following initial purposes for developing a questionnaire for principals were identified:

- to obtain the perspective of the principals on current practice with respect to parental involvement in school development planning
- to identify themes for in-depth investigation during the qualitative phase of the research
- to assist in identifying factors to be taken into consideration in developing a continuum of parental involvement
- to aid the process of selecting case study sites.

A pre-pilot study was conducted in October 2002, which helped identify a range of issues and provided useful information from which a framework for a draft questionnaire emerged. The sample selected to participate in the pre-pilot consisted of three teachers working in schools serving designated areas of disadvantage with

experience of partnership in school development planning and three teachers working in schools which are not serving designated areas of disadvantaged. The pre-pilot generated categories for closed questions relating to topics such as:

- the partners consulted in the context of school development planning (who?)
- the reasons why parents should be consulted with regard to aspects of school policy (why?)
- the variety of processes of partnership in school development planning (how?)
- a suggested list of organisational and curricular policies which conceivably should be drawn up by the education partners in a collaborative manner (what?).

Asking the familiar questions of 'who', 'what', 'where', 'how' and 'why' may lead the student towards placing appropriate boundaries around the research problem.

(Yin,1989, p.17)

Enabling or inhibiting factors to parental involvement in school development planning were also identified in the pre-pilot. The number of factors set out in these rank order questions was reduced on the recommendation of the respondents to five.

....Wilson and Mc Lean (1994:26) suggest that it is unrealistic to ask respondents to arrange priorities where there are more than five ranks that have been requested.

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.252)

3.3.4 Design – Pilot Study – Validity and Reliability

It was identified at the outset that if a structured questionnaire was to be used, enabling patterns to be observed and comparisons to be made, then the questionnaire would need to be piloted and refined so that the final version would contain as full a range of possibilities as could reasonably be foreseen. Six principal teachers who would not ultimately be in the sample were asked to test a draft (Appendix 1.1) of the actual survey itself.

This process had a number of functions

....principally to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire
(Oppenheim, 1992; Morrison,1993; Wilson & McLean, 1994: 47)
(Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p. 261)

A letter dated January 7th , 2003 (Appendix 3.1) accompanying the pilot questionnaire asked the sample to

- check the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout
- to give feedback on the purposes of the research and whether all aspects of their experience of partnership in school development planning had been addressed in the questions
- to highlight ambiguities or difficulties in the wording of the questions
- to comment on the types of questions and the format (open, closed, rank order and multiple choice) and
- to check the time taken to complete the questionnaire.

The pilot instrument consisted of 22 items which had been developed to measure a specific aspect of the objectives of this study.

- Questions (1) and (2) related to the size of the school and whether the school serves a designated area of disadvantage under the Department of Education and Science scheme. These questions facilitated the selection of schools for the qualitative phase of this study
- Question (3) provided an indication of how long the school has been involved in a process of development planning and of awareness of the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process
- Questions (4) and (5) related to the engagement of schools with the national initiatives Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (SDPI) in the context of development planning, while question (18) sought information on the attendance or non-

attendance of parents on school based planning days

- Questions (6), (19) and (20) related to formal structures within the school the Board of Management and Parents' Association and the process by which they are consulted in the context of policy formation
- Question (7) sought to provide data relating to the content of the school plan while question (16) attempted to elicit information relating to the involvement of parents with specific reference to the development of policy in curricular areas
- Question (8) addressed the issue of how policy is generally formulated question (10) focused specifically on how parents are consulted regarding the development of school policies and question (11) looked at how often parents are consulted on core policies named in the legislation and in Department of Education and Science documentation, where collaboration with parents is required
- The why of consultation with parents was at the core of question (9). In seeking to ascertain the perspective of the principals in the sample, the researcher offered five reasons for parental consultation on aspects of school policy. These options included:
 - (a) Commitment to democratic decision-making
 - (b) Awareness of parental rights and the law
 - (c) Ethical reasons e.g. School Ethos, Relationships and Sexuality Education
 - (d) Recognition of parents as the prime educators of their children
 - (e) One of the characteristics of an effective school is salient parental involvement.

In selecting the above options and in requesting principals to rank them from the most important (1) to least important (5), the researcher took cognisance of the reasons for parental involvement outlined in the OECD Report, detailed in Chapter Three, Research Methodology, Section 3.3.4 together with factors which are specific to the Irish context. One of the options included, which is specific to the

Irish context is mindful of Article 42.1 of *The Constitution of Ireland 1937*, which states

The State acknowledges that the prime educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the education of their children.

Thus, the option (d), recognition of parents as prime educators of their children, has its origin in the 1937 Constitution. More recently, the appointment of Boards of Management of schools, the establishment of the National Parents' Council, and the commitment to a partnership approach in decision-making as evidenced in the *Education Act, 1998* were factors in including two further options, awareness of parental rights and the law, and commitment to democratic decision-making. Parental demand as outlined in Chapter Two for greater variety of school types and ethos together with efforts by policy-makers to involve schools in solutions to social issues are the background to the inclusion of ethical reasons as a purpose for parental consultation on school policy. Relationships and Sexuality Education was specifically named by the author, as in the guidelines for the development and implementation of school policy and programmes on Relationships and Sexuality Education, emphasis throughout is placed on the collaborative and supportive role of all the partners within the school community.

- Questions (12) and (13) and (14) were included with reference to a national Department of Education and Science Initiative relating to the compulsory involvement of parents in the development of a Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy. This was the first national programme where specific guidance was given to schools in relation to the process to be used and the partners to be involved. The Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and Sexuality Education, (1995) identified the principal teacher as the central figure

in facilitating a collaborative approach to the development of this policy.

There should be a collaborative, whole-school approach to the development of the school programme with the principal having a key leadership role in facilitating consultation within the school community. (p. 9)

- The *Education (Welfare) Act, 1998*, Section 23(1) requires schools to draw up their Code of Behaviour in consultation with parents. Question (15) provided data relating to how the school communicates the code of behaviour to parents
- Perspectives relating to the involvement of parents in the development of school policy and the ultimate benefit that involvement may or may not have on their children is the issue on which data is sought in Question (17)
- Questions (21) and (22) list enabling or inhibiting factors relating to partnership in school development planning. Factors were selected with reference to the literature on school effectiveness, school improvement and school development and were reduced with reference to the pre-pilot study. Eventually five facilitating factors and five inhibiting factors were selected and respondents were asked to rank from 1-5 in terms of the priority they would assign them.

3.3.5 Analysis of Pilot Questionnaire

An analysis of the pilot questionnaires, all of which were completed and returned in early February 2003, identified the need to refine the language of some items, the need to develop further categories for closed response modes together with suggestions regarding the general layout and presentation of the questionnaire with particular reference to the need to provide extra space for open questions. The analysis also informed the coding system for data analysis.

The following are the modifications made as a result of the pilot phase.

- More space was requested when giving examples to support a chosen answer and

when explaining a choice which involved some combination of closed response modes

- Two questions 19 and 20 were amended to include an open option to facilitate a choice where a combination of statements might be most appropriate
- Questions 4 and 5 which relate to the national programmes Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (SDPI) were considered vague and were amended to read – “did your school utilise the services of PCSP or SDPI” rather than “has the PCSP or SDPI been a support to your school in the process of school development planning?”
- No cognisance had been taken in the pilot questionnaire of the need for training of parents to participate in the planning process and the fact that this can slow the process considerably. This issue will be addressed at interview with the partners in education during the qualitative phase of this research.

Some key themes began to emerge from the pilot questionnaire, which are developed in greater depth as this research proceeds including:

- awareness of the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process
- engagement of parents with schools and more specifically with school development planning
- the partnership process (how is the process facilitated?)
- policy areas (what policy areas should be developed in this way?)
- supports in place for developing a collaborative process
- facilitating and inhibiting factors (why is the process of partnership in school development planning at the stage its at?)

3.3.6 Responses to the Questionnaire

In all forty-three questionnaires (Appendix 1.2) were posted on January 18, 2003 to the principals of the schools in the district of a primary district inspector. Thirty-four questionnaires had been completed and returned by April 24, 2003. A reminder (Appendix 2.3) was issued to the remaining nine principals. By June 2003 all the questionnaires were returned, including, however, one which had not been completed. Forty-two questionnaires are analysed for the purposes of this study. Details of the main findings that emerged from the data are described in Chapter Four under the following headings:

- Engagement with school development planning
- Purpose of involving parents in school development planning
- Process of involving parents in school development planning
- Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas
- Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association
- Relationships – facilitating or inhibiting factors in school development planning

3.4 Qualitative Phase of Research – A Case Study Approach – The Schools

3.4.1 Why a Case Study Approach?

To facilitate an in-depth study of the issues and perspectives gleaned from the analysis of the questionnaires completed by the principals and to gain further insights into the complex field situation of parental involvement in policy formation in schools, a case study approach was selected for the qualitative phase of this research.

A case study approach was appropriate because of the necessity to focus on

(a) relationships and processes

Case studies recognise the complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truths. By carefully attending to social situations, case studies can represent something of the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants. The best case studies are

capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations.
(Adelman et al. 1980:59-60 in Bassey, 1999, p.23)

(b) gathering data from multiple sources to be carried out in a natural setting.

As Yin (1994) stresses, the case study is a 'naturally occurring' phenomenon. It exists prior to the research project and, it is hoped, continues to exist once the research is finished.
(Denscombe, 1998, p. 31)

(c) the use of multiple methods for data-collection. The strategy of using several techniques to get a better understanding of what you are studying facilitates the validation of data through triangulation and helps capture the complex reality under scrutiny.

Unlike the experimenter who manipulates variables to determine causal significance or the surveyor who asks standardised questions of large, representative samples of individuals, the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit – a child, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs.

(Cohen & Manion 1989:124-125 in Bassey , 1999, p.24)

In selecting a case study approach the researcher recognises the serious criticisms in research literature of the approach:

Yin (1994:9) recognized that within the academic community there is opposition to the idea of case study on the grounds of a 'lack of rigor' and 'little basis for scientific generalization', and 'they take too long and they result in massive, unreadable documents (Yin 1994:10).
(Bassey, 1999, p.34)

The point at which the case study approach is most vulnerable to criticism is in relation to the credibility of generalisations from its findings. In opting for a case study approach, cognisance has been taken by the researcher of such criticism.

However, the value of 'fuzzy generalization' as described by Bassey (1999, p.12) is recognised:

This is the kind of statement which makes no absolute claim to knowledge, but hedges its claim with uncertainties. It arises when the empirical finding of a piece of research, such as

In *this* case it *has been* found that.....

is turned into a qualified statement like this:

In *some* cases it *may be* found that.....

(Bassey, 1999, p. 12)

Bassey elaborates on the concept of 'fuzzy generalization' by stating

The fuzzy generalization arises from studies of singularities and typically claims that *it is possible, or likely, or unlikely that* what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere: it is a qualitative measure. (Bassey, 1999, p.12)

As Borg and Gall state

Most case studies are based on the premise that a case can be located that is typical of many other cases, that is, the case is viewed as an example of a class of events or a group of individuals. Once such a case has been located, it follows that in-depth observations and collection of other data about the single case can provide insights into the class of events from which the case has been drawn.

(Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 402)

The initial phase of this study the questionnaire gathered data with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions in the sample schools from the perspective of the principals, with respect to parental involvement in school development planning. The qualitative phase, the case studies, provide the opportunity to corroborate the findings by eliciting data from the partners, Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives or parents who are actively involved in the schools and teachers. It should be noted, however, that

It is unwise to think that threats to validity and reliability can ever be erased completely; rather the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a piece of research. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.105)

3.4.2 Checklist to Support the Claim that this Enquiry meets the Criteria of an Educational Case Study

Bassey (1999, p.21) outlines a checklist to support the claim that an enquiry meets the criteria of an educational case study that is useful in justifying the choice of a case study approach. Bassey suggests that firstly it is necessary to decide the type of educational case study to be undertaken. This research is a theory-seeking case study concerned to enrich the thinking and discourse on the topic. It seeks to provide new knowledge, theories and ideas in relation to parental involvement in school development planning. The research problem involves people's constructions of

meanings and experience which have not previously been explored and therefore, requires a qualitative methodology. Theoretical research is a subset of educational case study research.

This category of research work has the purpose of trying to describe, interpret or explain what is happening without making value judgements or trying to induce any change. The researchers are trying to portray the topic of their enquiry as it is. The aim is to give theoretical accounts of the topic – perhaps its structures, or processes, or relationships – which link with existing theoretical ideas. They are not seeking to evaluate it and they strive to investigate without disturbing. Of course, others may use the findings to initiate change, but the researchers themselves aim to complete the enquiry without changing the situation. (Bassey, 1999, p.40)

To meet the requirements outlined by Bassey, the enquiry must be conducted within a localised boundary of space and time which in this instance involves the purposive selection of cases following analysis of forty-two questionnaires completed by principals in the district of a primary district inspector. The examination of interesting aspects of an educational activity, programme, institution or system in its natural context with an ethic of respect for persons is central to the study. The purpose of this phase of the research is to pursue in greater depth and detail, interesting lines of enquiry resulting from the analysis of the questionnaires completed by the forty-two principals of schools involving suburban, town and rural schools as outlined previously. To provide a deeper understanding of the research problem and to enhance the validity of the research findings the education partners, Board of Management members, teachers and parent representatives are interviewed at the school and taped with their permission.

Other features of the checklist outlined by Bassey which informed the research methodology and process were details relating to the need to collect sufficient data to be able to:

- to explore significant features of the case
- to create plausible interpretations

- to test the trustworthiness of these interpretations
- to relate the argument to the literature
- to provide an audit trail that other researchers can use to validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments.

Qualitative research methods are largely subjective in that they rely heavily upon the researcher's skills of understanding and interpretation to provide valid information.

The research problem in this instance cannot be measured by the questions 'how many?' or 'what?'. The checklist created by Bassey is useful to the researcher in providing a structure and framework for this phase of data gathering.

3.4.3 The Selection of Cases and Boundaries to the Case Studies

This research has been conducted using a naturally occurring cluster of schools – the district of a primary district inspector, during the period 2002-2003. This district as outlined in Section 3.3.2 includes a broadly representative cluster of school sizes as outlined previously. It is recognised that the proportion of schools serving designated areas of disadvantage is higher in the sample, than the national average, as is the number of larger schools with fifteen plus teachers. The district, however, represents proportionally quite a good spread with respect to the numbers of pupils who attend varying sizes of school nationally:

88,785 pupils attend schools of 1-4 teachers	[9 schools in sample]
103,700 pupils attend schools of 5-9 teachers	[11 schools in sample]
98,986 pupils attend schools of 10-15 teachers	[10 schools in sample]
140,236 pupils attend schools with 15 plus teachers	[12 schools in sample]

(Department of Education and Science, 2003 p. 28)

A purposive approach, involving the identification of specific criteria based on the responses of the 42 principals to the questionnaire, was used in selecting the three

cases for in-depth study. A number of items were identified as indicating ‘openness to parental involvement in school development planning’. Further details regarding the selection process and the case study schools selected are outlined in Chapter Five, Section 5.2.

In selecting cases for in-depth study, cognisance was taken of initiatives and research, including Kelleghan (1997), Widlake (1986), Comer (1996), Hanafin and Lynch (2001) and Conaty (2002), previously undertaken and described in Chapter Two to encourage the involvement of parents who live in designated areas of disadvantaged areas in their children’s education. A case study of a school serving a designated area of disadvantage would contribute to an understanding of the particular difficulties experienced by schools serving designated areas of disadvantage in sustaining a Parents’ Association and how these schools consult with parents in the development of school policy.

3.4.4 Focus Groups

A group interview technique was selected to complement information obtained through the questionnaires to principals and to explore attitudes, perspectives and circumstances which facilitate parental involvement in school development planning. It was deemed essential to gain a deeper understanding of the central research problem, that the perspective of the other partners in education be ascertained. Focus groups consist of people specially selected for their experience in relation to whatever is being researched. In this instance the groups were chosen because they represent a particular viewpoint and experience - the viewpoint and experience of teachers, the Parents’ Association or parents who are actively involved in the school and the Board of Management. In focus groups the interaction is among the members, who work

through an idea, issue or problem that the researcher has selected. The research sessions were designed to encourage reflection on action and experience that sought to surface understandings about consultation with parents in the development of the school plan. Easterby-Smith et al., (1991) provide some guidelines in relation to focus group interviews

Focus group interviews can take the form of loosely structures 'steered conversations'. The skills of initiating and facilitating are of particular relevance when a group of people are being simultaneously interviewed. The format of the interview should be organised by using what is called a 'topic guide'. This is a résumé of the main areas of interest which are to be explored. It is designed so that, whilst still covering the general areas of interest, it should also allow unforeseen areas to emerge. (p.93-94)

Limitations of focus group sessions include the fact that it can be difficult to record the discussion that takes place, as speakers interrupt one another and talk simultaneously and that they provide less depth and detail about the opinions and experiences of any given participant. Also, as with all group interviews, there is the possibility that people will be reluctant to disclose thoughts on sensitive matters in the company of others and that extrovert characters can dominate the proceedings. There can be a danger of the moderator, in trying to maintain the interview's focus, influencing the group's interaction.

3.4.5 Topics for Discussion – Validity and Reliability

Topics for discussion were selected following an in-depth analysis of the questionnaires, together with modifications which occurred as a result of pilot sessions held with a group of teachers November 24th 2003, members of a Board of Management November 24th 2003 and representatives of a Parents' Association December 10th 2003. The wording of how the themes were introduced to each group was slightly different. Parents for example were asked what makes it easy/hard to approach the school and the corresponding questions for teachers is what makes it

easy/hard to involve parents in the school. The themes discussed were as follows:

- Personal experience of partnership between parents and teachers in children's learning
- The purpose of involving parents in the school
- Factors that facilitate or inhibit parental involvement in schools
- Structures – Board of Management, Parents' Association
- Teachers, members of the Board of Management, representatives of the Parents' Association, other parents who are actively involved in the school and school development planning – policy areas, process, The School Plan
- Training and support
- Awareness of rights and responsibilities with respect to school development planning and the law

3.4.6 Analysis of Focus Groups

The qualitative data obtained using the focus group interview research method, had to be organised before it could be analysed. The organisation of the data in preparation for analysis required the following practical steps

- the taped interviews were transcribed with a margin so that notes and reflections could be added next to relevant words and in order that the researcher could return to points in the data which were of particular interest
- early coding and categorising of the data involved linking the themes selected for discussion with the comments of the participants
- a profile of each of the case study schools was drawn up to facilitate greater understanding of the attitudes and perspectives of the partners in education, to 'triangulate' the findings with alternative sources as a way of supporting

confidence in their validity and to gain a deeper understanding of the research question and hypotheses central to this research

- the data was analysed with respect to the research question and the three hypotheses separately from the perspective of each of the education partners, to facilitate linking the data with obtained from the focus group interviews with previous research and the data obtained from the questionnaires
- the next stage involved drawing together the data gleaned from the focus group interviews with that already gathered from the questionnaires and an attempt to identify ‘patterns and processes, commonalities and differences’ Miles and Huberman (1994, p.9), (Chapter Six).
- through a process of reflection conclusions and implications for policy and practice were identified (Chapter Seven).

3.5 Presentation of Data Findings and Concluding Comments

The research findings are presented in detail in Chapters Four and Five. Quantitative foundational data together with qualitative data gleaned from the open questions in the questionnaires distributed to forty-three principals in the author’s district are outlined in Chapter Four. Details of the main findings that emerged from the data are described in Chapter Four under the following headings:

- Engagement with school development planning
- Purpose of involving parents in school development planning
- Process of involving parents in school development planning
- Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas
- Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association
- Relationships – facilitating or inhibiting factors in school development planning

Similar headings are used to provide in Chapter Five insights into attitudes,

perceptions, hopes, concerns and experiences of the participants in the focus group interviews held in the three case study schools. The perspective of members of the Board of Management, and the parents and teachers interviewed are described in detail in relation to each case study school. The data is then analysed in such a way as to enrich the thinking and to provide new information with respect to the problem and hypotheses central to this research. In reporting on the analysis, a method, given by Murrison & Webb (1991), which combines the reporting of the results and the discussion, is used. Chapter Six, Linking the Strands reviews the data obtained from both the questionnaires to the principals and the focus group interviews with the education partners in the context of previous research, with a view to developing theories that emerge. Conclusions and implications for policy and practice are outlined in the final chapter, which seeks to place the findings of this research with existing knowledge with respect to parental involvement in school development planning.

CHAPTER FOUR – THE QUESTIONNAIRE

4.1 Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter are gleaned from the questionnaire distributed to the forty-three principals of the primary schools in the author's district. Drafts of the questionnaire were refined, as described in Chapter Three, Sections 3.3.3-3.3.4, in the pre-pilot and pilot phases. Details of the main findings that emerged from the data will be described under the following headings:

- Engagement with school development planning
- Purpose for involving parents in school development planning
- Process of involving parents in school development planning
- Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas
- Structures – Board of Management, Parents' Association
- Relationships – facilitating or inhibiting factors in school development planning

School development planning data is outlined initially to gain an overview of where schools are at in relation to school development planning and their understanding of the implications of education legislation on the process of school development planning. This chapter then proceeds to narrow the focus to look at the role of parents in school development planning by analysing responses to why parents could or should be involved in school planning. The processes used by schools that have embraced the concept of involving parents at some level in school development planning and the policy areas addressed are then discussed. School structures, including Boards of Management and Parents' Associations, have been established in many schools to facilitate partnership and dialogue in school management and relationships. This research looks at responses to ascertain the extent to which these school structures are consulted and / or provide leadership with respect to school

development planning. Finally, an attempt is made to gain base-line data in relation to factors which facilitate or inhibit partnership in school development planning.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit quantitative foundational information, together with qualitative data in the form of responses to open questions relating to the above topics, with the intention of using this information as a base or reference point for further investigation. In reporting on the analysis of the data, some reference is made to relevant literature to provide a context for the data obtained from the questionnaires and facilitate deeper discussion of the themes that emerged from it.

4.2 Response Rate

In all, as stated previously, forty-three questionnaires were distributed to the principals of schools in the district of a primary district inspector. All of the questionnaires were returned, however, one was not completed. Forty-two questionnaires are therefore included in the analysis. The comprehensive nature of the questionnaire and the high rate of return provide an adequate basis to ensure that the findings discussed in this chapter are representative of the opinions of the principals surveyed within the inspectorate district.

4.3 Questionnaire Description

Chapter Three includes a comprehensive description of the development of the questionnaire for principals of primary schools in the author's area which includes six main themes as described in Section 4.1 of this chapter, together with two introductory questions relating to school size and educational disadvantage. The purpose of these questions has been outlined in the context of an explanation of the sample in Chapter One, Section 1.7 and again in greater detail in Chapter Three, Research Methodology, Sections 3.3.3-3.3.4. Table 4.1 gives the breakdown of the

schools with respect to size of school, determined by numbers of teachers.

Table 4.1: Size of school – Q.1

No. of Teachers	Frequency	Percent	National figures	Ratio Sample vs National Figures
1-4	9	21.4	1,549	0.0058
5-9	11	26.2	827	0.0407
10-14	10	23.8	433	0.0230
15+	12	28.6	348	0.0344
Total	42	100.0	3,157	N = 0.0133

As described previously in Chapters One and Three, there are 3,157 ordinary national schools in Ireland Department of Education and Science (2001/2002), Statistical Report, (p. 28). The following table gives an overview of school size nationally and the numbers of pupils attending schools of varying sizes.

Table 4.1(a): School Size – National Figures

No. of Teachers	No. of Schools Nationally	No. of Pupils
1-4	1,549 schools	81,785 pupils
5-9	827 schools	103,700 pupils
10-14	433 schools	98,986 pupils
15+	348 schools	140,236 pupils
Total	3,157 schools	424,707 pupils

The district selected represents a cross-section of school sites, a broadly representative cluster of schools. It should be noted however, that there is an over-representation of large schools in the sample. The inspectorate district of the author is primarily urban based. Small schools are under-represented in the context of their numbers nationally because small schools generally serve rural areas. The number of schools serving designated areas of disadvantage, 11 schools (26.2%) forms a significantly higher proportion of the sample than the national figures: 316 primary schools containing 16% of primary school pupils in the current Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Government of Ireland, (1999c), The New Deal, A Plan for Educational Opportunity, (p.10)

Table 4.2: Schools - Designated Disadvantaged – Q.2

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	11	26.2
No	31	73.8
Total	42	100.0

Analysis of the data collated from the questionnaires will follow under the six themes –

- 4.4 Engagement with school development planning
- 4.5 Purpose for involving parents in school development planning
- 4.6 Process of involving parents in school development planning
- 4.7 Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas
- 4.8 Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association
- 4.9 Relationships – facilitating or inhibiting factors in school development planning

4.4 Engagement with School Development Planning

4.4.1 School Development Planning and Current Education Legislation

School development planning, it would appear, remains a relatively new experience for the majority of schools in the sample. Prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*, many Department of Education and Science circulars and documents encouraged Boards of Management to engage the education partners in aspects of school planning. The Department of Education and Science *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, (1993), states ‘if staff, pupils and parents / guardians are involved in the development of the policy, they are more likely to actively support it’ (p.11). The significance of the key principles of accountability, transparency and partnership which permeate the *Education Act, 1998*, is the underpinning of a rationale for which every person

concerned with the implementation of the Act must have regard. Accordingly, any procedures or policies agreed, as part of the implementation of the Act are required to reflect, as appropriate these principles. The first hypothesis of this research as outlined in Chapter One proposes that

there is a difference between the aspiration of partnership in the development of school policies as espoused in education legislation and the process by which parents are currently consulted in school development planning.

In this context, therefore, the need to review current practice with regard to school development planning in general and the level of understanding and knowledge of education legislation in the sample schools was considered fundamental to building a picture of how the schools were engaging parents in school development planning.

The questionnaire elicited information from the sample group of principals regarding involvement or lack of involvement of their schools with a school development planning process prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*, together with data relating to whether the principals themselves feel sufficiently informed regarding the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process. Table 4.3 shows that 73.8% of schools had not engaged in a school development planning process prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. 26.2% had some of experience of school planning prior to 1998. School development planning is, therefore, a relatively new experience for the vast majority of these school communities.

Table 4.3: Involved in the School Development Planning Process Prior to the Enactment of the Education Act, 1998 – Q. 3

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	11	26.2
No	31	73.8
Total	42	100.0

Given the leadership role of principals in school development planning it was deemed

important to ascertain their knowledge of the implications of current legislation on the planning process. A significant number of principals (69.0%) indicated that they remain unsure regarding the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process. This represents a very high proportion of the principals in the sample.

Table 4.4: Knowledge of the Implications of Current Legislation on the School Development Planning Process – Q. 4

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	13	31.0
Unsure	29	69.0
Total	42	100.0

A comparison between the questions relating to involvement with school development planning prior to 1998 and how informed the principals feel they are regarding the implications of the legislation shows that 22 of the 31 principals (52.4%), whose response indicated that their school did not engage in the school development planning process prior to 1998, remain unsure of the implications of current legislation.

Table 4.4(a): Comparison – Questions 3 and 4

Involvement in School Development Planning prior to 1998 (Q.3) and Knowledge of Implications of Current Legislation on the School Development Planning Process (Q.4)

	Q. 4				Total
	Yes		Unsure		
Q. 3 Yes	4	9.5%	7	16.7%	11
No	9	21.4%	22	52.4%	31
Total	13	31.0%	29	69.0%	42

Principals who indicated they did not feel sufficiently informed regarding the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process highlighted the need for further in-career development with specific emphasis on the legal aspect in their open responses to question 4. Responses included statements such as, ‘weak on the legislation bit’, ‘do not feel adequately informed at all’, and ‘very

difficult to be sufficiently informed in all areas'. Concern was expressed by a number of principals regarding the adequacy of in-service training opportunities – 'it's a vast area and there is a need for a lot of on-going education of principals and teachers in this regard', 'I worry about being trained after one-day seminars, eg. area of child abuse, role of the school liaison person', 'legal aspect of school development planning is not emphasised at in-service' and 'no whole-school in-service on the implications of many of the new acts'. Other comments acknowledged current support services, Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary, defined in Chapter One Section 1.7, 'information on the above continues to come to light through seminars, circulars, *cuiditheoirí (primary curriculum support team facilitators)* and principal support groups' and 'the School Development Planning Team has been a huge help to us'. A lack of consistency between the different perspectives of the various partners in education on the implications of the legislation was also noted – 'different messages coming out from various partners – DES (*Department of Education and Science*), INTO (*Irish National Teachers' Organisation*), parents (*National Parents' Council*), CPSMA (*Catholic Primary School Management Association*)'.

4.4.2 Engagement with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme

Looking more closely at the 31 schools which are relatively new to the school development planning process, 26 schools (61.9%) have engaged with the national initiative, Primary Curriculum Support Programme in the context of curricular development planning. The Primary Curriculum Support Programme has responsibility for the introduction and implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). Data from this study, with respect to the utilisation of the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme, show that this has been a very

successful initiative in relation to encouraging curricular planning in schools. 88.1% of principals indicated that their schools have utilised the services of the team and their comments were very favourable. It was stated that the support team provide ‘practical advice’, are ‘very helpful’, that they ‘benefited from the courses offered to us’ and that they are continuing as a staff to use ‘the expertise of the *cuiditheoir* (primary curriculum support programme facilitator) to draw up policies’ related to curricular areas.

Table 4.5: Engagement with Primary Curriculum Support Programme – Q. 5

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	37	88.1
No	5	11.9
Total	42	100.0

It is worrying to note, however, that the small number of schools, five schools (11.9%) which had not utilised the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Team, were all found to be schools which only began the process of school development planning since 1998. The principals of four of these schools have teaching duties together with their administrative duties.

Table 4.5(a): Comparison – Questions 5 and 3

Utilisation of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (Q.5) and Engagement of Schools in the School Development Planning process prior to the Enactment of the Education Act, 1998 (Q.3)

	Q. 5				Total
	Yes		No		
Q. 3 Yes	11	26.2%			11
No	26	61.9%	5	11.9%	31
Total	37	88.1%	5	11.9%	42

The teaching staffs of these and all national schools have been provided with inservice seminars by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme Team, however, the principals indicated that this group did not avail of the complementary support to develop school based plans for the implementation of the curriculum. Lack of

engagement with the support team may imply an apathy towards the adaptation and implementation of the curriculum with reference to the particular circumstances of the school and may result in limited whole school planning among the education partners. It would be important that the qualitative phase of data collection should provide further insights into the implications of lack of engagement by certain school staffs with the Primary Curriculum Support Team in developing school-based plans for the implementation of the curriculum.

4.4.3 Engagement with the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary

The School Development Planning Initiative – Primary is, as defined in Chapter One Section 1.8, a national initiative to support schools in developing a school plan. The school plan deals with the total curriculum and the organisation of all the school’s resources. It also includes the school’s policies on a diverse range of administrative/organisational issues and, where appropriate, the school’s strategies for implementing official guidelines, circulars and regulations.

School planning is essentially a process in which policy and plans evolve from the ever changing and developing needs of the school community. Since every school is unique in terms of its staffing, pupils, support structures, availability of resources and in many other ways, the strategies employed in school development planning vary considerably from school to school. In all cases, however, school planning has as its essential purpose the promotion of school effectiveness and improvement, and it should involve the collaborative effort of all the school’s partners.

(Department of Education and Science, 1999a)

The majority of schools in the sample as seen in the table below have utilised the services of the School Development Planning Support.

Table 4.6: Engagement with the School Development Planning Support – Q. 6

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	29	69.0%
No	13	31.0%
Total	42	100.0%

Principals indicated in their comments that they found the practical handouts and resources booklet, the training days, the planning days and the facilitators a tremendous help in conducting an audit /needs analysis and also in helping them base their planning on the findings. Comments included ‘we have been in from the start and the system and framework for planning is excellent’, ‘attended all seminars, facilitator for meeting, developed five year strategic plan, on-going curricular and administrative development, action planning, SCOT analysis’. Only one of the thirteen principals who indicated that their school did not utilise the services of the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary commented. The principal indicated that ‘the staff wanted to use the grant money to buy equipment for the school’.

A comparison was carried out between responses to question 3, which relates to involvement of the school in school development planning prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998* and question 6, the utilisation of the services of the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary. This comparison suggests that while the majority of schools (69.0%) have engaged with the School Development Planning Team, 12 schools (28.6%), which had indicated previously that they were new to the school development planning process, did not access this important support service. It could be suggested from the above data, that schools with some experience of school development planning prior to the availability of a national support service were aware that it is a difficult exercise and were therefore ready to engage with the services of School Development Planning Support.

Table 4.6(a): Comparison – Questions 6 and 3

Utilisation of the Services of School Development Planning Support (Q. 6) and Involvement with the School Development Planning process Prior to 1998 (Q. 3)

	Q. 6				Total
	Yes		No		
Q. 3 Yes	10	23.8%	1	2.4%	11
No	19	45.2%	12	28.6%	31
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42

Data received from principals in this research indicate that the majority of schools in the sample (73.8%) did not engage in school development planning prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. However, since the establishment of the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary, a significant number of schools (69% of the sample) have utilised the services of School Development Planning Support. A majority of schools (88.1%) in the sample have also engaged with the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Service. When a comparison was conducted between the engagement of the sample schools with the two services the following data emerged.

Table 4.6(b) Comparison – Questions 5 and 6

Engagement with Primary Curriculum Support Programme (Q.5) and School Development Planning Support (Q.6)

	Q.6				Total
	Yes		No		
Q.5 Yes	27	64.2%	10	23.8%	37
No	2	4.8%	3	7.2%	5
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42

This comparison indicates that the vast majority of schools have utilised the services of the national support teams with respect to school development planning. Three schools (7.2%) did not, however, engage with either service. The selection of one of these three schools as a case study may be appropriate in the context of gaining a deeper understanding of the facilitating or inhibiting factors to school development

planning in general and more specifically to involving parents in the process of developing the school plan.

4.4.4 Parents and School Based Planning Days

Question 19 elicits information on parental involvement with teachers in policy formation on school based planning days. Schools have been granted days each year, since 1999, free from teaching duties to engage in school development planning. Table 4.7 shows that very few schools, (14.3% of sample), used this discretionary time to engage parents in the development of the school plan. The principals of the six schools which involved parents in school development planning on school based planning days were all administrative principals of schools with more than ten teachers. This may imply greater opportunity for principals of larger schools to engage with parents and the wider community.

Table 4.7: Attendance of Parents at School Based Planning Days – Q. 19

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	14.3
No	36	85.7
Total	42	100.0

Responses of those principals of schools which have not had parents attend school based planning days, indicate that in most instances parents were not invited to attend. ‘It never entered my head to ask them’ was the response of one principal. Another stated ‘I wasn’t aware they could attend’. Circumstances are also different for staffs of small schools as pointed out by one principal,

We operate in a small cluster and I cannot come to grips with parents present on planning days.

It should be noted that principals indicated in their response to the questionnaire, that parents who are the parental representatives on the Board of Management in three schools out of the 36 schools which indicated a negative response to the question were

invited, but did not attend. It was stated in one response that ‘All the Board members were invited particularly the parents’ representatives but these people all have jobs and are voluntary workers’. The availability of parents to engage with teachers in the development of the school plan requires further investigation. Some of the policy areas discussed in those schools where parents were involved included discipline / behaviour policy, child protection and anti-drugs, whole-school review and the formulation of the health and safety policy.

4.4.5 Summary

A hypothesis central to this research proposes that

partnership with parents in school development planning remains a relatively new concept for Boards of Management, principals, teachers and parents themselves.

In summary, the review of the above responses from principals indicates that many schools have only recently begun to engage in the school development planning process. It also established that a significant proportion of principals remain unsure of the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process. Support services funded by the Department of Education and Science have been well utilised. However, a worrying feature is the relatively small number of schools who have not engaged with the support teams and have little experience of school development planning. The data analysed to date represent the perspective of principals only. The perspectives of the other partners, Board of Management, teachers and parents on issues relating to parental involvement in school development planning will be investigated in the context of the qualitative phase of this research.

4.5 Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning

Moves to develop partnership between the school and the family are coming, in most countries, from policy-makers (at government, local or school level) and also in the other direction from the parents and families themselves.

(OECD, 1997, p.24)

In seeking to ascertain the perspective of principals in the sample, the researcher offered, as outlined previously in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.4 five reasons for consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

Table 4.8: Reasons Offered for Parental Consultation on Aspects of School Policy - Q. 10 - First Preference:

	Frequency	Percent
Democracy (a)	0	0.0
Rights of Parents (b)	4	9.5
Ethical Reasons (c)	3	7.1
Prime Educators (d)	15	35.7
Effective School (e)	18	42.9
No Response	2	4.8
Total	42	100.0

42.9% of the principals in the sample selected ‘one of the characteristics of an effective school is salient parental involvement’ as the most important reason for parental consultation on aspects of school policy. 35.7% opted for ‘recognition that parents are the prime educators of their children’, while the figures for the other three options were significantly lower – 9.5% ‘awareness of parental rights and the law’, 7.1% ‘ethical reasons’ and no one choosing ‘commitment to democratic decision-making’ 0%.

Table 4.8(a): Reasons Offered for Parental Consultation on Aspects of School Policy – Q. 10 – Second Preference

	Frequency	Percent
Democracy (a)	5	11.9
Rights of Parents (b)	4	9.5
Ethical Reasons (c)	7	16.7
Prime Educators (d)	11	26.2
Effective School (e)	10	23.8
No Response	5	11.9
Total	42	100.0

When responses ranked (1) and (2) by the principals are taken into consideration, the options

- one of the characteristics of an effective school is salient parental involvement and

- recognition that parents are the prime educators of their children

remain the favoured options with a cumulative percent of 66.7% and 61.9% respectively. Given that such a large number of principals indicated that they view involving parents as an important constituent criteria in the development of an effective school, it will be interesting to investigate the perspective of the other partners in relation to the leadership role of the principals in facilitating that involvement. The range of reasons offered by parents for getting involved in the education of their children together with their perception of factors which facilitate parental involvement in schools will be investigated during the qualitative phase of this research.

Table 4.8(b) Overview of Reasons Offered for Parental Consultation on Aspects of School Policy – Q. 10

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
(a)	0	5	16	10	6
(b)	4	4	7	10	12
(c)	3	7	6	10	11
(d)	15	11	5	4	3
(e)	18	10	3	3	5
No Response	2	5	5	5	5
Total	42	42	42	42	42

The overview ranks the final preference as chosen by the sample group of principals in the following order starting with the least important:

- Awareness of parental rights and the law
- Ethical reasons
- Commitment to democratic decision-making
- One of the characteristics of an effective school is salient parental involvement
- Recognition of parents as the prime educators of their children.

Some insight into the perspective of principals regarding the possible benefit to children of involving their parents in the development of school policies was gleaned

from question 18. 88.1% of principals in the sample consider that involving parents in the development of school policies will ultimately benefit the children in their school.

Table 4.9: Involving Parents in School Development Planning will Ultimately Benefit the Pupils – Q. 18

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	37	88.1
No	4	9.5
No Response	1	2.4
Total	42	100.0

The reasons given by principals for their viewpoint include

- the parents are more involved and interested in their child’s education if they have some input into policies,
- policies are better supported at home when parents are consulted regarding same,
- showing parents that we value their contribution should help bring about a positive attitude towards the school and ultimately benefit their children,
- when parents are involved in the working of the school, children relate better to teachers and to what is being taught,
- policies are effective if everyone has ownership. All partners are needed to make it successful and
- shared ownership of the process leads to more satisfactory outcome overall.

‘Ownership’ was a theme named by a number of respondents, however exactly what is meant by ‘ownership’ was not spelt out. Some of the respondents elaborated on the theme by suggesting that ‘involvement’ leads to ‘ownership’, and suggesting that when parents are involved in the development of policies they are interested in ‘seeing that it operates’. Involvement it was suggested also contributes to unity of purpose, ‘cultivates a sense of unity of purpose, encourages and maintains parental support, breaks down barriers between home and school’, ‘I think that in a school

where pupils, teachers and parents have the same values, aspirations and goals – all will do well’.

It would appear that the principals in the sample are positive on theory in relation to involving parents in school policy development, however one principal of a large urban school suggested that parents should be involved ‘in non-curricular areas only’, while another stated ‘as long as involvement is focused and structured’. A principal of a large school serving a designated area of disadvantage highlighted the role of parents as the ‘voice for the children’.

They are the voices for the childrens’ needs and views and although I won’t say parents always know what is best for their children, they are a guide as to what and where the children are ‘at’.

A small number of respondents 9.5% indicated a negative or ambiguous response to the statement that involving parents in the school development planning process will ultimately benefit the children in their school. Teacher professionalism was named by one respondent, ‘It is important not to undervalue the expertise teachers have as professionals’. Another acknowledged some benefit in involving parents in the development of some policies, ‘beneficial in some areas only, for example, the Code of Discipline, Relationships and Sexuality Education and health and safety’ and ‘in non-curricular areas only’.

The above responses of principals indicate that the roles of parents and teachers in school policy formation and the attitudes of the education partners to partnership in school development planning need to be explored. While principals generally seem from their responses to be positive in their attitude to involving parents, it would appear that some form of consultation with parents may be what is being suggested, rather than an equal partnership between parents and teachers in the development of

the school plan.

4.5.1 Summary

The questions considered in this section indicate a general awareness among the principals sampled that salient parental involvement is one of the characteristics of an effective school. An appreciation of the important role of parents in education is also evident. However, some concern exists among respondents in relation to the appropriateness of parental involvement in specific policy areas, for example, curricular areas and the process by which the voice of parents can be heard in the context of school development planning. These topics will be addressed in greater detail in Sections 4.6 and 4.7.

4.6 Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development Planning

4.6.1 Introduction

One of the fundamental aims of the *Education Act, 1998* is to ensure that the education system is conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff, the community served by the school and the state. Specifically Section 6(e) affirms the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice; 6(g) lists parents specifically as people with whom schools must liaise and consult and 6(m) commits the education providers to the enhancement of transparency in educational decision-making. It is important, in seeking to understand how schools are fulfilling their obligations under the Act, to ascertain current practice with regard to how schools are engaging in school development planning and what strategies are being used to include the voice of parents in the process.

4.6.2 Process of School Development Planning

Question 9 sought to establish the process of school development planning by asking for information in relation to how policy is generally formulated in schools. Five options were provided including:

- (a) The principal determines policy and outlines it to the teaching staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management
- (b) The principal seeks consensus on policy at staff meetings. The Parents' Association and Board of Management ratify the policies
- (c) The principal delegates the development of certain policies to post-holders who draw up draft policies, which are then presented to staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management
- (d) Policy committees including representation from the teaching staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management draw up draft policies which are then presented to the general body of teachers, parents and board members.

The fifth option (e) was open - an opportunity for the respondents to explain their choice. The following table displays the options chosen by the respondents.

Table 4.10: Describe How Policy is Generally Formulated in your School – Q. 9

	Frequency	Percent
Principal only (a)	1	2.4
Principal & Staff (b)	17	40.5
Post-holders (c)	6	14.2
Policy committees (d)	1	2.4
Other (e)	17	40.5
	42	100.0

The above table shows that some form of consultation is central to the process of policy formation in the vast majority of schools. Only one principal selected option (a), which placed the burden of policy formation solely on the principal. 40.5% of principals, indicated however, that many school policies are brought about by

discussion and consensus at staff meetings with the role of the Board of Management and Parents' Association, being to ratify the policies.

Looking at the explanations given by some principals who indicated that a number of options were relevant to their practice, some indicated that option (b) was their past practice but that other practices are now developing, others indicated that (b) was practice in relation to curricular areas with other options being chosen for organisational policies, while one principal of a school, which has a Parents' Association, indicated that the Parents' Association would have no role in ratifying policy. It is important to note that 23.8% of the sample has no Parents' Association and so, for these schools, the only parents with whom policy is discussed formally, are the parent members of the Board of Management.

Some insight into the role of middle management in policy formation can be gleaned from the response of principals to option (c) which states the principal delegates the development of certain policies to post-holders who draw up draft policies, which are then presented to staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management. 14.3% of principals, all of whom are principals of schools with more than ten teachers, felt this statement best described how policy is generally formulated in their school. This figure when compared to a total of 42.9% choosing options (a) and (b) where the focus is primarily on the leadership role of the principal in policy formation suggests that delegation of a pivotal role in policy formation to middle management including the deputy principal, assistant principals and special duties post holders is the practice in a limited number of schools. The researcher then took a closer look at the process of policy formation in schools of varying sizes and discovered as is evident from the following table that significantly more principals of small schools, who have teaching

duties together with their administrative duties, selected options (a) or (b). Principals of larger schools indicate that they delegate responsibility for policy formation more and that a combination of approaches are used to develop policy. This may be because an administrative principal has more time and opportunity to consider options and possibilities in relation to policy formation and to liaise with those to whom responsibility is delegated. There are also obviously more teachers with promoted posts in larger schools.

Table 4.10(a): School Size – Q.1 and Process of Policy Formation – Q. 9

	1-4 teachers	5-9 teachers	10-14 teachers	15 plus
Principal (a)	1	0	0	0
Principal & Staff (b)	8	7	1	1
Post-holders (c)	0	0	3	3
Policy Committee (d)	0	1	0	0
Other (e)	0	3	6	8
Total	9	11	10	12

The responses from principals show that the delegation of aspects of policy development is increasingly being included in the duties of middle management in larger schools. One principal of a school with more than fifteen teachers commented ‘(b) past practice – we hope to develop curriculum and policy plans through (c) this time round’. Another suggested a more centralised role for middle management in curriculum policy development ‘I think (c) most accurately describes what occurs in curriculum areas’ and a third stated ‘I have delegated the responsibility to post-holders for individual policies but consensus is sought at staff meetings before policy is ratified’.

Only one principal indicated that policy committees involving all the partners in education best described how policy is generally formulated in the school. A further

seven principals indicated that policy committees were one of number of methods of policy formation used. Comments included ‘we use a variety of methods (a), (b), (c) and (d)’, ‘in organisational areas policy committees have been active but the main input is still from staff’, ‘(d) presents particular problems for a large school re time’ and ‘As we are relatively new, and as there are a number of key policies that needed to be developed, we used more than one of the above approaches – for Relationships and Sexuality Education and School Ethos policy development we used the model described at (d), Special Needs Assistants policy we used model (a), much curricular work was done using model (b)’.

The process by which schools engage in policy formation varies. This research shows patterns of engagement differ between schools of varying sizes with a greater variety of approaches being used in larger schools.

4.6.3 Parents and School Development Planning

A further question specifically attempted to elicit how parents are consulted regarding the development of school policies. Again a number of options were provided:

- (a) Through the Parents’ Association
- (b) Questionnaire to all parents
- (c) Working groups of parents and teachers
- (d) Parent representatives on the Board of Management
- (e) No formal consultation with parents
- (f) Some combination of the above (Please explain)

Table 4.11 shows the responses received:

Table 4.11: Consultation with Parents Regarding School Development Planning – Q. 11

	Frequency	Percent
Parents' Association (a)	4	9.5
Questionnaire (b)	1	2.4
Working groups (c)	1	2.4
BOM representatives (d)	5	11.9
No consultation (e)	3	7.1
Combination (f)	28	66.7
Total	42	100.0

Although only four principals (9.5%) identified the Parents' Association solely as the means by which they consult parents regarding policy, a further thirteen (31.0%) included the Parents' Association as one of the methods used to elicit parental input regarding policy formation giving a total of seventeen (40.5%). The option questionnaires to parents was chosen specifically by one principal (2.4%) and named as one of a combination of approaches by a further 10 principals (23.8%). Working groups of parents and teachers was selected by one principal (2.4%) and was included by nine others (21.4%). A number of comments with respect to working groups are interesting as yet again the policy areas highlighted are in the broad areas of health and safety: 'Consultation with small groups of parents, some working groups of parents and teachers. Parents invited to attend course (*drug awareness*) with home/school / community liaison coordinator', 'Other than Relationships and Sexuality Education policy, parents have not been consulted on the development of the school plan', 'For Relationships and Sexuality Education we had parents involved making policy. Otherwise through the Board of Management' and finally 'Again it would depend on the policy – Relationships and Sexuality Education policy, Code of Behaviour – all involved, equal representation'. One principal of a small school with four mainstream teachers commented on the reticence of many parents to become involved in policy formation stating:

Parents have consistently declined invitations to be part of school policy making. Some particular policies that are of interest to them we invite two members of the parent group to participate.....

It cannot be presumed therefore, that parents will want to engage with teachers in school development planning or that they have the time or expertise to contribute positively to the process.

The pattern of consultation with parents regarding school development planning in the sample schools differed slightly between small and larger schools. The following table links size of school with process of consultation with parents.

Table 4.11(a): School Size Q.1 and Consultation with Parents Regarding School Development Planning Q. 11

	1-4 teachers	5-9 teachers	10-14 teachers	15 plus
PA only (a)	1	0	1	2
Questionnaire (b)	0	0	1	0
Working groups (c)	0	0	0	1
BOM Reps (d)	2	2	1	0
No consultation (e)	1	1	1	0
Combination (f)	5	8	6	9
Total	9	11	10	12

The majority of schools use a combination of strategies for consulting with parents with this pattern being most evident in schools with more than fifteen teachers. This finding mirrors findings outlined in Section 4.6.2 Process of School Development Planning that a higher proportion of principals of larger schools use a combination of ways to consult with the education partners with respect to school policy formation.

The parent representatives on the Board of Management would appear to have some exposure to policy development and review. 11.9% of the principals chose this group of parents as the parents consulted regarding the development of school policies,

together with sixteen (38.1 %) others who named the parents on the Board of Management together with other processes for eliciting parental input in relation to policy. Three (7.1%) principals of schools of varying sizes stated that there is no formal consultation with parents with regard to policy. Although this is a small percentage of schools in the sample, a pattern would appear to be emerging that there is a small number of schools which as indicated previously in this chapter:

- started the process of school development planning since the *Education Act* was enacted in 1998 and yet have not engaged with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (11.9%) or with the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (31.0%)
- are unsure of the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process and have not utilised the services of the two national support initiatives Primary Curriculum Support Programme (9.5%) and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (21.4%)

The principals of these three schools have indicated that there is no formal parental involvement in school policy formation. More work needs to be done to develop awareness among the management of these schools of the obligation to consult with the partners in the development of the school plan.

4.6.4 Summary

To conclude, schools currently use a variety of methods in the formulation of school policies. Most policies especially in smaller schools, appear to be developed by principals in consultation with staff and in many cases, subsequently discussed with or ratified by members of the Parents' Association and Board of Management. Some progress towards delegating responsibility for the formation of certain policies to middle management is evident, particularly in large schools with a number of

promoted post holders. Progress in the development of working groups of parents and teachers coming together to develop policy appears to be confined to specific policy areas, for example Relationships and Sexuality Education and the Code of Behaviour. The development of policy in these areas will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this thesis, Section 4.7.

4.7 Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas

4.7.1 Introduction

This section will analyse data obtained from the forty-two questionnaires with respect to parental involvement in the development of policy in specific policy areas. It will also look at the content of the school plan and whether it currently focuses more on organisational or curricular policy areas. Of particular interest is the progress or lack of progress schools have made with respect to consulting with parents on policy areas which have been named in Irish education documents, such as the Report of the National Education Convention 1994, as being of interest to parents. More recently education legislation as described in Chapter Two, Sections 2.2.9-2.2.10 requires schools to consult with parents with respect to certain core policies for example, a school enrolment/admissions policy including the policy of the school relating to expulsion and suspension – *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*, Section 15(d) and Section 19(1), students with special educational needs, *Education Act, 1998*, Section 21 and a statement of strategies to encourage regular attendance, *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*, Section 22(1). In devising question 12, which seeks clarification from principals regarding consultation with parents regarding the following policy issues, cognisance was taken as outlined in Chapter Three, Research Methodology, Section 3.2.3 of the policy areas named in Department of Education and Science documentation and in education legislation, including

- (a) Mission Statement of the School
- (b) Uniform Policy
- (c) Code of Behaviour
- (d) Enrolment Policy
- (e) Pupils with Special Educational Needs
- (f) Homework Policy
- (g) School Attendance Policy,

together with an invitation to the principals to name other school policies in the development of which parents were consulted. In the context of this question, principals were given three options – no consultation at all with parents, once, and each occasion policy is reviewed. The different policy areas are analysed separately.

4.7.2 Mission Statement

In New Brunswick, Canada each school has a parent-school committee which participates in establishing the school mission statement, developing school policies that will enhance school climate, assessing school performance reviews and encouraging family and community involvement (OECD, 1997 p.69). Section 21 of the *Education Act, 1998* requires the Board of Management to set out in the school plan, the school's objectives in relation to equality of access to and participation in the school and how the school proposes to achieve these objectives. The plan is required to be prepared in accordance with ministerial directions. The then Minister for Education and Science Mr. Micheál Martin published guidelines for developing a school plan, *Developing a School Plan, Guidelines for Primary Schools*, Government of Ireland, (1999). These guidelines place particular emphasis on collaboration within the entire school community.

The school is also an organisation and likewise needs to be effective. In order to be so, it needs to enable all its partners to join in the clarification and statement of its aims and objectives and to agree on strategies to achieve them. School-based planning is the most important means through which this is done. (p.7)

It is in this context that principals were asked how often parents have been consulted with respect to the mission statement of their school. 52.4% of principals replied that parents have never been consulted on this issue, 16.7% indicated consultation once and 11.6% each occasion the policy is reviewed.

4.7.3 Uniform Policy

Consultation on the uniform policy showed a greater degree of involvement of parents with 4.8% choosing the option of no consultation, 35.7% once and 57.1% more than once. The issue of parental consultation regarding school uniform arose at each of the meetings conducted in the context of research carried out by Hanafin and Lynch and reported in a paper published in *Learn, Journal of the Irish Learning Support Association*, September 2001. This paper presents findings on what parents of pupils in a school serving a designated area of disadvantage have to say about parental involvement and the financial costs of schooling. It recommends that

At a whole-school development planning stage, we recommend that decisions and policies should be proofed for the financial implications for parents on low incomes. For example, if decisions are to be made about swimming as part of the PE programme, or “looking and responding” as part of the arts programme, the question of financial costs to parents should be built into planning. (p.6)

It concludes that

.....the exclusion of working-class parents’ views on education, and the expressed unease regarding assumed parental compliance with policy and other decisions (Coldron and Boulton, 1996) are in themselves reasons for further efforts to elicit, record and consider their opinions, wishes and concerns prior to the formulation of policy in schools. (p.6)

The significant number of schools in the sample which have consulted parents at some level relating to uniform policy indicates an increased awareness of the need for consultation and involvement of parents in aspects of school policy formation.

4.7.4 Code of Discipline

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) conducted a national survey on discipline in 1993 which recommended that schools should have a written Code of Discipline (INTO, 2002, p.25). The INTO conducted a further survey in 2000 which discovered a steady increase in the number of schools with a written Code of Discipline from 73% in 1993 to 92% in 2000. This survey shows that parents were more likely to receive a copy of the code than they are to be consulted in its preparation (INTO, 2002, p.30).

The present research concurs with the INTO survey with regard to the fact that over 90% of schools have a written Code of Discipline. It shows that 92.9% of principals in the sample indicated that parents were involved in drawing up the school Code of Discipline. This figure, however, is significantly higher than the 50% of schools which included parents in the preparation of their Code of Discipline as reported in the INTO Discipline in Schools Report, (2002), p.29.

The present research also indicates that parental involvement on a consistent basis was higher in the context of the development of the Code of Discipline than any other policy. Only 4.8% of the principals selected the option 'parents were not consulted at all', 31.0% selected once and 61.9% indicated parents are involved on each occasion policy is reviewed. One principal chose not to select an option in this instance. Given the importance of consultation with parents in the context of the development of a Code of Discipline and the fact that Circular 7/88 of the Department of Education relating to the development of Codes of Discipline enshrined "for the first time the right of parents to be involved in the drawing up and approving of the content of any school's code" (INTO, 1997, p.7), the questionnaire included a question specifically related to how the sample schools communicate their Code of Discipline to parents

(Question 16). Principals were asked to rank the methods described in order from the most frequently used to the least frequently used. The methods named were as follows

- (a) Printed in homework journal / newsletter / school brochure
- (b) Outlined at induction meeting
- (c) Circulated as part of the school plan
- (d) Policy brochure brought to homes by the home/school/community liaison coordinator
- (e) Policy brochure brought to homes by parent home visitors

The principals in the sample were asked to explain their answer. The two most common methods used by schools to communicate the Code of Discipline to parents are through printing the code in the homework journal, school brochure or newsletter - an option chosen by 42.9% of the principals - and outlining it at an induction meeting for new parents - selected by 40.5%. Comments such as 'frequent reminders are given in newsletters of certain aspects as the need arises', 'each family is given a copy of the Code of Discipline' and 'given to parents when enrolling child by school principal' indicated some effort by schools to communicate the code to the wider parent body. Efforts are also made by some schools to encourage parental comment and input into the code, 'draft policy circulated to all families, suggestions and comments invited, final draft to be sent to all families' and 'parents were consulted when policy was reviewed some years ago – copy goes home at intervals reminding parents. Policy is discussed with parents when new entrants enter school'.

One principal noted difficulties in engaging parental interest in the code 'at the beginning of the school year the main points are printed in newsletter with the invitation to parents to view the rest, which is available to all to read in school hall.

No one ever came to read it'. Others emphasised the importance of individual contact with parents, 'parents invited to school to discuss children's behaviour when necessary' and 'if we have difficulties with behaviour we inform parents and seek approval in the actions taken'. Circulation of the Code of Discipline as part of the school plan is not widespread with one principal commenting 'school plan is not circulated to parents' and only 9.5% ranking it as the most frequently used option. Options (d) policy brochure brought to homes by the home/school/community liaison coordinator and (e) policy brochure brought to homes by parent home visitors were only relevant to schools serving designated areas of disadvantage and even in those schools the practice is not widespread 2.4% ranking (d) as most frequently used and 0% choosing option (e).

In summary, the traditional approaches of outlining the Code of Discipline at induction meetings, presenting parents with copies of the Code of Discipline when they are enrolling their child and asking them to sign that they will make all reasonable efforts to ensure compliance with such code by the child and including the Code of Discipline in school brochures, handbooks for parents and homework journals remain widespread practice. Comments from some principals serving designated areas of disadvantage indicate some involvement of home/school/community liaison coordinators and parent home visitors in discussing the Code of Discipline in their own homes with parents. One principal noted 'the Code of Discipline is brought to the homes of new junior infant pupils by the home/school/community liaison coordinator and parents'. Discipline for Learning, a positive approach to school discipline which includes fostering parental cooperation, is also named as being well established in one school.

4.7.5 Enrolment Policy

Many schools would appear to have only recently developed an enrolment policy. The need for a policy in this area has been highlighted in the *Equal Status Act, 2000* and the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000* which may account for the fact that 40.5% of principals stated that parents had been consulted once, however, only 19.0% had been consulted more than once. It is a cause of concern, however, that 35.7% of schools in the sample have not engaged parents at all in the context of developing an enrolment policy.

4.7.6 Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Chapter 3 of the Department of Education and Science, Learning-Support Guidelines, 2000b, is entitled Partnership in Learning Support.

Effective learning support requires a high level of collaboration involving the Board of Management, the principal teacher, class teachers, the learning support teacher(s), special education teachers, parents and relevant professionals. Such collaboration should be purposely and specifically planned and the responsibilities of each person or group should be clearly defined in the school plan.

(Government of Ireland, 2000b, Learning-Support Guidelines, p. 20)

Learning-support is one aspect of provision for children with special educational needs but the Guidelines reflect a commitment by the Department of Education and Science to encourage partnership in planning with respect to pupils who attend learning support together with other pupils with special educational needs. The *Education Act, 1998* in Section 21(2) refers to the requirement that

The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including equality of access to and participation in the school by students with special educational needs.

In defining how the school plan should be drawn up the Act states in Section 21(3)

The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the minister in relation to school plans.

Data received from the principals in the context of this study shows that 57.2% of principals indicated that they have not consulted parents in the development of school policy in relation to pupils with special educational needs. 11.9% indicated as shown in Table 4.12 that parents were consulted once and a further 19.0% have consulted parents on each occasion the policy is reviewed.

Table 4.12: Consultation with Parents with Respect to Policy Regarding Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	24	57.2
Once	5	11.9
Each occasion	8	19.0
No response	5	11.9
Total	42	100.0

One principal noted a comment on the questionnaire ‘we would have a lot of consultation with individual parents of children with special needs but not with the parent body as a whole. We only got a resource teacher this last school year (2002) and learning support in 1999, on a shared basis’.

4.7.7 Homework Policy

Homework is a topic discussed with parents in most schools, with 47.6% of principals stating that parents have been consulted on each occasion the homework policy was reviewed and 26.2% indicating that parents were consulted once. Three principals did not respond to this question. As has been established previously in Section 4.6.3 of this chapter this consultation can take many forms – questionnaire, discussions with parent representatives on the Board of Management or involved in the Parents’ Association or policy groups of parents and teachers working together to develop the homework policy for the school. 19.0% of principals indicated that there was no consultation with parents in relation to the homework policy in their school.

4.7.8 School Attendance Policy

With the enactment of the *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*, schools are encouraged to develop, as part of the school plan, a statement of strategy to encourage regular school attendance. There has been some delay in setting up of the National Education Welfare Board and the appointment of Education Welfare Officers, which may account for the fact that 47.6% of the sample schools have not consulted with parents with respect to a school attendance policy. 14.3% have consulted once and 28.6% on each occasion the policy has been reviewed. Four principals did not indicate on the questionnaire whether parents are involved or not in the development of their school policy with respect to school attendance. Guidelines from the National Education Welfare Board in relation to the development of a statement of strategy in relation to school attendance have yet to be issued.

4.7.9 Named Policies in the Development of which Parents have been Consulted

When principals were given the opportunity to name other policy areas, where consultation with parents was an integral part of the process, health and safety issues appeared to dominate. Sixteen principals (38.1%) named parental involvement in the development of 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy', nine 'healthy eating' policies (21.4%), six 'anti-bullying' (14.3%), one 'substance misuse prevention policy' (2.4%) and one a 'stay safe' policy (2.4%). Some of the other policy areas named include administration of medicines, internet use policy, fund-raising, home school links, school tours and extra-curricular activities.

4.7.10 Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

In April 1994 the then Minister for Education, Niamh Bhreathnach set up an Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and Sexuality Education. The terms of reference of

the group included providing “guidelines for schools on the process by which management, staff and parents are consulted and involved as the school clarifies, specifies and discloses its policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education” (*Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and Sexuality Education*, 1995, p.20).

This report in Chapter Three, entitled, Towards Developing a School Policy, details the consultation process, including the setting up of a representative committee/structure to facilitate consultation among the partners for the development of the policy. The report represented the first step in a process designed to promote consultation between those involved in this important area.

The aim of the consultative process is that every school will develop a policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education, in collaboration with parents, which reflects its ethos and core values and is known within the school community.

(Foreward, p.2)

To clarify the current position of Relationships and Sexuality Education policy development in the sample schools, three questions 13-15 were asked of the principals:

- (13) What process was used to draw up a policy for Relationships and Sexuality Education for your school?
- (14) What partners were involved in drawing up your Relationships and Sexuality Education policy?
- (15) Was the process used in drawing up your Relationships and Sexuality Education policy effective in your opinion and why?

With respect to question (13), the process described in most instances involved a policy committee, with representation from the Board of Management, including parent representatives on the board, the teaching staff and, in some schools, the Parents’ Association, drawing up a draft policy which was subsequently sanctioned by the Board of Management. These policy committees worked in different ways with some inviting written submissions from all parties, and amendments made following

discussion regarding the submissions. Others drew up the draft policy, sent a copy to all parents and asked them to sign it. A further committee used the model of parents and teachers working together, exploring parent/teacher relationships, areas of similarity and difference, followed by specific issues relating to Relationships and Sexuality Education policy development. The replies of the principals indicate, however, that eight schools (19.0%) in the sample have still not drawn up a relationships and sexuality education policy. Four of these schools are in the 1-4 teacher category, which indicate again that a more restricted pattern of engagement with parents exists in small schools. Statements included 'no policy was drawn up', 'policy not yet formulated', 'we don't have Relationships and Sexuality Education in this school', 'I am drafting a proposed policy at present. When I have a document, I will set up a committee to review and revise it. This committee will include parents, teachers and representatives from the Board of Management including the chairperson'. It should be noted that six of the eight schools which have not developed a Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy are in a diocese where the Patron has indicated that this area of the curriculum should be presented within the context of the religious education programme. The scenario described shows the influence of the Patron on aspects of policy formation. This can cause confusion in schools, when there is a dichotomy between guidelines from the Department of Education and Science and dictates from the Patron. The other two schools without a Relationships and Sexuality Education policy are schools serving designated areas of disadvantage which may have had difficulty forming a policy committee representative of the partners.

Question (14) asked principals to name the partners involved in drawing up the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy for the school. Generally the committee

as stated previously consisted of teacher representatives and representatives of the Board of Management. The parents who participated on the committee were parent representatives from the Board of Management, representatives of the Parents' Association or occasionally parents who expressed an interest in participating to the principal. Consultation with the wider parent body in the form of an invitation to make a written submission or to suggest amendments to a draft policy was also a feature in some situations.

With respect to the effectiveness of the process the most consistent theme in the replies to question (15) was 'ownership' – 'the views of all the partners were considered. In particular parents saw that their concerns were accommodated. Cultivated a sense of ownership of the policy'. The process also appeared to 'allay fears' – 'it was very effective as parents were involved at every stage and fears allayed regarding content'. Also, the process was transparent – 'everyone had an opportunity to ask questions, voice concerns, make recommendations. Nothing hasty or undercover'. 71.4% of the principals felt that the partnership process used in drawing up the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy for the school was effective.

Table 4.13: Effectiveness of the Process Used in Drawing up a Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy – Q.15

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	30	71.5
No	4	9.5
No Response	8	19.0
Total	42	100.0

The comments of those who answered negatively included – 'the principal was expected to provide leadership and expertise that others just endorsed', 'personally I

would have preferred a greater input from the parent body’ and ‘reporting back poor / slow – change of Board of Management’.

Parents are in law and in fact the primary educators, and home is the natural environment in which Relationships and Sexuality Education should take place. The school has a role to play in supporting and complementing the work of the home in this task. This requires the management of each school in consultation with the school community, to develop a clear policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education which is made known to all parties within the school. Yet again the findings of this study indicate that there are some schools (19.0%), which have not embraced their responsibilities in this regard despite a national programme of in-service and the provision of comprehensive guidelines. The positive comments of the principals regarding the effectiveness of the process used in developing the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy and the perception that the partners ‘own’ the policy when they have had an input into its formulation, suggests the need to encourage wider use of this method of policy formation.

4.7.11 Parents and Involvement in Curriculum Policy Development

Parental involvement in school planning for curricular areas caused some discussion at the National Education Convention in 1993. There was some disagreement as outlined in Chapter Two, Literature Review, Section 2.2.8 Consultation to Legislation 1992-1998 about the degree to which the different partners within the school community should become involved in this exercise. The delivery of the curriculum and the implementation of policy was the responsibility of the professional staff of the school with parents having a consultative role in these matters. (Report on The

National Education Convention, 1994, p.57). The Irish National Teachers' Organisation in their pack to support schools in engaging in a review of their current practice, *An Approach to School Review*, also support a delineation between the involvement of parents in organisational policy development and the responsibility of teachers for curriculum policy development.

Some aspects of school review may also involve the Board of Management and parents particularly in relation to the non-curricular issues.

(INTO, 1999, An Approach to School Review, User Guidelines, p1)

It is interesting to note that initiatives in the area of involving parents in curricular planning are being encouraged in some OECD countries. In some project schools in Denmark, parents and teachers have planned aspects of the curriculum together. The 1993 Alcuin Award was won by a Danish Folkeskole teacher who for more than ten years has been involving parents in curriculum development. The jury noted that "Mrs. Rolsted actually discussed, planned and set up her entire programme in close consultation with the parents of her students" (OECD, 1997, p.89).

It is in this context that as described in Chapter Three, Research Methodology, Section 3.3.4 two questions relating to the content of the school plan and the role of parents with respect to the development of policy in curricular areas were included in the questionnaire. The principals were asked in question (8) of the questionnaire to indicate whether the content of their school plan

- concentrates more in organisational issues and to a lesser extent on curricular issues
- concentrates more on curricular matters and to a lesser extent on organisational issues
- devotes equal attention to both organisational issues and curricular matters

The following table indicates that generally there is a good balance between curricular and organisational planning, with 50.0% of principals indicating that their

school plan devotes equal attention to both organisational issues and curricular matters.

Table 4.14: Contents of The School Plan – Q.8

	Frequency	Percent
Organisational	14	33.3
Curricular	7	16.7
Both	21	50.0
Total	42	100.0

However, when the principals were asked, ‘do parents have a role regarding the development of policy in curricular areas’ 28.6% choose ‘no’ and a further 54.8% were unsure. Only 16.7% felt that parents have a role in curriculum planning.

Principals in elaborating on their selection of the option that parents should be involved in the development of policy in curricular areas, raised important issues including (a) time, (b) the need for further in-career development to empower principals to facilitate the process, (c) difficulties motivating parents, particularly in disadvantaged areas to understand that they have something important to contribute to the process and (d) difficulties regarding the perceived attitudes of some teachers. Their comments included - ‘ideally yes, but it is very difficult to develop – usually due to pressure of time, number of meetings etc’, ‘parents have a role but I feel that I am not sufficiently knowledgeable in the Primary School Curriculum to guide this consultation’ and ‘in disadvantaged areas it is hard to motivate parents to become involved in curricular areas as they feel they do not have much to contribute in the opinion of most teachers’.

Comments from those principals who chose a negative response, that parents have no role regarding the development of policy in curricular areas, focused on the professional role of teachers – ‘this is fundamentally a matter for trained, professional

teachers. Parents may discuss the matter and generally trust the school', 'we are the professionals here. We have the training in curricular areas', 'these areas are discussed and policies formulated by the teaching staff' and 'curricular areas are dealt with at class parent meeting by way of information only'. The process would take too long was a further reason for a negative response to this question.

The most significant number of principals (54.8%) indicated they were unsure whether parents have a role in curricular planning. Social, personal and health education areas of the curriculum, including Relationships and Sexuality Education and substance misuse prevention, together with language development and reading were curricular areas named as being appropriate for involving parents in policy development.

Concerns raised again included time, the professional role of the teacher, the perceived lack of expertise and interest among parents with regard to curriculum and a general unease regarding the delicate balance in the relationship between parents and teachers.

4.7.12 Summary

This section has analysed the data obtained from the questionnaires relating to consultation with parents with regard to specific policy areas. Many schools have consulted parents in the development of policies on curriculum matters in the health and safety areas and on organisational issues such as the Code of Behaviour, uniform and homework. Issues of concern to principals with respect to involving parents in policy formation, particularly in the context of curriculum policy development included

- time

- professional role of the teacher
- attitudes of some teachers
- parental expertise / lack of expertise regarding the curriculum and
- difficulties in engaging parents in the process.

Some of these issues will be discussed further in the next section which focuses on school structures – Board of Management and Parents’ Association.

4.8 Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association

4.8.1 Introduction

The importance of structures at school level to promote a greater sense of collegiality and engagement on the part of the partners, together with, as was referred to in the Green Paper, “the drive to promote greater autonomy for schools” (p.141) led in 1975 to the development of Boards of Management in schools and in 1985 to the setting up of the National Parents’ Council, which promotes positive participation by parents in education at school level. In seeking to discover the current level of participation by parents in school development planning, this research has sought information on the role of the Board of Management and Parents’ Association in policy formation in the sample schools.

4.8.2 Board of Management and School Development Planning

With respect to the role of the Board of Management and policy formation the respondents were given four options including:

- (a) the Board of Management is represented on all working groups relating to policy development in our school
- (b) the Board of Management ratify policies drawn up by the staff and principal of the school
- (c) the Board of Management input and reaction is sought in developing some school policy on organisational issues and in relation to curricular matters

(d) the school uses a combination of the above.

The following data was received from the principals in the sample

Table 4.15: Role of the Board of Management in Policy Formation – Q.21

	Frequency	Percent
Policy groups (a)	3	7.1
Ratify policies (b)	17	40.5
Input sought (c)	6	14.3
Combination (d)	16	38.1
Total	42	100.0

Comments from the respondents suggest that in most instances the Board of Management ratify policies drawn up by staff in relation to curricular areas but have more involvement in certain organisational policies. One respondent stated ‘the Board of Management had an active involvement in the development of an enrolment policy and have traditionally ratified policy in curricular areas’. Another comment was ‘usually (curricular policies) staff draw up and Board of Management have input then. Sometimes (certain organisational areas) Board of Management draw up and staff then have input’. The view of a third principal was ‘the Board of Management reviews policies drafted by the principal and staff of the school. It would be grossly unfair to suggest that they merely ratify them’. Time and availability of personnel during the school day were again raised as issues to be addressed – ‘Board of Management representatives are all working people and don’t have the time to attend staff meetings or planning days during school time’. The teacher representative on the Board of Management and the principal were named as link people between the Board and staff – ‘the Board is represented by principal and teacher member. Policies are presented at one meeting. Amendments / changes are asked for at the next meeting. To date they have always ratified policies in their entirety’.

This research shows that the Board of Management of most schools has some involvement in policy development and ratification. To date the process of involvement appears primarily that the policy is drafted by the staff and principal and comes to the Board for discussion, possible amendment and ratification. Issues relating to time and availability of Board members were named by principals as reasons why involvement in policy formation working groups is limited.

4.8.3 Parents' Association and School Development Planning

Boards of Management of schools have a statutory obligation, under Section 26, (3), *Education Act, 1998* to “promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a Parents’ Association and to a Parents’ Association when it is established”. School-parent committees and Parents’ Associations have differing functions and aims in the various OECD countries as described in *Parents as Partners in Schooling*, OECD, 1997. In Spain, for example, parent participation in school planning and financial decisions is particularly high (p.31). In Spain inspectors’ reports are publicised through Parents’ Associations. Parents are involved in drawing up the school development plan, which follows such a report and must address any weaknesses identified by the inspectors (p.56). German schools on the other hand have limited autonomy within the centralised state educational system and this places limits on the ability of parents to participate in defining the ethos and objectives of schools (p.127). Circular 7/85 was issued in January 1985 announcing the establishment of the National Parents’ Council in Ireland.

To ascertain data from the participating schools in this research, the role of Parents’ Associations in school planning, principals were asked to respond initially to the

question ‘has your school a Parents’ Association’. 76.2% of the sample indicated that they have a Parents’ Association with no Parents’ Association in 10 schools (23.8%) of the sample, as stated previously in Section 4.6.2 of this chapter.

Table 4.16: Parents’ Association – Q. 7

		Frequency	Percent
PA	Yes	32	76.2
PA	No	10	23.8
Total		42	100.0

A comparison between this question and question 1 indicates that 10% of schools with one to four teachers in the sample have no Parents’ Association, 9.1% of schools with five to nine teachers, 50% in the ten to fourteen teacher grouping and 25% in the large schools with fifteen plus teachers. Seven of the eleven schools serving designated areas of disadvantage do not have a Parents’ Association. This data confirms the need for intervention programmes as described in Chapter 2 Literature Review Section 2.5 to facilitate involvement of parents of children attending schools serving designated areas of disadvantage with encouraging parental involvement in collaborative decision-making and school management structures. The importance of parent training sessions is highlighted in the literature (Comer et al. 1996, p.49.)

When a comparison was drawn between Q.7 - Has your school a Parents’ Association and Q.11 - How are parents consulted in your school regarding the development of school policies, some interesting data emerged. Two schools with a Parents’ Association indicated that there is no formal consultation with parents regarding policy. A majority of schools use a combination of approaches to consult with parents regarding school policies.

The questionnaire sought information on the role of the Parents’ Association in policy formation Q. 20. 33.3% of principals indicated that the staff draw up the draft policy

in collaboration with the principal. The Parents’ Association is then asked for input and reaction to the draft policy. Joint working groups of parents and teachers draw up a draft policy which is then presented to staff and the Parents’ Association to be discussed and amended as appropriate was a less popular choice with 7.1% selecting this option. In summary it is important to note that a significant number of principals (35.7%) indicated that the Parents’ Association either have no role in policy or there is no Parents’ Association to consult.

Table 4.17: Role of the Parents’ Association in Policy Formation – Q.20.

	Frequency	Percent
Staff only – PA ratify (a)	14	33.3
Working group (b)	3	7.2
PA not consulted (c)	6	14.3
No PA (d)	9	21.4
Combination (e)	10	23.8
Total	42	100.0

PA = Parents’ Association

In commenting on the above one principal did reiterate that the parents’ representatives on the Board of Management are consulted. The issue of time was raised again with one principal commenting ‘there is no specific method employed regarding involvement. It is rather hap-hazard, depending on levels of stress and time to properly plan drawing up a policy involving all’. Difficulties experienced by some schools in maintaining a Parents’ Association were highlighted – ‘we attempted to start a Parents’ Association but there was very little interest from parents. We would always consult parents representatives on the Board of Management’. A further issue regarding how representative the Parents’ Association really is, was central to the comment of another principal – ‘as this is an infant school we do not have a very vibrant Parents’ Association. Currently there are five members on it who seem not to get along too well. One has to ask if five members should speak for over two hundred

parents. People don't get involved'.

4.9 Relationships – Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors to Partnership in School Development Planning

4.9.1 School Development Planning – Facilitating Factors

It is evident from the data analysed to date that schools are at different stages with respect to involving parents in school development planning. Many factors contribute to a school climate, whereby structures and relationships facilitate communication between the various partners. Principals in this study were asked to rank five enabling factors that facilitate partnership in school development planning in order from the highest priority to the lowest priority.

The factors that facilitate partnership included in question 22 include:

- cooperative, well-motivated staff
- leadership of the principal
- encouragement of parental involvement
- collective ownership of school's aims and objectives
- respect for each others' roles as parents and teachers.

The principals in the sample ranked the above factors highest priority as follows:

- leadership of the principal (20)
- cooperative, well-motivated staff (12)
- respect for each others' roles as parents and teachers (6)
- collective ownership of schools' aims and objectives (3)
- encouragement of parental involvement (1)

Table 4.18: Enabling factors that facilitate partnership in school development planning – Q.22

	Cooperative staff	Leadership of principal	Parental involvement	Collective ownership	Respect for roles
1st priority	10	24	5	2	1
2nd priority	20	12	6	3	1
3rd priority	1	2	14	11	13
4th priority	3	1	6	16	16
5th priority	8	3	11	9	9

It should be noted that a small number of respondents did not rank all five options. A cooperative, well-motivated staff and the leadership of the principal were selected as the most critical enabling factors that facilitate partnership in school development planning by the sample group of principals. It is interesting to note a pattern, whereby it was explained previously in this section that question 12 revealed 52.4% of schools in the sample had not engaged parents in the development of the school mission statement.

It is interesting to note that collective ownership of the schools' aims and objectives was given a priority (1) or (2) ranking by 9.5% of the total sample. While the meaning of 'ownership' is not clearly defined by principals, it is a word that was used by a significant number of principals in response to question 18:

Do you consider that involving parents in the development of school policies will ultimately benefit the children in your school?

Some principals elaborated on the concept by suggesting that policies are effective if everyone has ownership. 81.1% of the principals surveyed considered that involving parents in school development planning would ultimately benefit the pupils. Yet in spite of a requirement in the *Education Act, 1998* to consult with the education partners with respect to the 'objectives of the school.....and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives.....' Section 21 (2), less than 10% of principals regard collective ownership of the schools' aims and objectives as a

significant facilitating factor in facilitating partnership between parents and teachers.

4.9.2 School Development Planning – Inhibiting Factors

The open sections of the questionnaire, as has been explained previously, elicited issues for principals with regard to involvement of parents in school development planning. Many of these issues reflect inhibiting factors to parental involvement named in previous research, as outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.3. Five factors that inhibit partnership between parents and teachers in school development planning were named in question 23 and principals were asked to rank them using the same format as for the previous question, from highest priority (1) to lowest priority (5). The factors named were:

- (a) lack of flexibility within traditional time limits
- (b) partnership in school development planning not regarded as a priority by staff
- (c) lack of accommodation, for example, a Parents' Room
- (d) teachers lack confidence in their relationship with parents
- (e) lack of in-service regarding partnership with parents in school development planning.

Principals in the sample ranked the factors named in the following order:

- lack of flexibility within traditional time limits (21)
- lack of accommodation, for example, a Parents' room (7)
- partnership in school development planning not regarded as a priority by staff (6)
- teachers lack of confidence in their relationship with parents (6)
- lack of in-service regarding partnership with parents in school development planning (0)

Table 4.19: Factors that Inhibit Partnership in School Development Planning – Q.23

	Time	SDP not priority	Lack of accommodation	Teacher confidence	Lack of in-service
1st priority	21	6	7	6	0
2nd priority	10	7	9	10	4
3rd priority	1	3	2	6	26
4th priority	5	10	12	7	5
5th priority	4	14	10	9	3

It should be noted that a small number of respondents did not rank all five options.

The fact that the lack of in-service regarding partnership was hardly selected at all initially and twenty-six principals chose this option as a third priority is also significant. This may be because teachers have been receiving significant in-career development with respect to the 1999 Curriculum which is causing some disquiet among parents as the pupils are losing out on contact time with their teachers. The perspectives of the other partners, teachers, parents and Board of Management members regarding the adequacy of in-career development with respect to partnership between parents and teachers in school development planning will be addressed in the qualitative phase of this research.

4.10 Conclusion

The data discussed in this chapter were gleaned from questionnaires completed by the forty-two principals of primary schools in the sample. The research question central to this thesis is whether the aspiration of partnership espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is being realised through the process by which parents are currently consulted in the context of school development planning. To date it would appear that there remains a significant amount of work to be done if all schools are to embrace the spirit of partnership as laid down in the legislation. Many schools,

(73.8%) of the current sample, only began to engage in the school development planning process when the *Education Act, 1998* was enacted. Significant numbers of principals, (69%), remain unsure of the implications of current education legislation on the school development planning process. 23.8% of the sample schools do not have a Parents' Association and a significant number of Parents' Associations have limited involvement in policy formation. Also, over half of the principals (54.8%) remain unsure whether parents have a role in the development of policy in curricular areas, and over a quarter of principals (28.6%) consider parents have no role in this area of policy formation.

There are however, some positive indications of change, including, the experience of most schools in working with parents in developing a Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy. 71.4% of principals regarded the process used in drawing up this policy as effective. The engagement of schools with the national initiatives Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary is also very encouraging with 88.1% and 69.0% of schools in the sample having utilised the services of the respective teams. Data with respect to the above initiatives and their role in encouraging parental involvement in the development of school policy were not gathered in the context of this questionnaire. It will however, be taken up and included in the themes to be discussed with teachers in the qualitative phase of data gathering. Principals have an appreciation and awareness of the important role of parents in education with 88.1% stating that they consider that involving parents in the development of school policies will ultimately benefit the children in their school. They are also clear in their realisation of the purpose of involving parents, recognising that parents are the prime educators of their children and that one of the characteristics of an effective school is salient parental

involvement. In the context of the general health and safety areas of the curriculum and in certain organisational matters the data showed some involvement of parents in policy formation.

In the context of this research, however, to date we have but one perspective on parental involvement in school development planning. The next phase of this research will develop themes and issues raised in this chapter, through eliciting the perspectives of the other partners – Board of Management members, parents and teachers. A process of triangulation will be used to come to a better understanding of the issues involved, and the component elements which come together to facilitate or hinder parental involvement in school development planning. This process will involve case studies of a small number of schools. These schools are selected purposively as outlined in Chapter Three, Research Methodology, Section 3.4.3-3.4.6 with the aid of the data obtained from the questionnaires to the principals discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE – A CASE STUDY APPROACH – THE SCHOOLS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Three describes in detail the research methodology and outlines in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 the two distinct phases of data gathering in this research. The initial phase sought to ascertain the perspective of a sample of principals with respect to consultation with parents in school development planning. The purpose of the questionnaire to principals was to provide a snapshot of how things are currently, to facilitate a deepening understanding of the research questions and to indicate themes to be explored in the second phase of this research. It has provided a solid foundation from which to progress the enquiry. The main findings of the quantitative phase of this research, which involved probing beneath the surface of the understanding of principals of current practice in their schools with respect to consultation with parents in school development planning, are described in Chapter Four under the following headings:

- Engagement with school development planning
- Purpose for involving parents in school development planning
- Process of involving parents in school development planning
- Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas
- Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association
- Relationships – facilitating and inhibiting factors to partnership in school development planning

However, an analysis of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, Sections 2.2 and 2.5 together with information gathered from the questionnaires and analysed in Chapter Four, Section 4.8 indicated the need to obtain data from the key partners in education, representatives of the Parents’ Association or parents who are actively involved

in their child's school, members of Boards of Management, and teachers in order to facilitate an in-depth study of this complex field situation. Chapter Three describes the rationale for a case study approach with focus group sessions, involving the various partners, to provide more perspectives on the phenomena being studied and to produce qualitative data – insights into attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and feelings of participants. The suitability of the specific cases and the reasons for their selection are discussed in Section 5.2 of this chapter. Focus group interviews were held in three schools. Representatives of the Boards of Management, parents who are actively involved with the school or representatives of the Parents' Association and groups of teachers from each school were interviewed. The interviews followed qualitative methodology producing descriptive data and offering the opportunity to explore in some depth and detail the hopes and concerns of the participants. The interviews sought perspectives and information from each of the three groups with respect to themes which were modified to suit the specific role of each group – parents, teachers and Board of Management.

The format of the interview should be organised by using what is called a 'topic guide'. This is a resumé of the main areas of interest which are to be explored.
(Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, p. 94)

The headings outlined above and used in Chapter Four to describe the main findings that emerged from the questionnaire data provided the basis for the 'topic guide'. An introductory question to set the scene for a comprehensive exchange of views was included.

This chapter details the process by which the three case study schools were selected, provides a description of each case study site and finally an overview and synthesis of the data in relation to each of the three schools selected, based on the vivid, inclusive accounts of the various partners. Data gleaned at interview with the education partners

are described and analysed with respect to each case study site separately. The themes identified in Chapter Four provide the basis for comparative analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data in Chapter Six.

5.2 Case Studies

5.2.1 Introduction

A purposive approach, involving the identification of specific criteria based on the responses of the 42 principals to the questionnaire, was used in selecting the three cases for in-depth study. A number of items were selected as indicating ‘openness to parental involvement in school development planning’, such as whether the school

- (1) Has engaged with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme
- (2) Has engaged with School Development Planning Support
- (3) Has a Parents’ Association
- (4) Has developed a Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy in collaboration with parents and other partners
- (5) Has had parents involved in school planning on school based planning days
- (6) Agrees that parents should be involved in curricular planning
- (7) Uses a combination of ways to engage the Parents’ Association or the parent body in general in school development planning
- (8) Uses a combination of ways to engage the Board of Management in school development planning
- (9) Consults with parents regarding the development of school policies through working groups of parents and teachers
- (10) Provides for the Board of Management to be represented on all working groups relating to policy development in the school

Table 5.1: Openness to Parental Involvement in School Development Planning

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
					9	7	9	4	1	
		6	3	3						
Total		6	3	3	9	7	9	4	1	

Schools in the sample were placed on a continuum - from schools which principals indicated have limited experience of school development planning in general and particularly of consultation with parents regarding the school plan, to those schools with significant involvement of parents in school development planning. A school with limited openness to parental involvement in school development planning would have selected a positive response to two of the above items, while a school with experience of parental involvement in aspects of school policy would be placed at nine out of ten on the continuum.

The following data which emerged from the questionnaires were also taken into consideration in the selection of the cases:

- Eleven schools were involved in school development planning prior to the enactment of the *Education Act 1998*, (Q.3).
- Thirteen principals indicated that they feel sufficiently informed regarding the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process (Q.4). Twelve of this group engaged the services of Primary Curriculum Support Programme (Comparison Q.4 and Q.5) and nine utilised the national support programme School Development Planning initiative - Primary (Comparison Q.4

and Q.6)

- All eleven schools involved in school development planning prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*, availed of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (Comparison Q.3 and Q.5)
- Three schools did not engage with either of the national initiatives to support school development planning – Primary Curriculum Support Programme or School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (Comparison Q. 5 and Q. 6)
- Two schools have a Parents’ Association but indicated that there was no formal consultation with parents regarding the development of policy (Comparison Q.7 and Q.11)
- In six schools parents attended school based planning days and engaged with teachers in policy development and review
- Seven principals indicated that they believe that parents have a role regarding the development of policy in curricular areas, twelve indicated that parents have no role and twenty-three were unsure
- Ten schools in the sample do not have a Parents’ Association, including seven schools which serve designated areas of disadvantage (Comparison Q. 7 and Q. 2)

Three schools were selected for in-depth study. The reasons for selecting the specific schools are justified as each case study school is described. However, the questionnaires and literature review indicated the importance of selecting:

- (a) a school serving a designated areas of disadvantage
- (b) a school with as yet limited experience of parental involvement in school development planning
- (c) a school which indicated in the responses to the questionnaire ‘openness to

parental involvement' in school development planning

5.2.2 Case Study 1

The logic applied in the selection of this case is that the case selected is similar in crucial aspects with others that might have been chosen and that the findings from this case study are likely to apply elsewhere. This case represents an extreme instance, a school with little experience of school development planning and in particular, limited experience of parental involvement in the development of the school plan. The following variables were taken into account in choosing a suitable school to represent this end of the spectrum:

- A conscious and explicit choice was made to select a school, which had not been involved in school development planning prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. Thirty-one schools in the sample fell into this category.
- The Department of Education and Science support services, Primary Curriculum Support Service and the School Development Planning Initiative-Primary provide guidance to schools with respect to the process of school development planning. Both these services have been utilised by a majority of schools – thirty-seven schools in the sample utilised the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Service (Q.5), while twenty-nine schools utilised the services of the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary (Q.6). Only three of the sample schools did not engage with either support team. The three schools were all rural schools, two with 5-9 teachers and one with 1-4 teachers. The principal of the school selected for the case study indicated that ‘the staff wanted to use the grant money to buy equipment for the school’ and therefore chose not to utilise the services of the national support team.
- With respect to the role of the Board of Management in policy formation (Q.21),

seventeen school principals, including the principal of the school selected for this particular case study, indicated that the statement that ‘the Board of Management ratify policies drawn up by the staff and principal of the school’ best describes the role of the Board of Management in policy formation in their school (Q.21,b).

- The case selected is one of nine schools which indicated that, although the school has a Parents’ Association (Q.7), the Parents’ Association are currently not consulted regarding any policy in the school (Q.20)
- The response of the principal to Q.17 indicated that ‘it would take too long’ to involve parents in the development of policy in curricular areas. Also parents have not been invited to attend any school based planning days (Q.19).

5.2.3 Case Study 2

The second school selected is an urban school with 15 plus teachers. This school has utilised the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (Q.5) and the School Development Planning Initiative - Primary (Q.6). It also has a Parents’ Association which is consulted in the context of school development planning. The reasons for selecting this particular school as a case study stem from a perception, gleaned from the responses in the questionnaire, that an ‘openness to parental involvement’ in policy formation exists. Responses to Q.9, 20 and 21 relating to how policy is generally formulated and who is involved were considered particularly important.

In selecting options relating to how policy is generally formulated in your school (Q.9) the principal in this case selected two options

The principal seeks a consensus on policy at staff meetings. The Parents’ Association and the Board of Management ratify the policies (b) and

Policy committees including representation from the teaching staff, Parents’

Association and Board of Management draw up draft policies which are then presented to the general body of teachers, parents and Board members. (d)

This school is one of just six schools in the sample to invite parents to participate on school based planning days (Q.19). Parents were involved, on one such day, in reviewing the Code of Behaviour and Health and Safety Policy and in drawing up the enrolment policy. Parents had previously been consulted with respect to a uniform policy, homework policy, healthy lunch policy and Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy (Q.12). It is also evident that the Board of Management play an active role in policy formation. The principal states in response to Q. 21 that

(a) the Board of Management is represented on most policy committees.

He also indicates that the options

(b) the Board of Management ratify policies drawn up by the staff and principal of the school and

(c) Board of Management input and reaction is sought in developing some school policies on organisational issues and in relation to curricular areas

are also used by the Board in exercising its policy making role.

5.2.4 Case Study 3

In selecting cases for in-depth study, cognisance was taken of initiatives and research, including Kelleghan, (1997), Widlake, (1986), Comer, (1996), Hanafin and Lynch (2001) and Conaty, (2002), previously undertaken and described in Chapter Two to encourage the involvement of parents, who live in designated areas of disadvantaged areas, in their children's education. One of the cases included in the research is a school serving a designated area of disadvantage. As there are 11 schools in this category in the sample, other criteria have been taken into consideration. An independent researcher was asked to run a number of different analyses to assist in locating a suitable case study, based on the following criteria:

(1.) Overall seven of the sample schools serving designated areas of disadvantage have no Parents' Association. A deeper engagement with one of these schools to discover whether there was ever a Parents' Association, why it is no longer active and the kinds of activities parents are currently involved with, was deemed important in the context of selecting a case study in this category. The researcher was mindful of previous research, Hanafin and Lynch, (2001), which found that

parents' involvement in school structures was seen to be limited to fund-raising and associated activities and they considered this level of involvement unsatisfactory. For example, parents had the impression that their chief if not only function on the parents' council was to raise funds. As Vincent (1997, p. 274) points out, this level of involvement is not uncommon: "the 'voice' of parents through Annual Parents' meetings or school-based Parents' Associations is muted...their voice does not impinge upon the operation of the school as an educational institution" (p.3)

A case study of a school serving a designated area of disadvantage would contribute to an understanding of the particular difficulties experienced by schools serving designated areas of disadvantage in sustaining a Parents' Association and how these schools consult with parents in the development of school policy.

(2.) By further splitting the file it was discovered that four schools with no Parents' Association use a combination of approaches for consulting parents in relation to school development planning. All of these schools indicated a number of approaches including, consultation with small groups of parents, working groups of parents and teachers and consultation with parent representatives on the Board of Management. None of the four schools indicated that there was no formal consultation with parents.

An independent researcher suggested four possible case study sites. The school selected as the case study of a school serving a designated area of disadvantage was not involved in a school development planning process prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998* (Q.3), had utilised the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (Q.5) and the School Development Planning Initiative - Primary

(Q.6). Policy issues on which parents have been consulted include Code of Behaviour, homework policy, uniform policy, healthy eating, policy relating to pupils with special needs and substance use (Q.12). Yet, it is one of a small number of schools (19%) in the sample which have not embraced their responsibility in relation to developing a policy with respect to Relationships and Sexuality Education despite a national programme of in-service and the provision of comprehensive guidelines.

5.3 Focus Groups

5.3.1 Focus Groups – Boards of Management

Focus group sessions were conducted with representatives of the Board of Management in the three schools selected. The researcher acted as facilitator and the groups discussed the following themes:

- Achievements of the Board
- Current challenges for the Board
- How have you become involved?
- Why did you get involved?
- What makes it easy to be involved in the school?
- What makes it difficult to be involved in the school?
- Logistics – how often do the Board of Management meet? Attendance? Issues regarding commitment / membership
- Current priorities of the Board with respect to planning
- Board of Management and The School Plan
- Structures – Board of Management, Parents' Association
- Board of Management and home/school links
- Board of Management and the law

- Board of Management and training and support

A number of members of each Board of Management, including nominees of the Patron, parents, community representatives, principal, elected teacher representative attended the sessions. By agreement with the groups all the focus group sessions were conducted in their respective schools. The focus group session with the Board of Management of Case Study 1 was held on March 12th 2004 and four representatives participated. In this instance, as this is a small school, the principal chose to attend the focus group interview with the teachers and so there was no teacher representation in this group. The four representatives included patron, community and parent representatives. Case Study 2 focus group with members of the Board of Management was conducted on February 24th 2004 and was attended by five Board of Management members. The principal, a nominee of the Patron, two community representatives and an elected parent representative participated in the discussion. A second parent representative joined the discussion towards the end of the session. The final focus group interview with representatives of the Board of Management of Case Study 3, a school which serves a designated area of disadvantage, was held on May 30th 2004. The Chairperson, a nominee of the Patron, the principal, teacher representative and a parent representative attended this group interview.

5.3.2 Focus Groups – Representatives of Parents

The framework for discussion with the parents' representatives was broadly similar to that of the sessions with the representatives of the Boards of Management. In some instances the wording was amended to facilitate the enhancement of the discussion to highlight the personal experience of involvement of the group in the school. The parent representatives of Case Study 1, interviewed on March 12th 2004, were three mothers, all with children currently in the school, who are active members of the

Parents' Association. This Parents' Association is not, however, affiliated to the National Parents' Council. One of the mothers had been a parent representative on the previous Board of Management for three years. Four mothers from Case Study 2 attended, including the Chairperson of the Parents' Association, the representative to the National Parents' Council and two relatively new members to the Parents' Association. This session was conducted on March 5th 2004. The principal of Case Study 3 had indicated in the completed questionnaire that this school currently has no formal Parents' Association. This school serves a designated area of disadvantage and is included in the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme. The school has a teacher appointed to work with parents and teachers in the role of home/school/community liaison coordinator. A wide range of activities are arranged to encourage parental involvement in the school and ten mothers attended this focus group interview which was conducted on May 30th 2004.

It is important to note that all of those who attended the focus group interviews for parents were mothers of pupils in the schools. There is a stipulation in the context of the formation of a Board of Management, that the parent members, must be a mother and a father. Each focus group of Board of Management members interviewed for the purposes of this study, included a parent who is a father of a pupil in the schools selected. However, no fathers attended as representatives of the Parents' Association or as parents who are actively involved in their child's school.

5.3.3 Focus Groups – Teachers

As Case Study 1 is a three-teacher school, the principal and the two class teachers contributed to the discussion at this focus group interview on March 12th 2004. In both the large urban school, Case Study 2, and in the school serving a designated area of disadvantage, Case Study 3, five teachers volunteered to participate in the group

interview. The interviews in the above two schools were conducted on March 5th 2004 and April 30th 2004 respectively. Yet again, the framework for discussion during the focus group interviews was similar to that worked through with the other partners. These themes were identified as a result of the analysis of the questionnaires described in Chapter Four and revised following the pilot focus group sessions outlined previously in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.5.

5.4 Overview of the Focus Group Responses

Sections 5.5-5.7 will review data received from the education partners at interview . It will provide an in-depth overview of each Case study separately. Case Study I, as described in Section 5.2.2, was selected as an extreme instance. This is a school that scored at the lower end of the continuum of factors, which indicate openness to parental involvement in school development planning. The rationale for choosing Case Study 2 is that it represents schools at the upper end of the continuum with a history of parental involvement in the school. The third Case study was selected following a number of analyses, as described in Section 5.2.4, as the school serves a designated area of disadvantage.

5.5 Case Study 1: Focus Group Data

5.5.1 Case Study 1 - Introduction

This is a three-teacher co-educational primary school, catering for a small village and its hinterland. The original school building, constructed in 1834, was demolished in 1991 and replaced by the current three-classroom building. On 30 September 2003, enrolment was sixty-four pupils. For a number of years the school attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain the services of fully qualified teachers. Whole-school planning proved difficult in these circumstances. The relative isolation of the area and

the shortage of teachers nationally were cited as being the prime causes of this situation. Fortunately, the school now has a full complement of qualified teachers. To facilitate ease in gaining an overview from those interviewed of their perspectives and experiences of involvement with the school, and specifically of the school development planning process, I have summarised the data outlined in Sections 5.5.2-5.5.11 in diagrammatic form to convey the information obtained in a succinct manner. Tables 5.2-5.4 which represent a summary of the views expressed by the partners at interview are reprinted in Appendix 5.

Table 5.2: Overview of Case Study 1

	Board of Management	Parents Interviewed	Teachers Interviewed
Engagement with the school	School finance, accommodation, maintenance	'We just help out whenever we can', not affiliated to NPC	Parents support activities at the invitation of teachers
Engagement with SDP	Very recent, limited experience	Very recent, limited experience	Since <i>Education Act, 1998</i>
Awareness of implications of the law	'not up to speed'	School attendance – 'twenty days', enrolment, Code of Discipline	Parents entitled to see all policies; consultation certain policies
Training and support	Have attended no training; Handbook for BOM members 'hard to follow'	Not affiliated to NPC, one parent attended one day	PCSP and SDPI – focus on teachers identifying planning needs & action plans
Purpose of involving parents		Responsibility to be involved, know what is going on, get to know teachers	Parents primary educators; caution 'the line isn't crossed' by parents
Process of School Development Planning	Amend and ratify certain policies only	Consulted if 'big issue' comes up	Teachers draw up policy and in certain instances PA and BOM to amend/ratify
Specific policy areas developed	Budget plan, Health & Safety, Admissions, English, Anti-bullying, Code of Discipline	Anti-bullying, given a copy of the school rules	Recently BOM and PA are given copies of draft policies for comment
Structures – BOM, PA	Meet more regularly now, BOM and PA 'there is a divide'	No formal contact with BOM, two parents on BOM	Principal and teacher on BOM, principal is link with PA
Relationships – facilitating factors	Atmosphere in school, attitude of teachers, open-door policy, small school	Atmosphere in school, attitude of teachers, open-door policy, small school	Easier at infant level, role of school secretary, easier if appointment made
Relationships – inhibiting factors	Lack of continuity from one BOM to next, communication BOM and PA	Appropriate time to discuss issues with class teachers, lack of progress on issues	Training and structures to manage relationships with parents

It is important to note that completing the questionnaire raised the consciousness of the principal with regard to engagement with the partners in the development of the school plan. Sections 5.5.2-5.5.10 will elaborate on the recent experience of both the Board of Management members and Parents' Association representatives of reviewing and ratifying aspects of school policy.

5.5.2 Case Study 1 - Engagement with the school

At interview the representatives of the Board of Management indicated that they have come to their role as Board members with different hopes and aspirations. One parent stated that 'my children are twelve and seven, in sixth class and in first class and since they started school I have been involved at some level, such as Parents' Association, but this is my first time as a member of the Board'. Another member of the Board outlined

I'm at the grandfather stage, so my interests are slightly different. I was invited to join or to be put forward... I have three grandchildren in the parish, probably all will be going here...I would like to see the Board of Management starting to plan now for what happens when the new houses come on stream.

(Case Study 1, Board of Management)

A Board of Management member highlighted the more centralised role parents now play in their children's education 'I see change coming, because parents today will not accept the nonsense that I had to accept, where I was told, we know what is best for educating your children and that is what you are going to get'. Reservations, regarding the ability of the Board to make progress on issues, were expressed by an experienced member of the Board who stated 'people coming on the Board have a vision of what can be done to the school, but the system doesn't allow it'. Lack of clarity with respect to Department of Education and Science circulars and procedures, for example, relating to the appointment and retention of teachers, school accommodation, complaints procedures and resource provision for pupils with special

educational needs were noted. The achievements noted by the members of the Board at interview focused on the maintenance of the school building. 'The last Board decided that the school needed to be done up and the Board noticed that the building needed repairs, so we decided that we would spend money on these essentials'.

The three parents interviewed were representatives of the Parents' Association. One parent summarised their involvement with the school by stating

we just help out whenever we can. We don't have much involvement with the school. It'd be more just activities....

(Case Study 1, Parent)

First Holy Communion, fundraising, the annual Christmas show and having the gardaí in to speak to parents about drugs awareness are examples of named activities the parents organise and support.

Contact between home and school as described by the teachers, falls into a number of different categories. Firstly dialogue with parents including incidental meetings, conversations by telephone, meetings regarding concerns of parents and annual parent/teacher meetings. Informal communication with parents can involve leaving messages with the secretary and use of the homework journal. Information meetings named include a meeting with the parents of new pupils to the school and preparation for the sacraments. Special events which take place annually, involving cooperation between parents and teachers are the annual Christmas show, graduation for sixth class, sports day and sacramental and liturgical celebrations. Parents also help maintain the school grounds.

The level of engagement with the school described by the education partners indicates a low level of involvement in school affairs. Maintenance of the school building was named by a member of the Board of Management as a significant achievement and

the parent representatives summed up their involvement by stating that they help out when they can. Informal relationships are generally described as positive, however, due to the lack of clarity in relation to procedures for raising a query or complaint both teachers and parents remain cautious about an appropriate approach to dealing with such issues. The point made by the member of the Board of Management in relation to the perception that the system stifles the vision of those active in the school will be referred to again in the context of knowledge of the system and the need for training and support.

5.5.3 Case Study 1 - Engagement with School Development Planning

The policies named as current priorities of the Board of Management include the budget plan, admissions, anti-bullying and health and safety. It was noted by a Board member that the teachers have been ‘ writing the English policy, and that the Code of Discipline is there’. When a draft policy is drawn up by the teaching staff, recent practice is that the draft policy is then generally presented to the Board. In some instances Board members are given copies to read before the Board meeting ‘ so that we could have our amendments made out’. Some disquiet was expressed regarding the length of time it takes to have policies amended and finally approved by the Board.

With respect to their experience of school policy, the parents spoke about the fact that the school is small and that things are working well and the feeling that if ‘a big issue came up, we would be consulted’. The example quoted related to the issue of bullying... ‘that was a big issue and we were consulted and a new bullying policy was drawn up’. A copy of the anti-bullying policy was sent home to all parents. A copy of this policy is also displayed in the foyer of the school. In referring to the Code of

Discipline, one parent stated, ‘the discipline one was always there. It works. If it is working, why change it?’ The parents outlined the procedure whereby all parents of new pupils to the school get a copy of the school rules, the school uniform and the Code of Discipline. They presume that there is a policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education as they are aware that there is a meeting for parents of older pupils in this regard, however they have never seen a copy of this policy. Parental and Board of Management involvement in school development planning, based on the evidence in this section is a relatively new and limited experience for the education partners. This point will be discussed further in Section 5.5.9.

The teachers spoke about a recent planning day at which they drafted a homework policy.

We had a planning day there recently and basically we actually have it drafted, how much homework would be given in each class, so that the parents would know and so that there is a continuous link between classes, so that there isn’t a big jump...
(Case Study 1, Teacher)

It is interesting to note that the teachers planned to inform parents of the homework policy, rather than engage in a consultative process with parent representatives. The process described will involve showing it to the Parents’ Association and to each member of the Board. Amendments will be included if agreed and then it will become formal policy. Reference was made to a similar process used in the drafting of the English and bullying policies.

While this school as indicated previously uses a number of strategies for maintaining communication with parents, the teachers confirmed the perception of the members of the Board of Management and the representatives of the Parents’ Association that as yet, no formal home/school links policy has been developed.

5.5.4 Case Study 1 - Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities under the Law

The members of the Board of Management indicated that they ‘were not up to speed’ on aspects of legislation that impinge on school policy formation. Health and safety, the budget plan, admissions, anti-bullying and aspects of social, personal and health education such as Relationships and Sexuality Education and drugs awareness were mentioned as possibilities.

The parents interviewed named the enrolment policy, school attendance and specifically the ‘twenty days’ and the Code of Discipline as policies which they were aware there is a legal obligation on schools to draw up.

One teacher indicated that she believed that parents are entitled to see all school policies - ‘nearly in for a penny in for a pound, if you are going to get them in, you might as well get them in for all of them’. With respect to legislation which specifies consultation with parents, the teachers named policies relating to anti-bullying, safety in the school, the Code of Discipline, admissions and Relationships and Sexuality Education.

5.5.5 Case Study 1 – Experience of Training and Support

None of the members of this Board of Management has attended any course to advise them of their role. One member has accessed some relevant information, including examples of policies from other schools, on the internet. The *Management Board Members’ Handbook 2004* was described as very hard to follow.

It’s not that helpful. You have to read it about ten times to try to understand what it means in the day-to-day running of a school.

(Case Study 1, Board of Management)

One parent member attended a training course organised by the National Parents’

Council for members of a Parents' Association. While aspects of the training were relevant including discussion regarding roles on the committee, such as chairperson and secretary, the perception of the parents interviewed was that overall, the focus of the day was on schools with much larger, more formal committees. The Parents' Association of this school is currently not affiliated to the National Parents' Council.

The general consensus from the teachers is the support received from the school development planning and primary curriculum support facilitators is excellent and that it is particularly helpful in providing direction and guidance. This group of teachers felt that the role of parents in policy formation is however, not emphasised by the facilitators 'it was sort of very low key...' and

she said then that we'd have to show it to the Board and the parents for ratification. That's how it was dealt with, not in a huge way, not a great deal at all.

(Case Study 1, Teacher)

5.5.6 Case Study 1 – Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning

Parents answered the above question in a general way with respect to parental involvement in the school and indicated that they felt that

- they have a responsibility to be involved and to help
- they know more of what is going on by getting involved
- it is good that parents attend activities and events for the children and that it helps the children realise that education is important
- it helps build communication with the teachers and
- it's a great way for new parents to get to know other parents.

The teachers remarked on the fact that the parents are the primary educators of their children, that it is important for teachers to know what is happening in the child's home life, that it is not possible to separate school life from everyday life and that there is a great strength when people pull together. 'The children must feel there is a continuity and that they go home and the learning continues...' One teacher stated 'we're working here and we've nothing to hide, we welcome ideas'. Caution was

expressed in relation to managing the relationship with parents and ensuring that ‘the line isn’t crossed’. It is interesting to note that as stated in Section 5.5.2 this school does not have a formal home/school links policy. It does not have clear guidelines and strategies for consultation between parents and teachers agreed and written down as part of the school plan. This lack of clarity can leave teachers and parents feeling vulnerable and cautious.

5.5.7 Case Study 1 - Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development Planning

As noted previously, school policies are generally drafted by the teachers. Recently some policies including the anti-bullying and English policies have been presented in draft form to the Board of Management for discussion. The general parent body get copies of critical policies such as the school rules, uniform and the Code of Discipline. Comment from parents and the Parents’ Association is invited for policies such as the bullying and homework policies when it is felt that the policy might be of particular interest or concern to parents. This practice is a recent development.

5.5.8 Case Study 1 - Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas

The parent body within a school fall into three main categories (1) the parent members of the Board of Management (2) representatives of the Parents’ Association and (3) the wider parent body. In this school, as indicated above, the parent members of the Board of Management have some exposure to school development planning but remain at a stage where their role is primarily to ratify policies drawn up by staff. Recently, the Parents’ Association have received copies of certain draft policies for discussion. However, no reference was made at interview in relation to working groups of parents and teachers developing any policy. The wider parent body as

indicated in Section 5.5.3 get a copy of the school rules when their child starts school. They are also provided with a copy of the school anti-bullying policy.

5.5.9 Case Study 1 - Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association

The Board of Management of the school meet more regularly this year.

It’s more than it was any other year, every two months now. Up to last year it was a decision of the Chairperson to call a meeting. You didn’t know one meeting to the next when it was going to be. The secretary had to write to people.

(Case Study 1, Board of Management)

Concern was expressed by some members of the Board in relation to the perceived gap between the Board and the Parents’ Association.

I feel that there is a great opportunity, a great bunch of parents, it’s a very small school, and I don’t think it has been used. People are just waiting. There has been a gap or something between the Board of Management and the Parents’ Association. There is a divide and it needs to get sorted.

(Case Study 1, Board of Management)

It was suggested that the Board of Management and the Parents’ Association might meet every six months so that any issues that may arise of mutual interest could be discussed.

The representatives of the Parents’ Association acknowledged that there are no formal links between the Board and their association. They outlined the role of the two parent representatives on the Board to represent parents’ views and to link with the Parents’ Association. These parent representatives have children in the school. The informality of meeting the parent representatives at the school gate each day and the possibility of raising issues of concern with them, was discussed. The Parents’ Association also do not have meetings with the teachers.

We never really need to meet them because we meet at different events anyway. We have been doing the same thing for so many years, we all know the routine.

(Case Study 1, Parent)

The Parents’ Association is not, as stated previously, affiliated to the National

Parents' Council. They meet whenever there is an event to be organised rather than at regular intervals. They hold an Annual General Meeting and had difficulty in the past encouraging parents to commit to involvement, however they perceive that there has been some improvement in recent years.

The principal and a teacher representative are members of the Board of Management. The principal is also the link person with the Parents' Association. Teachers meet with both groups at fundraising and social activities, however, currently there are no formal opportunities for the Board of Management, Parents' Association and teachers to develop a shared vision for the school, to develop trusting relationships, to dialogue, to self-evaluate and to plan together for the future development of the school.

5.5.10 Case Study 1 - Relationships – Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors to Partnership in School Development Planning

As involvement by the Board of Management and the Parents' Association in school development planning is still a relatively new experience for the partners in the school, the facilitating and inhibiting factors discussed related to general involvement of parents in the school rather than focusing specifically on partnership in school development planning. The atmosphere in the school, the attitude of the teachers and an open-door policy were named as facilitating factors in encouraging parental involvement in the school by both members of the Board of Management and representatives of the Parents' Association. The teachers mentioned the ease of access to parents at the infant level in the school, when parents are bringing their young children to the school. In a small school where all teachers have responsibility for class groupings, having a secretary who is accessible to parents during the school day was named as important.

Inhibiting factors named by the members of the Board of Management include the lack of continuity from one Board to the next. This causes frustration in relation to the pace and efficiency with which tasks and objectives can be completed. It was suggested that the procedures of the Board should to be streamlined. This was particularly evident in an example outlined with regard to the inclusion of amendments to the school anti-bullying policy. Concern relating to perceived lack of familiarity with Department of Education and Science circular letters and procedures was also expressed as an inhibiting factor. The lack of adequate communication between the Board of Management and the Parents' Association was also raised as an issue.

I would like the Board to work with the parents because I'm the representative of the Parents' Association, to work in conjunction with the Parents' Association. I know they are separate entities in themselves, but if they need something or want something, because it's for the good of the children. They are both designed to act in the best interests of the children. I'm a little frustrated with the Board at the moment. Hopefully, that's the way I would like to see it, that things would move a little quicker and maybe more efficiently.

(Case Study 1, Board of Management)

An appropriate time to discuss issues with class teachers and the feeling that as a parent you are generally disturbing the teacher and keeping them from their class were issues raised by the parent representatives. In discussing school organisational policies of concern to them, the parents commented on the timing of the parent / teacher meeting within the school year. They also referred to a school policy that the children must go out to the yard on wet days to clear the classroom at break time. This is a rural three-teacher school with no general purposes room or school hall. These are issues of concern to the parents. They have been discussed at Board of Management and Parents' Association meetings. A level of frustration exists due apparently to a lack of clarity in relation to the lack of progress on these issues.

The need for structures and for adequate training in the management of relationships with parents were highlighted by the teachers. The difficulties that can arise ‘when things go wrong’ and ‘people are in bad humour’ were outlined together with the importance of ‘a bit of space to think’ for teachers.

5.5.11 Case Study 1 – Concluding Comments

The atmosphere in this small school is generally perceived as friendly and informal. Many strategies for developing home/school links were outlined, including communication of information, dialogue with parents, use of parental skills as a resource in the school and more recently some opportunities for enlisting parents’ views in aspects of policy making. Formal school structures including the Board of Management and Parents’ Association are in place, however their awareness of the breadth of their roles and responsibilities is limited. The priorities of the Board named at interview include school accommodation, maintenance issues and finance. The Parents’ Association ‘help out whenever we can’. Patterns of communication between the Board of Management and the Parents’ Association regarding progress on issues raised, requires improvement. The Parents’ Association is not affiliated to the National Parents’ Council and does not benefit from the sharing of practice and experiences of other Parents’ Associations. Some frustration was expressed with regard to how the Board conducts its business and the pace at which decisions are made. The lack of easily accessible information for newly appointed Board members was also a difficulty. The evidence presented indicates that consultation with respect to school development planning is a relatively new experience for teachers, the Board and the parents of this school. No opportunities have been created, as stated previously, for the education partners to come together to develop trusting relationships, to dialogue, to self-evaluate and to plan together for the future

development of the school.

The teachers were very positive about their experience of the national support programmes – Primary Curriculum Support Programme and the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary. The support teams with the named programmes provide support and advice to the teachers with respect to the process of school development planning. The teachers noted however, that there was little or no emphasis on consultation with parents in the development of the school plan. The primary focus was on the teachers identifying their priorities, working on draft policies as a group of teachers and then maybe, in some instances presenting a draft copy to the Parents' Association and the Board of Management for ratification. This school has embraced the notion of parental involvement in the context of school structures with elected parental representation on the Board of Management and a Parents' Association. Parental involvement at a deeper more participatory, accountable level will require further support and training for all the partners.

5.6 Case Study 2: Focus Group Data

5.6.1 Case Study 2 - Introduction

On September 30th 2003, this school had a teaching staff of a principal and fourteen teachers and an enrolment of two hundred and seventy pupils. The school was built in 1972 and it serves an urban lower middle class community. As outlined in Section 5.2.3 the school was selected purposively for in-depth study because it represents an extreme instance, a school which has had quite significant parental involvement over the years. Recently on a school-based planning day parents, teachers and representatives of the Board of Management worked together to develop aspects of school policy. Table 5.3 summarises data obtained at interview with the

partners. This is followed in Sections 5.6.2-5.6.11 by a more detailed overview of the perspectives of the Board of Management representatives, parents and teachers who contributed at the focus group sessions.

Table 5.3: Overview of Case Study 2

	Board of Management	Parents Interviewed	Teachers Interviewed
Engagement with the school	Experienced Board, wide range of activities, decision-making	Affiliated to NPC, Fundraising, classes and talks, library, computers	Support from parents 'phenomenal'
Engagement with SDP	A number of years	First involved in RSE 1995	Prior to <i>Education Act, 1998</i>
Awareness of the implications of the law	Policies being amended due to changes in law	Have a right to establish a Parents' Association	Good overview of implications of the law, parents and formal curriculum unresolved
Training and support	BOM members have attended talks and courses provided by CPSMA and others	Parents feel stronger as an association because have received training from NPC	Focus of PCSP and SDPI solely on teachers with no emphasis on the partnership process
Purpose of involving parents		'show an interest', 'know what is going on'	'helpful on our terms'
Process of School Development Planning (SDP)	Teachers prepare, committee formed, draft circulated, amendments welcome	Involved on school-based planning day	Working groups lead to better listening, understanding and commitment
Specific policy areas developed	RSE, enrolment, health and safety, Code of Discipline Formal curriculum policies drawn up by teachers and ratified by BOM	Code of Discipline, anti-bullying, ethos, mission statement, homework, enrolment, RSE Not sure of role re formal curriculum	Mission statement, enrolment, Code of Discipline, RSE, health and safety, anti-bullying, school attendance
Structures – BOM, PA	More democratic management welcomed, regular communication with PA	PA meet regularly, good communication with principal and Board	Principal and teacher rep. link with BOM, principal link with PA
Relationships – facilitating factors	Leadership of principal, school climate	Leadership of principal, openness of teachers, PA welcoming	Working with parents
Relationships – inhibiting factors		Bad experience of school, teachers a different social class, self-esteem	Parents early school leavers, parents who do not connect with the school

5.6.2 Case Study 2 - Engagement with the School

Data obtained at interview with the members of the Board of Management indicate that this is an experienced Board. The different levels of involvement of parents in the school and the progression in relation to parental involvement noted previously in the literature review, Chapter Two, Sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3 is evident. That progression developed from fundraising for the school to being an elected representative on the Parents' Association, to membership of the Board of Management and also to involvement in the National Parents' Council at county level. One community representative had been a Board member previously in 1975 while the other is involved in a local club and works with the school to engage the pupils in sport as a form of recreation. The members of the Board in collaboration with the Parents' Association have organised and supported fundraising events for the school and have attended talks and courses on topics such as parenting, reading with your child, anti-bullying, homework and self-esteem. They have brought school teams away on weekends together with the teachers. Some Board members have been trained, along with other parents of children in the school, to facilitate a support programme for children in the school who have suffered as a result of separation or loss.

The achievements of the Board named at interview refer specifically to two important decisions when the Board consulted the whole-school community. A plebiscite was organised in 1973 among the parents to decide whether the school was to be a co-educational school or a single sex school. In the middle nineties again the Board of Management consulted with the parents in relation to possible amalgamation. The will of the parents was the deciding factor in both instances. The Board expressed pride in the involvement of parents generally in the school, including parental representation on the Board of Management, the Parents' Association and

others who aren't members of the formal Parents' Association but who come in at times when they are needed as helpers, when there are different events on.

(Case Study 1, Board of Management)

One Board member commented on the effectiveness of the class meetings held in September at which the principal and a member of the Parents' Association raise awareness of the role of parents in their children's education and encourage parents to become involved.

The Parents' Association representatives also highlighted their involvement in fundraising events such as the Christmas Fair which is supported by teachers, parents and pupils and the support programme for pupils who have suffered as a result of separation or loss. Another initiative named was the setting up and running of the computer room in the school. Parents ran the computer classes for the pupils in collaboration with the teachers for a period when information and communication technology was being introduced. The school library is also organised by parents. Some parents have been trained to visit sixth class pupils and their parents in their own homes in the context of sacramental preparation. The parish community support this work.

Fundraising, the support programme for pupils, computers and the involvement of parents in school tours were named also by the teachers. One teacher described the support from parents as 'phenomenal' and stated that the atmosphere is 'so rewarding'. Some reservations were expressed, regarding the class meetings by one teacher, who indicated that it must be made clear to parents that they are not an opportunity for complaints to be raised regarding individual teachers.

5.6.3 Case Study 2 - Engagement with School Development Planning

The Board of Management in the school has been involved in school development

planning for a number of years. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was one of the first policies drawn up in consultation with parents.

School policy on RSE was very largely parent-driven. It was terrific. It was one of the first policies written up. They came in and made their contribution. They formed the policy that we have with regard to the delivery of the RSE programme.'

(Case Study 2, Board of Management)

Three school policies were being revised and amended on the school based planning day attended by the teaching staff, members of the Board of Management and representatives of the Parents' Association. On that day they were up-dating the Code of Discipline to include requirements of recent education legislation, the health and safety policy and the enrolment policy.

The process used to draw up organisational policies generally in this school was described at interview. The teachers do the preparatory work. Then a committee is formed of parents, teachers and members of the Board of Management who review the initial work and prepare a draft policy. This committee circulate the draft for comment and amendments to teachers, Board and Parents' Association members and on occasions to the wider parent body. The wider parent body are consulted, by distribution of a questionnaire to all parents of pupils in the school, on aspects of policy such as Relationships and Sexuality Education, the Code of Discipline and uniform. One of the hopes for the coming year expressed by a member of the Board is to explore the involvement of parents in aspects of curricular policy development.

The parents were positive about their involvement on the school based planning day. They spoke particularly about the experience of working on the Code of Discipline. They all felt that their opinions were listened to and valued. They commented on the draft Code of Discipline prepared by the teachers. It was described as being written in 'very teacher's writing' and it was suggested that there is a need to

look at where we (*parents*) are, and it needs to be written so that everyone can pick it up and read it. (Case Study 2, Parent)

The parents state that when policies are written in complex language ‘it makes you feel small’ and ‘you get less feedback on it’. They also welcomed consultation in relation to the school uniform. Parents were surveyed regarding the wearing of a tracksuit or the uniform on days when the pupils have physical education sessions. The results of the survey when collated, were communicated to the parents, so that they were assured that their opinions were taken into consideration. ‘You know in this school, if you are asked your opinion and it’s a valid opinion, then it will be counted’. The parents were asked during the focus group session about involvement in curriculum planning. They appeared reticent and unclear of their role. ‘Are parents allowed to be involved in the curriculum?’ one parent asked, while another wondered, ‘Is that not taking away from the teacher’s job?’

The issue of including parent representation on committees set up to formulate draft policies on curricular areas caused some discussion among the teachers interviewed. One perspective expressed was ‘I don’t think there is any debate. I draw the line at curriculum. The teacher pursues curriculum. That’s the one area that parents should have no involvement in – none!’ Another teacher acknowledged that ‘in terms of the world outside, people are working in the workplace and so on, people can see the needs. Should there be some consultative process for input from parents as to what the curriculum might be?’ While a third teacher commented ‘I would question as a parent myself....I think there is too much time spent on Irish. I think there should be a European language. Why shouldn’t a parent have an input on that?’ The teachers were all in agreement that having the parents involved in drawing up the Code of Discipline was ‘fabulous’ and very ‘productive’. They appreciated the input of the parents in

relation to the language used to make it more accessible to the wider body of parents. One teacher noted that the parents would have wished for more punitive sanctions for serious misbehaviour within the school.

In relation to a home/school links policy, it was acknowledged by all three groups that there is no formal home/school links policy in the school plan, however one parent commented towards the end of the focus group session 'you don't realise all the ways the school links with parents until you start thinking about it'.

5.6.4 Case Study 2 - Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities under the Law

An awareness of recent legislation including the *Education Act, 1998*, the *Education (Welfare Act) 2000* and the *Equal Status Act 2000* has influenced the decision of the Board of Management to revise the Code of Discipline and the enrolment policy of the school. Parents were also involved in drawing up the mission and ethos statement of the school. Some information has been circulated to parents regarding compliance with school attendance legislation, however, a statement of strategy in relation to school attendance has not been drawn up. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are consulted on an individual basis and have not been involved in drawing up school policy.

With respect to legislation, the parents were aware that they have a right to have a Parents' Association and that the Board is obliged to facilitate and support the setting up of a Parents' Association.

The school mission statement and ethos, enrolment, anti-bullying, reporting child abuse, Code of Discipline and school attendance were named by the teachers interviewed as policies that are required to be drawn up by the school community.

Consultation with parents of pupils with special educational needs is done on an individual basis and parents have not been involved in drawing up such policies. One teacher observed that the traditional approachable nature of the national school is being eroded as schools become more 'formal and codified'. The comment was made that teachers often oblige parents by discussing issues with them informally at the door of the classroom. However, even the annual parent/teacher meeting is possibly becoming more rigid as a result of pay negotiations and a concern was expressed that some teachers may not be as accommodating of parents in the future.

I want to come in and say this, that parent/ teacher meetings are very well attended. There are only a handful of parents in the whole school that don't actually come to the meetings. Now they might not come at the designated time but we have always accommodated them to come, every parent. I won't accommodate them any more...I'll tell them it's the minister's fault...'

(Case Study 2, Teacher)

5.6.5 Case Study 2 – Experience of Training and Support

Some members of the Board of Management have attended information talks and courses. The parents' representatives have had training from the National Parents' Council in relation to their role as Board members and as the link between the Board and the Parents' Association. This group of parents feel that they are stronger as an association because they have had training from the National Parents' Council. This training provided them with guidelines in relation to their roles and responsibilities and about setting appropriate boundaries for meetings. They also remarked on the value of Parents' Associations from different schools meeting to share experiences and ideas – an opportunity to learn from one another.

With respect to their experience of curriculum planning the general feeling among the teachers was that they have been exposed to too much too quickly. 'I think that maybe people are trying to be too productive in too short a time'. They perceived that the

facilitators of the national programmes, Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary, have focused solely on teachers and have not explicitly mentioned involving parents in school development planning.

5.6.6 Case Study 2 – Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning

This thesis recognises that it is generally parents, who have been involved with the school over a period and who have committed themselves to engagement with a number of initiatives within the school, become involved in school development planning. In seeking a response to why involve parents in school development planning it was decided for the purposes of the focus group to ask the broader question ‘why did you become involved?’, of the parent representatives and Board of Management members and ‘should parents be involved in the school?’, of teachers. A range of reasons for involvement were discussed including:

- I’m over here all the time, just showing an interest in their education.’ ‘If you show an interest, they’ll show an interest as well
(Case Study 2, Board of Management)
- Being new to the area, I found the school very welcoming. I decided to join the Parents’ Association as I think that’s a good way to get to know people and get to know the school.’ ‘It makes you feel better, knowing who people are...
(Case Study 2, Parent)
- I joined basically because I wanted to know what was going on in the school and I felt the best way would be by getting to know the teachers, the other parents and see what they’re saying.
(Case Study 2, Board of Management)
- The reason that I joined the Parents’ Association in the first place was because my autistic child couldn’t tell me what school was about, so I thought the only way I’m going to find out about this school is by joining the Parents’ Association. But, before I would never have dreamed of joining the Parents’ Association because I thought they can’t need me, I might have to be too educated for it or something so I stayed clear of it.
(Case Study 2, Parent)
- The more comfortable you become, I think it seeps out in a way to your children. They see school as a good place to be, a place where you will be listened to, where your opinions are valued. If they hear you speaking very positively about the meeting this morning and we really got through a lot and we did A,B,C and D, if they hear you talking like that, school is a whole different ball game.
(Case Study 2, Parent)

- ..coming out to the Parents' Association, training to be Chairperson, you're kind of motivating yourself. You're getting away from sweeping the floor and feeding babies. You're learning.

(Case Study 2, Parent)

A lively debate took place among the teacher group in relation to why parents should be involved in the school. 'We want them to be helpful on our terms' was a comment made by one participant. Another spoke about the barrier that was there in the eighties when parental involvement in schools was first promoted and suggested that that barrier remains.

We want them so far. We don't want them in our classrooms, telling us what to do or getting too close, being too well up, telling us we didn't do Irish today. There is that fear...

(Case Study 2, Teacher)

The prospect of parents 'dictating' the curriculum to the professionals, who are at the coal-face providing it, and whether the 'user should be the person who is dictating or whether it's the service-provider...', was discussed. Difficulties in striking a balance in a situation where a parent becomes involved in the school because they have a particular agenda to pursue, were also highlighted.

5.6.7 Case Study 2 - Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development Planning

As with the previous school different processes appear to be used when developing organisational rather than curricular policies. Generally the teachers complete the initial draft. A range of ways are used to engage parents in organisational policies including involving them in working groups, involving them on school-based planning days, distributing questionnaires to the wider parent body and consultation with the parents on the Board of Management and the representatives of the Parents' Association. All groups suggested that involvement in working groups led to greater listening, understanding and commitment to the policies drawn up in this manner. In relation to curriculum policies, Relationships and Sexuality Education is the only

policy area that parents have worked on with teachers to date. It was suggested that involving parents in curriculum policies may be explored during the coming year.

5.6.8 Case Study 2 - Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas

A process of consultation occurs in this school in respect of a number of organisational areas and policies relating to special programmes. There is more openness to parental involvement in developing the Code of Discipline, anti-bullying, homework, enrolment and health and safety policies. Parents and teachers also worked together on the school mission and ethos statement. Parents were centrally involved with the teachers in the development of the Relationships and Sexuality Policy. While some information has been circulated to parents regarding school attendance, no formal policy has been drawn up. Also parents of pupils with special educational needs are consulted individually with regard to appropriate educational provision for their children, however they have not been consulted in relation to school policy for pupils with special educational needs. Both parents and teachers are unsure regarding the appropriateness of involving parents in formal curriculum planning. This is an issue which requires further discussion and clarification among the education partners, as the *Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.64)* states that ‘schools are encouraged to involve parents, teachers, the Board of Management and the wider school community in the planning process’. In this context it is referring specifically to partnership in the development of curriculum policy.

5.6.9 Case Study 2 - Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association

Changes in the development of a more democratic management structure in national schools were noted at the focus group meeting of the representatives of the Board of

Management of this school. The change from a single manager to shared management and the setting up of the Parents' Association were significant changes welcomed by experienced members of the Board. The need to cultivate and encourage parental involvement in the school, to build up the confidence of parents to take up their role was acknowledged. Difficulties in getting people to serve on the Board were discussed. 'Mind you, people don't fall over one another to take up this position because the actual business of management can be quite intense at times...' A parent representative on the Board spoke about the need for parents to think about their role in the education of their children in conjunction with the school.

I think it is a process for parents as well to realise that you are not sending your child out in the morning to be baby-sat from nine o' clock in the morning until three o' clock in the day...I think parents probably have to think about it as well and not just say that my child's education is the principal's education.'

(Case Study 2, Board of Management)

The importance of the role of the principal in supporting parents to move from 'low-level involvement' to more active involvement in the school was acknowledged by Board members. Each year the Board of Management organise a social occasion to which the teaching staff, ancillary staff and active members of the Parents' Association are invited. This is regarded as an important occasion by teachers, parents and Board members. The Board of Management do not meet with the Parents' Association formally but it is felt that regular communication is maintained, as two of the Board members, a father and a mother, are also members of the Parents' Association.

The Parents' Association of the school meet monthly and more regularly when there is some activity to be organised. The principal is invited to attend for a period towards the end of all meetings so that issues can be clarified and arrangements made. The principal is regarded as the link person with the teachers and so the Parents'

Association do not meet formally with the whole group of teachers. Parents and teachers meet at social and fundraising events and also when working on policy issues together. The Parents' Association regard their representatives on the Board of Management as an effective link with the Board.

5.6.10 Case Study 2 - Relationships – Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors to Partnership in School Development Planning

Both the representatives of the Parents' Association and the members of the Board of Management named the leadership role of the principal as the most crucial factor in facilitating parental involvement in the school.

I can't say enough about the principal here over the years, how easy he makes it for parents to come into the school and makes them welcome.

(Case Study 2, Board of Management)

The issue of the principal taking time to listen was highlighted, as was the importance of the principal setting the tone for relationships with the wider school community.

I knew from day one I could go in, knock on his door and if he had the time, sit down, close the door, have a chat, that's it finished with, gone. That's very important. If it's not right at the top, it's not going to work the whole way through...

(Case Study 2, Parent)

The influence of the principal on school climate was reiterated by another participant in the session

I think he encourages the teachers to listen to parents as well. It is difficult for some teachers, for any adult, we have different ways of dealing with things. But he does encourage the teachers to listen to you and to take note of what you are saying.

(Case Study 2, Parent)

The principal also appears to be able to instil confidence in the parents in relation to their own ability to engage with the school.

I think a lot of principals don't have confidence in the parents, whereas I think he has confidence in the parents, that they're able to do things for themselves. The times are gone when you were able to say to parents that you didn't feel they were able to do things but now they are. They are quite articulate and aware of their own abilities.

(Case Study 2, Parent)

The encouragement of parental involvement in policy development in the school was

also acknowledged 'He also involves parents in policy making which is very important and it doesn't happen a lot in schools yet' (*Case Study 2, Board of Management*).

Other factors named which facilitate parental involvement in the school include the openness of teachers, the atmosphere in the school and the attitude of people. The welcoming manner in which the Parents' Association encourages new parents to join was also mentioned. Teachers spoke of the importance of working with parents rather than approaching issues in a confrontational manner with a view to fostering positive relationships.

Parents named having a bad experience of school themselves as a factor which could prevent parents from becoming involved with the school. Some parents might perceive the teacher as coming from a different social class and this may result in a lack of confidence relating to teachers.

I think a lack of self-esteem in parents as well. They feel as if, well, I don't know enough and I don't want to make a fool of myself. They really are afraid to talk to anyone in case they don't come across right. (Case Study 2, Parent)

Yet again the ability of the principal to build bonds of trust with parents was named. 'There's a lot of places where parents are dismissed, and they're not listened to enough'.

In discussing factors which inhibit parental involvement in the school, teachers spoke about parents who left school early themselves having difficulties and lacking confidence in dealing with teachers.

A lot of them care desperately about what happens to their children but they left school themselves at primary level and there's a definite barrier...once it comes to the academic, once you talk about school policy or academic, I think there's a barrier. (Case Study 2, Teacher)

The teachers also spoke about a small minority of parents who don't communicate

with the school and aren't supportive of efforts made to engage with them.

I don't know if that's the fault of the school or the environment or a combination of both.
But we would like them to come through on the promises they make...

(Case Study 2, Teacher)

In referring to 'promises' made by parents, this teacher was alluding to a lack of follow-up by some parents in relation to behaviour, support with homework or ensuring regular school attendance.

5.6.11 Case Study 2 – Concluding Comments

There had been a long tradition of involvement of parents in this school. The same principal has been at the helm of the school for thirty-two years. His mantra as he says himself has been

the teachers are very well organised – they have a very good union. The management side of it have an organisation and parents ought not to be left out. They have their association and ought to belong to it and participate in whatever is going on in the Parents' Association either coming from the national body, the National Parents' Council or something that arises locally.

(Case Study 2, Board of Management)

It is evident that all the partners, Board of Management, parents and teachers regard the leadership role of the principal as crucial in fostering a climate of trust and mutual respect between parents and teachers. This school has progressed the involvement of parents to a stage where the strategies for developing home/school links include:

- providing opportunities for parents' own education and development
- encouraging parents to be involved in their children's learning at home and in school
- communication of information to parents
- dialogue with parents
- using parental skills as a resource in the school and
- enlisting parents' views in decision / policy making.

Issues which still require reflection and discussion include:

- the involvement of parents in establishing priorities for development in consultation with teachers
- the role of parents in the development of formal curriculum policy development,
- the engagement of parents who remain elusive

- the extent to which the views of all groups within the school community are incorporated in the review and evaluation processes and the continuing need to develop new strategies to encourage and build the confidence of new parents so that development of a partnership approach to school development planning can be progressed.

Opportunities must be provided also for the education partners to explore attitudes and values to progress partnership beyond ‘we want them to be helpful on our terms’ (*Case Study 2, Teacher*) to a deeper, more transparent and accountable relationship between parents and teachers in the future.

5.7 Case Study 3: Focus Group Data

5.7.1 Case Study 3 - Introduction

Chapter Two, Parents in Education gave details of various parental partnership initiatives including Widlake (1986), Comer (1996) and Conaty, (1999), created to raise standards of educational achievement among children from low-income families. As described previously in this chapter Section 5.2.4 an independent researcher was asked to run a number of different analyses to assist in locating a suitable case study based on the criteria outlined. Case Study 3 is a large coeducational national school, with three hundred and ninety three pupils and twenty-three teachers. The school is situated in a local authority housing development and has a high concentration of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with low levels of achievement. It benefits from a number of Department of Education and Science funded initiatives to support the educationally and socially disadvantaged. The parents who attended the focus group interview are all parents who are actively involved in the school. This school does not have an elected Parents’ Association.

A similar table to Tables 5.2 and 5.3 which were created to provide an overview of the data obtained from the partners at interview in Case Studies 1 and 2 is provided below for Case Study 3.

Table 5.4: Overview of Case Study 3

	Board of Management	Parents Interviewed	Teachers Interviewed
Engagement with the school	Single manager for some years prior to 2002, Practical, visible improvements to the school	No Parents' Association, back-to-work and community initiatives, HSCL activities	Parental involvement easier at infant level and with parents of pupils with special needs
Engagement with SDP	Very recent, since 2002	Recent through HSCL and community initiatives	Since <i>Education Act, 1998</i>
Awareness of implications of the law	Some awareness of policies required, limited awareness of consultative process	School attendance	Limited awareness with respect to health and safety issues
Training and support	No training	Community and HSCL initiatives	Emphasis on teachers planning to date
Purpose of involving parents	Encourage enthusiasm and a positive attitude to education within the community	Gives a positive message to children	Ensure continuity between home and school/ must be 'a line parents cannot cross'
Process of School Development Planning	Ratify policies presented to the BOM	Some consultation on aspects of organisational and health education policies	Curriculum policy teachers only, working groups for named policies
Specific policy areas developed	Substance use policy, healthy eating, Code of Discipline	Substance use policy, healthy eating, Code of Discipline	Substance use policy, healthy eating, Code of Discipline
Structures – BOM, PA	No formal meetings between the BOM and PA or teachers	No elected PA, HSCL parental involvement	Teachers meet BOM at annual social function, principal, teacher rep. link with BOM
Relationships – facilitating factors	Attitude of the principal, role of HSCL coordinator, openness of teachers	Attitude of the principal, role of HSCL coordinator, new energy	Teachers awareness of need for regular dialogue with parents / attitude of parents them
Relationships – inhibiting factors	Climate which excludes parents	News which is always negative	Teachers who are defensive

5.7.2 Case Study 3 - Engagement with the School

The Board of Management representatives at the focus group interview stressed the importance of the Board being involved in practical, visible improvements to the

school. The new school extension is seen as a huge achievement, finally providing the school with a modern, bright area which includes a more welcoming foyer area and additional office and classroom space. This school did not have a Board of Management for some time and was managed by the parish priest. The reason put forward for this situation was the difficulty in getting parents to serve on a Board at the time. Both the chairperson and the principal were appointed during 2002 and they have tried to harness the sense of 'newness in the air' with efforts being made at all levels in the school to 'let's look at things' and to try develop a plan for the future. This has involved the setting up of a committee of Board of Management members, parents and teachers to renovate the school hall. Parents supported the teachers who worked with the pupils to produce a show which was a great success. The school hall has now become a focal point in the area and is used in the evenings by various community groups. A group of parents, teachers and community representatives from a number of schools in the area have just completed a substance use policy for the schools. This involved significant discussion among the partners at a number of meetings and culminated in a celebration to 'reclaim the park' from drug addicts and drinkers one afternoon. The event was attended by parents, teachers and pupils. The primary purpose of engagement from the perspective expressed at the interview with the members of the Board of Management is to engender enthusiasm and a positive attitude to education within the community.

I was the parents' representative on the last Board of Management. I was elected and I found being on the Board of Management, that there was a lot achieved in the short time that we were there. Just the interaction with the parents and the children in the school, just fantastic, you know.

(Case Study 3, Board of Management)

This parent commented on a recent night for pupils, parents, teachers and Board of Management members. They were invited by the Lord Mayor of Dublin to a reception at the Mansion House.

Well there was a fantastic night there recently in the Mansion House...for a long time we were just a school, that was the community, the priests houses were over there, nothing actually worked together. I do think it's working....

(Case Study 2, Board of Management)

Ten mothers attended the focus group for parents and described the range of activities they are involved with. Some of the mothers are employed through disadvantaged and back-to-work initiatives, training and community schemes. More of the mothers interviewed are involved in home/school/community liaison activities and others give of their time regularly on a voluntary basis to work with individual teachers in their classrooms. The activities and initiatives described include:

- supporting the class teachers by helping with arts and crafts in the classroom
- preparing and distributing breakfasts and lunches to the children
- school attendance monitor
- reading with the infant classes
- supporting her own child with special needs in the classroom
- working with the home/school/community liaison coordinator as a home visitor, attending classes and courses and contributing to policy development and
- fundraising for the school hall

The teachers acknowledged, as has been commented on previously, that parental involvement is more active at infant level when parents are more accessible to teachers as they leave their children to school each morning. Parental support at this level is very welcome and parents become involved in structured play in the mornings and in helping with pre-reading and reading activities. The importance of building a relationship with parents of young pupils and helping them grow in confidence was highlighted.

I think that's important as well as it gives the parents confidence because a lot of them wouldn't have the wherewithal to help out, whereas when they get into it, it is sort of step by step and I think it's something you start with the infants and build up through the classes, that you start where they are able to start and where they feel they can build their confidence, you know.

(Case Study 3, Teacher)

Homework, incidental meetings, sacramental preparation and formal parent/teacher meetings were named as ways of engaging with parents of pupils in the senior classes.

The development of a relationship with parents of pupils with special educational needs was also discussed.

They like the one-to-one and they like to know that you are looking after their child, especially if their child has been struggling for the first two or three years....

(Case Study 3, Teacher)

The teachers perceive that the level of engagement of parents with the school has increased significantly in recent years. It was observed that parents 'are not as nervous around us, they used to be very intimidated, they couldn't make eye contact for a while, but they are grand now'. The involvement of parents in making costumes and in putting on the show in the hall, and their enthusiasm and support for the school football teams have helped create an environment where relationships between parents and teachers are more relaxed and informal.

5.7.3 Case Study 3 - Engagement with School Development Planning

The role of the Board of Management in making school policy accessible to parents was discussed. The possibility or likelihood that school policies distributed to families would not be read was felt to be an issue.

Would we print five hundred of them, not to be read, though, you know? You've got to ask yourself that. It should be available though, parents should be able to have access...

(Case Study 3, Board of Management)

The Code of Discipline, attendance, Relationships and Sexuality Education, procedures relating to child abuse, homework, healthy eating and the substance

use policy have been discussed at Board of Management meetings. The school has a special needs policy ‘but I hadn’t thought of bringing that to the Board’ (*Case Study 3, Board of Management*). The importance of informing new parents to the school of aspects of school policy has been recognised and a booklet is being prepared to include school times, food policy, homework, uniforms, attendance and other useful information. Due to the expense this booklet will be available in the school to those who want a copy, however it is not considered a viable option to send it to all families. The Board of Management is aware of its role in ratifying the policies drawn up by teachers and others. ‘Well we’re into the area of policies, I suppose, and the Board will have to check out the policies drawn up by the teachers in the school...’. The wider parent body is not consulted generally in relation to policy development.

We don’t involve all parents because so many of them are working but the parents who are available, we would ask eight or ten of them, the liaison teacher (*home/school/ community liaison coordinator*) would do that most of the time, they would come in...’
(Case Study 3, Board of Management)

Some of the parents interviewed had been involved in the working group to develop a substance use policy. Another initiative involving parents and teachers related to raising awareness among parents of issues relating to children with disabilities. The parents presumed that the Board of Management and the teachers drafted the school rules. They were unsure in relation to who was involved in drafting the Code of Discipline and unclear with regard to whether a Relationships and Sexuality Education policy had been developed.

The teachers interviewed also focused on the school substance use policy indicating that it ‘is probably the most inclusive policy that we have done’. It was considered that the process involving parents, teachers, community personnel and feedback from students was particularly important, as this is a topic that really ‘hits a community’.

The only other areas of policy named by the teachers, which involved consultation with parents, were the Code of Discipline and the healthy eating policy. In relation to curriculum parents are not consulted regarding aspects of formal curriculum policy development. Parents are however, informed of ways they can support their children's learning particularly as stated previously at infant level and in relation to children with special educational needs.

5.7.4 Case Study 3 - Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities under the Law

The Board of Management highlighted issues relating to procedures for dealing with suspected child abuse, suspensions in the context of the Code of Discipline, teachers and administration of medicines in school and the enrolment policy as aspects of the legal environment that impinge on their role. The observation was made that the power of the Board can be limited by the make-up of the Board, when it meets and their ability to carry out policies.

Certainly the principal would be the key person and the teachers in the school. Essentially the work of the school happens between nine and three and that is where school life is experienced and carried out. The Board needs support from the principal in the work of the school and the parents in educating their children'.

(Case Study 3, Board of Management)

The Department of Education and Science funds an initiative whereby some schools serving designated areas of disadvantage have prioritised developing strategies to improve school attendance. This school uses some of that funding to employ a school attendance monitor. The only aspect of the legal environment raised at the focus group of parents was school attendance. The teachers spoke about the obligation to consult with parents if a child is being recommended for assessment by a psychologist, procedures for administering medicines, Relationships and Sexuality Education and the *loco parentis* role of teachers when children are on school tours and involved in extra-curricular activities

and sport.

5.7.5 Case Study 3 – Experience of Training and Support

The Board of Management members of this school have not attended any training course. ‘Like other meetings, nobody goes to them...’ The parents interviewed have attended parenting and parents in education courses organised by local community initiatives and the home/school/community liaison coordinator. They were unable to name the parent representatives on the Board of Management and they no longer have an elected Parents’ Association. They linked the Parents’ Association with having a Parents’ Room in the past but that is where the Breakfast club is now. One member of the Board commented that, at the moment the important objective is to ensure that ‘parents believe they have access’ and the hope is that

I would actually love to see, when the next Board is advertised here in the school, that we would have a hall full of parents and keep involving parents so much that they really want a say, you know. (Case Study 3, Board of Management)

The mix of experienced and new teachers is seen as a bonus in the teaching staff working together on school development planning. The familiarity of the young teachers with the curriculum is complemented by the experience of more senior staff. Overall school development planning and the training and support provided is seen as positive ‘in giving direction’ to the endeavour. The perception of the teachers interviewed however is, that the primary focus of the national support facilitators to date, has been teachers working and planning together, with no emphasis on partnership with parents and the wider community.

5.7.6 Case Study 3 – Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning

The importance of taking an interest in their child’s school and education and the

positive message that this gives to children was the reason most parents gave at interview for giving their time and energy to the school. Parents also felt it was helpful when teachers allowed them into the classroom and gave them strategies so that they can support their children at home. The importance of breaking down barriers by parents and teachers getting to know one another was stressed.

When you used to be standing in front of teachers, you know...you don't have to put on a show any more...
(Case Study 3, Parent)

The teachers all agree that parents should be involved in the school. The way parents approach the teacher is considered important. 'If they are coming in trying to say, look, you should be doing this or that ...but when they come in not trying to tell you how to do your job, they are just enquiring about their own children...'. It is important for parents to know to go to the teacher, to the home/school/community liaison coordinator or the principal, if they have a query or a problem. Procedures need to be in place for dealing with complaints. Again the teachers reiterated 'there needs to be a line that they can't cross...'. The importance of involving parents in aspects of policy was recognised by the teachers. The example outlined related to the Code of Discipline where it was recognised that often parents experience the same discipline problems at home as are experienced in school. It was recognised that a consistent approach from both parents and teachers was more likely to work.

5.7.7 Case Study 3 - Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Involving Parents in School Development Planning

This school community started the process of school development planning after the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. Curriculum policies have been developed solely by teachers to date. Parents and Board of Management members have not been invited to participate on school-based planning days. The parents' perspective has

been sought with respect to certain policies including the school substance use policy, Code of Discipline and healthy eating policy. A single manager was responsible for managing the school for a number of years until 2002. The recently appointed Board of Management is in the process of reviewing the policies drawn up by the teachers and by the working groups of parents and teachers.

5.7.8 Case Study 3 - Consultation with Parents with Respect to Specific Policy Areas

Chapter Two, Section 2.3 of this thesis details specific Department of Education and Science publications which refer to parents and policy. Guidelines were published in May 2002 to assist schools in the development of substance use policies.

A partnership approach based on the 'whole school' model is recommended for the development of the policy. The policy applies to the entire school community, including teachers, students, parents/guardians and the users of the school building. It is strongly recommended that schools within the same community should collaborate on policy development.

(Department of Education and Science, 2002, p.2)

A working group of parents, teachers and community personnel representing this school developed a school substance use policy in the manner described in the guidelines. All groups stated that the process was inclusive and effective in providing opportunities for the partners to listen, to share ideas and to learn from each other. It was indicated at interview also that a group of parents who participated in activities organised by the home/ school/ community liaison coordinator also reviewed the Code of Discipline and the healthy eating policy. Although a variety of strategies are used to encourage parental involvement in the school, teachers, parents and Board of Management members made no mention of a formal home/school links policy.

5.7.9 Case Study 3 - Structures – Board of Management, Parents' Association

The Board of Management of the school do not meet teachers or parents formally on any occasion during the school year. The teachers and Board members attend a

reception at the end of the school year. The teacher representative on the Board has responsibility for bringing issues of concern of the teachers to the attention of the Board. One teacher is unsure whether the Board of Management has much relevance for teachers, 'But it doesn't feature largely in the scheme of things. I think the attitude now that there is a Board up and running and actually doing things...but I don't think it is integrated in our thinking for the day'. For the principal, consultation with the Chairperson and with the Board regarding decisions provides security and support. The different levels of commitment and experience of members of the Board was raised.

Parents are involved in many activities and initiatives as indicated previously in Section 5.2.4, of this chapter. Members of the Board of Management are conscious of the fact that some parents may have been early school leavers. They may not have had a very positive experience of education themselves. This situation needs to be handled sensitively. The focus at the moment is primarily to make parents feel welcome in the school and to let parents know 'they have access'. Currently there is no Parents' Association. Parents are recruited for policy groups and planning activities by the home/school/community liaison coordinator. Some of the parents interviewed indicated that they used to meet on a Tuesday night when the school had a Parents' Room. The Chairperson of the Board of Management stated that maybe in the future a Parents' Association could be set up

When I came here first we asked about that. We mentioned it again. Now obviously you could manufacture one, you could make one, you could bring enough parents together, but really it would have to happen from the ground up.

(Case Study 3, Board of Management)

Difficulties in relation to communication among parents remain. One parent who attended the focus group interview stated 'I'm sorry, can I just say that because I've

never done any of this, I never knew. I knew there was a breakfast club and I heard about that but I didn't know they had courses on drugs'. Another parent added 'I've been a long time at the school and it's only this year I found out how much goes on in the school. I didn't realise that so much went on behind the classroom'. Broadening the consultative process to include the wider parent body is a challenge for the future.

5.7.10 Case Study 3 - Relationships – Partnership in School Development Planning: Facilitating and Inhibiting Factors

The members of the Board of Management and the representatives of active parents in the school were asked to discuss what makes it easy to be involved in the school. Both groups highlighted the same facilitating factors. The first significant factor named is the attitude of the principal.

There is a difference in the parents and children towards the place. As was said earlier, years ago the parents would probably be afraid to come into the school, unless their children were in trouble. But now parents can come in. The principal has said to everybody, the door is always open. I think parents have a different approach now towards coming in and discussing things with the principal. It's great to see it you know.
(Case Study 3, Board of Management)

The role of the home/school/community liaison coordinator in listening to the needs of parents, in supporting them in their role as the primary educators of their children and in encouraging initiatives and programmes within the school, is regarded as an important facilitating factor. The attitude of teachers, and in particular the new teachers, in taking the time to listen to parents and in encouraging more parents to engage with the school is also acknowledged. Another parent commented on the sensitivity of experienced teachers who know the families for years. Teachers perceived that the attitude of parents to the school is changing also.

I was wondering, when there is a problem, are parents less aggressive than they used to be? I remember being attacked in my early years. I wonder if parents want more to discuss problems with you. I haven't been attacked, touch wood, in years. What happened there, what was all that about?
(Case Study 3, Teacher)

All the above factors have generated a 'new energy' which is evident to the school community in the new extension, the renovated school hall and the policies being circulated to parents.

I found in the past couple of years, you would hear the parents talking great things about the school. The school has moved on in the past few years. There is a lot more energy in the place, there are new teachers, young blood, new principal, things are being done, and all the new policies coming out..

(Case Study 3, Board of Management)

Teachers indicated at interview their awareness of their role in facilitating dialogue with parents particularly parents who may have been early school leavers. 'I think the more open you are with them, the more open they are with you'.

They appreciate that we are all the same. I think the partnership thing has maybe started to kick in, that we are all trying to work towards the same thing, their kids are the ones in the school and we all want things sorted.

(Case Study 3, Teachers)

They spoke about the need for regular contact and for that contact to take a variety of forms and about the importance of sending home good news rather than only contacting parents when their child is in trouble. Again the teachers referred to the importance of the home/school/community liaison coordinator building up relationships with parents and empowering them to develop the strategies to work effectively with the school for the benefit of their children.

Factors which make it difficult to be involved in the school discussed, include a school climate which excludes parents. 'If a place is unapproachable, I think people will just not bother.' Again the leadership role of the principal was highlighted in this regard. When consultation with parents focuses primarily on the negative it becomes hard for parents to continue to come to meetings. Some teachers also become defensive and do not listen to the perspective of the parent which causes problems.

5.7.11 Case Study 3 – Concluding Comments

This school did not have a Board of Management for a number of years prior to 2002. The current Board highlighted at interview a number of significant achievements including the school extension, the renovations to the school hall and its focus on school planning. Practical, visible improvements to the school and the encouragement of members of the wider school community to support school activities and use school facilities were considered important aims, given that the school had no Board of Management for a number of years. The priorities in relation to consultation with parents with regard to policy formation in this school, which serves a designated area of disadvantage, are slightly different to the previous two schools. Recently the Board of Management has reviewed procedures in relation to child abuse and the administration of medicines. Parents and community personnel have been working together on a school substance use policy and a healthy eating policy. As with the other case study sites homework, the Code of Discipline, enrolment and Relationships and Sexuality Education policies have been drawn up and some have been presented to the Board for ratification. Teachers devise plans relating to the formal curriculum. Parents are involved in a significant number of initiatives and programmes, however there is no Parents' Association and difficulties arise in ensuring that all parents are aware of activities within the school. The differing levels of commitment, knowledge and experience of Board of Management members was raised as an issue of concern, in the context of the extent to which the Board of Management functions in accordance with the requirements of the *Education Act, 1998* and Department of Education and Science policies, rules and directives.

5.8 The Three Case Studies - Observations and Implications

5.8.1 Introduction

The three case study schools were placed on a continuum of parental involvement as described in this chapter Section 5.2.1. Case Study 1 is a school identified, based on the response of the principal to the questionnaire, as having limited experience of parental involvement in the development of the school plan. Case Study 2 was purposively selected as a school with experience of parents and teachers working together on aspects of the school plan and Case Study 3 represents a school serving a designated area of disadvantage. This Section 5.8 will compare and contrast the responses of the partners from the three schools, as provided through the focus group interviews and outline observations and findings with respect to the research question which seeks to establish,

whether the aspiration of partnership as espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is being realised through the process by which parents are currently consulted in the context of school development planning.

This research, has through the focus group interviews, sought information from the partners in relation to their

- engagement with the school
- involvement in school development planning
- awareness of the implications of the education legislation on the school development planning process
- attendance at relevant training and in-service
- membership of the Board of Management, Parents' Association
- understanding of factors which facilitate and inhibit parental involvement in the school

with a view to developing a deeper understanding of the research question and

hypotheses.

5.8.2 Board of Management Members Interviewed

The three case study schools have properly constituted, elected Boards of Management. At interview Board of Management members of Case Study 3, which serves a designated area of disadvantage explained that their school had a single manager for a some years prior to 2002, however, a change of principal and parish priest were seen as the impetus that facilitated the setting up of a new Board of Management. Difficulty in bringing a cohort of parents together to elect representatives to serve on the Board was, in part, the reason outlined for not having a Board. This research confirms previous research, which highlights the high proportion of schools serving designated areas of disadvantage which do not have a Parents' Association affiliated to the National Parents' Council

The highest level of representation is in Dublin South with seventy-eight schools affiliated out of a total of one hundred and nine schools in the area. This can be contrasted with Dublin central which has a total of one hundred and eighteen primary schools and yet none are affiliated to the National Parents' Council.

(Cluskey, 1996, p.58))

Case Study 3 does not currently have a Parents' Association. It had a Parents' Association in the past, but when the school was given grant-aid to provide breakfasts for the pupils, the parents' room was needed, resulting in less parents around the school and the abandonment of the Parents' Association. Ensuring that parents have a voice in school management and planning is particularly important when there are cultural differences between the education system and the family.

Relationships between the Board of Management and Parents' Association varied between the case study schools. Board of Management members interviewed from Case Study 1 expressed concern over a perceived divide and lack of communication

between the Board and the Parents' Association. Case Study 2 Board members, on the other hand, spoke about the role of the two parent representatives on the Board in ensuring regular communication between the Board and the Parents' Association. The regularity or irregularity of Board of Management meetings may be a contributing factor. The Boards of Management of the three schools meet however, meetings are held regularly, every month by the management of Case Study 2. The Board members of the other two schools meet once each term and more often when a meeting is called by the chairperson. The implications of the above are that there remains a degree of formality between Board members who meet less often and the extent of the Board's decision-making in areas such as policy and planning is more restricted. Meaningful communication with the wider body of parents on aspects of the school's operation is also limited.

Board members in each of the schools listed school accommodation, maintenance of the school building and finance among achievements of the Boards of Management. Being seen to be involved with practical projects that are visible to the school community was seen as important, especially to the parent representative of the newly formed Board of Case Study 3. Case Study 2 Board members gave examples of their role in decision-making and highlighted a range of responsibilities, including responsibility for the development and ratification of aspects of the school plan. They named policies that were being amended due to changes in education legislation, including the Code of Discipline and enrolment policy. The Board of Management of this school first became involved in school policy development in 1995, when all the education partners worked together to develop a Relationships and Sexuality Education policy. The process used at that time was that outlined in the *Report of the*

Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and Sexuality Education 1995, involved Board of Management members, parent representatives and teachers drawing up a draft policy together, which was then presented to the education partners for amendment and ratification. Engagement with the development of the school plan has been a very recent experience for Board members in the other two schools. In fact, except for the Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy, it should be noted that Board members of Case Study 1 have had experience of amending and ratifying school policy only since the completion of the questionnaire for this research by the principal. This may have heightened awareness of the role of parents in the development of the school plan.

In identifying factors which create a climate in a school which support parental involvement in school planning the Board members of Case Study 2 and Case Study 3 were emphatic in naming the leadership role of the principal as the most significant facilitating factor. In this research, the observations of the partners with respect to the importance of the leadership role of the principal in creating a school climate which fosters engagement with the school community reflects previous research relating to school effectiveness, Rutter et al. (1979), Mortimore et al. (1988), Levine and Lezotte, (1990), school improvement Reynolds et al. (1993), Hopkins et al. (1994) and school development planning MacGilchrist et al. (1995), Stoll and Fink (1996). Board members in Case Study 1 commented on the size of the school, the atmosphere in the school and the attitude of teachers as facilitating factors. This is a small school with just three teachers, including the principal. When a school is small, however, its size can also inhibit communication. Board members were conscious of not disturbing the principal, who in addition to administrative duties also has responsibility for a class. Differences in communication patterns appear to exist between small and larger

schools. A significant factor may be whether the principal is an administrative or a teaching principal.

Board members of two of the three case study school Board members, Case Study 1 and 3, have not participated in any training for their role. This means that the parent and community representatives are at a disadvantage in relation to their understanding of the role and functions of the Board and their knowledge of the *Education Act, 1998* and Department of Education and Science policies, rules and directives. A Board member of Case Study 1 felt that the lack of continuity from one Board to the next militated against the effectiveness of the Board. Again, it is the parent and community representatives who are more likely to change, leaving these groupings less knowledgeable of procedures and more reticent possibly to contribute to discussion and take on responsibility. It is interesting to note that the *Management Board Members' Handbook* published in 2000 indicates that the term of office of a Board is for a period of three years, while the revised edition published in 2004 states that 'the term of office of the Board shall be four years' p. 32. Case Study 2 has an experienced Board, some of whom have served on a Board previously with a smaller number of new members. The Board members of this school stated that they have attended courses and information sessions on aspects of their role and that this has facilitated their engagement with a wider range of activities and functions as a Board of Management.

5.8.3 Parent Representatives Interviewed

All of the parents interviewed are active supporters of the case study schools. Two of the schools, Case Study 1 and 2 have elected Parents' Associations, one of which is affiliated to the National Parents' Council. Case Study 3 serves a designated area of

disadvantage and the parents interviewed have become involved in activities through community initiatives, home/school/community liaison activities and on request from teachers. The level of parental involvement in the schools as described by those interviewed differed. Engagement ranges from fund-raising and helping out when asked by teachers, to a deeper engagement when parents' views in decision and policy making are sought. Case Study 2, Parents' Association members interviewed, whose association is affiliated to the National Parents' Council, and attend meetings and in-service provided, appear to be better informed and more confident in their role. They are aware of their right to establish a Parents' Association and to engage with teachers in the development of school policies. They are however, unsure of their role in the development of policy in curricular areas and expressed concern that this might be encroaching on the professional domain of the teachers. The level of engagement of this group of parents with the researcher, with respect to the school plan, was at a deeper level than with the other two groups. The parents spoke of their experience in drawing up the Code of Discipline in consultation with teachers. They explained that the language used by teachers in the draft Code of Discipline had to be modified to make it accessible to the wider parent body. This implies that parents and teachers working together on school policy development can ensure that policy is written in a format that a greater number of parents can access.

Case Study 1 parents interviewed expressed a desire for a variety of opportunities for parents and teachers to dialogue with one another. The parents highlighted the size of the school, with just three teachers, the atmosphere in the school and the attitude of teachers, as factors which facilitate parental involvement in the school. Yet, an appropriate time to discuss concerns with teachers, communication between the Parents' Association and the Board of Management and difficulties in knowing if

progress is being made on issues were discussed in explaining factors which inhibit engagement by parents with the school. These parents do not see themselves as partners with teachers in relation to the development of school policy but a draft copy of certain core policies has been presented to them for comment. This a very recent experience, however the parents expressed satisfaction in engaging in this type of activity. They are not familiar with education legislation, although one parent had heard some discussion regarding school attendance and the requirement to inform the relevant authority if a child is absent from school more than 'twenty days'. Some progress is being made in providing parents with information regarding aspects of school policy. Real progress towards partnership, with real dialogue between parents and teachers, remains elusive in the absence of relevant training and support.

5.8.4 Teachers Interviewed

The teachers interviewed agree that parents have a right in theory and in law to involvement in their children's education. The level of engagement and types of strategies to build home/school links caused some discussion. Case Study 1 teachers have had very limited experience of listening to parents. The development of the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy was the only time parents and teachers ever sat together in a working group to draft a school policy. The implications of this are that engagement with parents remains superficial, with some communication of information to parents and encouragement of parents to support their children's learning at home. This means that a formality exists, which is evident from the suggestion made by teachers that parents should make an appointment, when they want to discuss an issue. They also spoke about the lack of training and support to 'manage' relationships with parents. The teachers spoke about the need for

procedures, particularly to help them deal with parents with an agenda relating to their own particular child and for dealing with complaints. Teachers have to see the bigger picture and that can be difficult for parents to understand and accept. None of the case study schools have a home/ school links policy.

Teachers in the other two case study schools appeared more confident in their relationship with parents, although again reference was made to the need for ‘a line they (*the parents*) can’t cross’ (*Case Study 3, Teacher*). Teachers in the Case Study 2 and 3 schools have experience of a level of dialogue with parents. Parents and teachers have formed policies in working groups such as, the Code of Discipline, health and safety, anti-bullying, school attendance, substance use and healthy eating. It is evident that the principals of the two schools are committed to engaging parents with respect to aspects of school policy development and that a climate is fostered within the schools, where teachers are encouraged to communicate regularly with parents. Strategies for developing a relationship with parents vary. However, a consensus emerged from the teachers interviewed, that it is easier to engage parents of pupils in the infant and junior classes. The teachers also spoke about working with parents of pupils with special educational needs.

In Case Study 2, which was selected purposively because of the high level of engagement with parents, two issues caused some discussion among the teachers interviewed. One teacher mused that ‘we want parents to be helpful on our terms’ (*Case Study 2, Teacher*). This comment really poses the question, even in a school with significant parental involvement, is the relationship between parents and teachers a partnership at all? This teacher’s perception is that it is not an equal partnership between parents and teachers but one where parents engage with teachers in planning

at the invitation of teachers, on a topic selected by teachers, at a time and venue that suits teachers, and with the teachers bringing to the discussion significant knowledge of curriculum, teaching methodology and school procedures generally. Difficulties and concerns, with respect to involving parents in the school plan, were most evident in the discussion which occurred with respect to the development of curriculum policies. This is an area which requires further thought and debate.

5.9 Case Studies – Summary of Main Findings

5.9.1 Engagement with schools

The main finding in relation to engagement with schools is that parental involvement remains at the invitation of principal, teachers and in some instances the Board of Management. This is evident in the statement from the parent who said ‘we help out whenever we can’ (*Case Study 1, Parent*). The implication of what the parent is saying is, we help out when asked by the teachers. It can also mean we help out when allowed to be involved! Teachers facilitate home/school links in many ways.

However, as one teacher suggested ‘we want them involved on our terms’ (*Case Study 3, Teacher*). Issues remain in relation to developing procedures for salient parental involvement in schools. Providing opportunities for the partners to explore attitudes and values together should be considered. Also there is a need to provide parents with knowledge of curriculum and methodology.

5.9.2 School Development Planning – Policy Areas

Deciding on priorities with respect to school development planning remains the prerogative of teachers. It is difficult to ascertain how school planning is reviewed, however, it would appear from the responses that the need to comply with legislation has influenced the identification of aspects of policy development such as, the Code

of Discipline, health and safety and enrolment and admissions and, in some instances, planning to provide for pupils with special educational needs. The publication of Department of Education and Science guidelines on policy development have also influenced the prioritisation of certain policies for development. The Board of Management members and parent representatives interviewed have very limited understanding of school development planning in general. They were unfamiliar with the concept of a school plan which should contain, an introductory section, sections for organisational, curricular and pastoral care policies, and a development section to include action plans, a planning diary and any other policies under review. The parents interviewed certainly have not been given a copy of the school plan and have never been given an opportunity to view the school plan in its entirety.

Successful Department of Education and Science initiatives in encouraging partnership in relation to school policy development include the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy, the Code of Discipline, anti-bullying and more recently, in schools serving designated areas of disadvantage, the school substance use policy. The above indicates that there is more openness to involving parents in policies relating to social, personal and health education and some organisational policies, rather than partnership in the development of formal curriculum policies. Involving parents in formal curriculum development remains a topic which requires further deliberation.

5.9.3 School Development Planning – Process

The process used to develop school policy at one end of the continuum of parental involvement in school development planning is to request parent representatives and Board members to view a draft policy drawn up by teachers and to suggest

amendments. In the school identified as having some experience of partnership in school development planning broader consultative processes are employed. These involve questionnaires to the wider body of parents and a working group of parent representatives, teachers and Board of Management members preparing a draft policy for deliberation by the education partners. Although some progress has been made to include the perspective of parents in school development planning, it is evident that schools differ in their practices, approaches and experience regarding the participation of parents in the planning process.

5.9.4 Awareness of the Implications of the Law and Training and Support

The organisational areas addressed most frequently as described at interview with the education partners suggest that schools are evaluating organisational issues in the light of their compliance with legal and departmental requirements. Curricular issues named are those areas which required revision due to the implementation of the *1999 Primary School Curriculum*. All of the partners indicated that they did not feel ‘up to speed’ with regard to the requirements of the law and Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications in relation to partnership with parents and school development planning. This situation is not helped by the fact that none of the teachers indicated at interview that the national programmes Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary provided advice or support to teachers to date, at their in-career development days in relation to developing a partnership approach to school development planning. The parent representatives and Board of Management members equally have had little training in relation to the process of development planning. Some talks and information sessions have been organised by the Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association, however the majority of those interviewed have not attended. Training

provided by the National Parents' Council was regarded, by some of those interviewed, as helpful in relation to understanding the role and responsibilities of a Parents' Association. This training did not however, elaborate on the role of parents in the school development planning process. It is interesting to note that to date, the national bodies named in this section have not worked together to provide any training and support to the whole-school community. Each of the partners – Parents' Association, teachers and Board of Management have attended information meetings, training or in-career development separately. The partners currently do not attend any in-service training as a unit, as partners in a whole-school process.

5.9.5 Relationships -Facilitating or Inhibiting Factors

A synthesis of the data gleaned at interview provides some insights into facilitating and inhibiting factors in relation to involving parents in the school. The leadership role of the principal is the most critical factor. The influence of the principal on school climate and on the attitudes of teachers to engaging with parents was highlighted. It is interesting to note that in Case Study 1, which is at an early stage in relation to partnership with parents, there remains a degree of formality in relation to dialogue with parents. Teachers at interview indicated that they prefer parents to make an appointment and parents are fearful of disturbing teachers when they are engaged with their class. Some concern was raised by teachers in relation to the approach of parents, when discussing a query or complaint. The need for defined practices and procedures regarding partnership with parents was discussed. None of the case study schools has a formal home/school links policy. The importance of parents understanding and engaging with their central role as the primary educators of their children was also raised.

5.9.6 School Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association

With respect to school structures, each of the case study schools has a Board of Management. Issues remain to be resolved in relation to the experience and expertise of members of Boards of Management, their understanding of the role and the responsibilities of a Board, and their knowledge of Irish education legislation and Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications. As stated previously, support and training is required to encourage a more effective role for Board members in school development planning.

Two of the schools have elected Parents’ Associations and the third school engages parents in the school in a variety of ways. One of the Parents’ Associations is affiliated to the National Parents’ Council and these parents stated that they felt ‘stronger’ as a Parents’ Association because of the training and support meetings they have attended. Here again it is evident that support is required to encourage school communities to develop from, as stated in hypothesis three of this research,

an acceptance of parental representation on the Board of Management and the establishment of a Parents’ Association to more accountable, diverse, partnership which should involve parents in a central way in the school development planning.

5.10 Conclusion

Chapter Five provides an overview and synthesis of the data obtained at focus group interviews with representatives of the Board of Management, parents and teachers of the three Case study schools. Chapter Six will outline briefly the background to this research and the literature and research findings which contributed to the development of the research problem and hypotheses. It will draw together the findings of the quantitative phase of this research as described in Chapter Four with the vivid accounts of the partners of the three schools selected, as reviewed in

Chapter Five.

CHAPTER SIX – LINKING THE STRANDS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to analyse and synthesise the data outlined in Chapters Four and Five of this study. It provides a brief reminder of the background to the research and of the literature and research findings, which contributed to the development of the research problem, hypotheses and subsidiary research questions. It draws together the findings of the previous two chapters with a view to providing new knowledge in relation to the research question and hypotheses, from the perspectives of the education partners.

6.2 The Literature Review

School effectiveness research has consistently identified salient parental involvement in the education of their children as one of the characteristics of an effective school (Sections 2.4.2-2.4.3). Interventions to promote continuing improvement in the quality of education offered by schools include a dimension, which focuses on partnership and collaboration through the participation of the school community in school development planning (Section 2.3.6). Education legislation has been enacted based on the principle of partnership and shared responsibility (Section 2.2.9). The Department of Education and Science has drawn up guidelines relating to consultation with parents on aspects of the school plan (Section 2.3). Some recent Irish research is outlined which indicates that teachers and parents are more positive about working together in the development of the Code of Discipline and special programmes, such as Relationships and Sexuality Education than in other areas (Section 2.3.1).

Research reviewed in Chapter Two also indicates that parents engage with their children's school at different levels (Section 2.6.2). The principles of parent

involvement developed by Comer and his colleagues as part of the School

Development Program indicate that only a minority of parents become involved in management and policy development. 1-10% of parents participate

in collaborative decision making with school staff, students, and other identified persons on the SPMT (*School Planning and Management Team*) (Comer et al. 1996, p.48)

Generally it is parents who are actively involved in the school who contribute to the planning process in schools (Sections 2.6.2-2.6.3).

In Ireland a system of Boards of Management was established in 1975 to promote the success of the school in all its work so that a high quality education is delivered to all the children and to ensure that the school is managed in a spirit of partnership. The introduction of Boards of Management offered opportunities for partnership between parents, teachers, patrons and community representatives. The establishment of a Parents' Association in connection with each individual school to promote and develop effective and positive participation by parents in education at school level, has been encouraged since 1985. The early 1990's was a period of unprecedented debate and consultation in Irish education with the publication of the *Green Paper, Education for a Changing World* (1992), the National Education Convention (1993), the *White Paper Charting Our Education Future* (1995) and finally the *Education Act, 1998*. This Act set out to provide a statutory basis for the first and second levels of Ireland's education system. The spirit of partnership is one of the key principles which permeates the Act. The 1998 Act requires the education system to be conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and the community served by the school and the State. Section 21 of the *Education Act, 1998*, provides the context for this research in that it provides that the Board of Management must prepare a school plan, which will include the objectives of the school relating to

equality of access, participation in the school and provision for students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs. It also states that the school plan should be prepared in accordance with such directions as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans and that the Board should make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school. This research through the questionnaire to principals and the focus group interviews with members of Boards of Management, parents and teachers seeks to provide new knowledge and understanding of the perspectives of the partners with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

The literature reviewed indicates that there is a significant body of research in relation to parental involvement in schools in general (Section 2.5.2). Some studies outlining intervention initiatives to encourage parents of pupils who attend schools serving designated areas of disadvantage, are highlighted (Section 2.6). These intervention initiatives were selected purposefully as they support and encourage school based decision making, and the involvement of parents in partnership with teachers in the development of the school plan.

Fullan (2003), as described in Section 2.7, provides insights into the complexity of educational reform. He describes the importance of understanding the relationship between the theory of change and the theory of education in supporting the implementation of reform.

The theory of change, or actions, concerns what policies, strategies and mechanisms are going to be used, in effect, to implement the theory of education... (p.53)

The theory of education being examined in this research is the concept of consultation with parents in the development of the school plan as enunciated in Section 21,

Education Act, 1998 and in Department of Education and Science guidelines, circular letters and publications. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 provide a framework to facilitate a deeper understanding of the theory of change and the theory of education with reference to the systems change of including the perspective of parents in the development of the school plan.

Table 6.1: Theories of Education and Change

		Theory of Education	
		Weak	Strong
Theory of Change	Weak	Drift	Superficial Change
	Strong	Change for the sake of change	Deep Change

(Fullan, 2003, p.53)

In drawing together the quantitative and qualitative data obtained through this research it is evident that within the above framework, the systems change in Irish education with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan appears to be in the drift, possibly the superficial change category of change.

The literature review shows that

- Irish policy makers in encouraging consultation with parents in school development planning have *a moral purpose*. *The Education Act, 1998* requires the education system to be conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and the community served by the school and the State.
- In the *Guidelines for Primary Schools, Developing a School Plan, 1999*, the then Minister for Education and Science states that the guidelines ‘place a particular emphasis on collaboration within the entire community’ (Foreword, p.4). Through engagement with the education partners, representatives of the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, Catholic Primary School Managers’ Association, National Parents’ Council – Primary, Association of Primary Teaching Sisters, Church of Ireland Board of Education and the Teaching Brothers’ Association in the preparation and production of these policy

guidelines, concentrated efforts are being made at a national level to develop *quality relationships*.

- There is however, a dearth of *quality knowledge* which comes from creating communities of interaction around ideas and ensuring that quality information infuses interaction and related deliberations.

Without quality ideas, we would be merely reinforcing each other's good intentions with nothing to show for it. (p.36)

To achieve transformational change Fullan (2003), as outlined previously, describes three '*social attractors*'.

Table 6.2: Transformational Change

'Social attractors'	Theory of Education & Theory of Change
Moral purpose	The development of a partnership approach between parents and teachers in the development of the school plan
Quality relationships	Engagement of the education partners at national level in the preparation and production of <i>Guidelines for Primary Schools, Developing a School Plan, 1999</i>
Quality knowledge	Theory of change involves the development of policies, strategies and mechanisms to be used

Policymakers have not been kept systematically informed about how directives relating to partnership in the development of the school plan have effected engagement between the partners at school level. There is little evidence to inform future progress. *A National Progress Report on the School Development Planning Initiative*, was published in 2003. This report indicates that the promotion of partnership remains a major challenge for the initiative (p.6). In her unpublished thesis *Effective Collaborative Partnership in Community Education*, O' Dwyer in the context of community education and interagency collaboration,

sees the absence of effective evaluation and responding to the learning derived from it as central to the unresolved issues that kept emerging and causing tension. (O' Dwyer, 2000, p. 122)

Understanding the link between the theory of change and educational reform, provides a framework for building joint commitment among policy makers for sustained action. This point will be discussed further in Section 6.8 of this chapter.

This research has as its focus the role of parents at individual school level, in working with teachers and others on the development of school policy. The wider perspective of consultation between the Department of Education and Science, patrons, trustees and management bodies, national associations of parents and teacher unions is not the subject of this research, although the local perspective may mirror the demand for greater participation at a national level. The seeks to provide new knowledge and theory through the analysis of information gleaned from the education partners, principals, Board of Management members, parents and teachers in relation to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

6.3 Engagement with School Development Planning

6.3.1 School Development Planning and Current Education Legislation

The *Education Act, 1998* as stated previously requires the education system to be conducted in a spirit of partnership between the education partners. Accordingly, any procedures or policies agreed as part of the implementation of the Act are required to reflect, as appropriate the principle of partnership. Section 21 provides that a Board of Management must prepare a school plan. The school development planning process facilitates the development of the school plan. Chapter Four outlines the response of principals to questions relating to engagement with the school development planning process and knowledge of the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process. A significant number of principals (73.8%) indicated that their school had not engaged in school development planning prior to the

enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. This shows that for many school communities, school development planning remains a relatively new concept and experience. The majority of principals (69.0%) indicated that they themselves remain unsure regarding the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process. The need for in-career development for principals in relation to the implications of current education legislation, together with support to facilitate a process, as outlined in Section 23(2) (d)

under the direction of the Board and, in consultation with the teachers, the parents and to the extent appropriate to their age and experience, the students, set objectives for the school and monitor the achievement of those objectives

is evident. It is interesting to note that almost all principals who indicated that their school communities had engaged in the school development planning process prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*, availed of the national support teams – Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Support. This may be, as was stated previously, that they realised that the process of development planning is a difficult exercise and they were therefore ready to engage with the support services provided.

Board of Management members explained at interview that they come to their role with different hopes and fears. The level of engagement of Boards of Management with school life, activities and management varies considerably, with finance, accommodation and maintenance issues named as priorities by some Board of Management members. Consultation with parents in policy and decision-making and the involvement of parents generally in the school are achievements recorded by members of the Board of Case Study 2. The lack of continuity from one Board of Management to the next was raised as a concern at interview as was the differing levels of experience, commitment and knowledge members bring to their role as

Board members. With respect to education and the law, Board members generally perceive they are not ‘up to speed on legislation’ (*Case Study 1, Board of Management*) and do not have in-depth knowledge of Department of Education and Science guidelines, circular letters and publications. Their experience of policy development varies across a spectrum from those whose primary role is to ratify draft policies drawn up by teachers, to the involvement of a small number of Board of Management members in developing policy in consultation with teachers on school based planning days. Some of the factors raised at interview which effect the level of engagement of the Board of Management in school affairs include:

- regularity of Board of Management meetings
- experience and knowledge of Board members
- leadership of the principal in facilitating consultation in the development of aspects of the school’s plan
- communication between the Board of Management, Parents’ Association, wider body of parents and teachers

The parents interviewed equally indicated that they have minimal knowledge of school development planning and the law. Recent changes in school attendance legislation have been brought to their attention however, as yet they have not been involved in drawing up strategies to promote school attendance. Their participation in the development of school policy to date, has been at the invitation of the teachers and in most instances has involved ratifying draft policies developed by teachers. A very high proportion of schools in the sample (85.7%) have not as yet invited parents to participate with teachers on school based planning days. Some consultation has taken place with parents with regard to the Code of Discipline, Relationships and Sexuality Education, enrolment, anti-bullying and the health and safety policies. The

involvement of parents in drawing up a school attendance policy and policies relating to pupils with special educational needs is less prevalent. Principals in their response to the questionnaire also demonstrated that few schools have engaged parents in a review of the mission statement and vision of the school. Previous research indicates that the development of a shared vision is fundamental to partnership. Bastiani (1989), in outlining elements of a whole-school approach includes vision:

a broad vision, worked out through discussion, of the way things might be, linked to a clear picture of the way things are, which is rooted in evidence and shared experience (p.13)

Senge (2000), writes

The discipline of shared vision is the set of tools and techniques for bringing all of these disparate aspirations into alignment around the things people have in common – in this case, their connection to a school. In building a shared vision, a group of people build a sense of commitment together. They develop images of “the future we want to create together”, along with the values that will be important in getting there and the goals they hope to achieve along the way. Without a sustained process for building shared vision, there is no way for a school to articulate its sense of purpose. (p.71)

Some Case Study 2 parents, had worked with teachers in developing a mission statement for the school. These parents at interview were more confident in their understanding of the role and contribution of parents in education. The importance of reviewing policy regularly and of trying through a range of initiatives to gain the perspective of the wider parent body is manifested in the fact that not all Case Study 2 parents had participated in the process.

The teachers interviewed did not show an awareness of the obligation to prepare the school plan in accordance with directions relating to consultation with parents and others ‘as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans’ Section 21(3) *Education Act, 1998*. No teacher mentioned at interview that the Act obliges the Board to ‘make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school’ Section 21(4)

Education Act 1998. Teachers showed an increasing awareness and an acceptance that some form of consultation with parents is advisable in relation to aspects of organisational policies and in relation to policies relating to social, personal and health education.

When the principals were asked if parents have a role regarding the development of policy in curricular areas 28.6% choose 'no' and a further 54.5% were unsure. Only 16.7% indicated that they felt that parents have a role in curriculum planning. This figure is consistent with the number of schools, as indicated by principals, which have had parents involved in planning on school based planning days. The parents interviewed equally displayed a reticence with respect to curriculum planning, some expressing the concern that involving parents might be taking from the role of the teacher. The nature of the contribution of parents to planning for curriculum implementation, together with barriers to engagement with parents at this level were highlighted by teachers.

Overall many issues remain unresolved including

- the process of consultation required in the development of the school plan
- the engagement of all the education partners in developing a mission statement for the school
- communication between the school and parents regarding the content of the school plan
- the involvement of parents in formal curriculum policy development
- the degree of collaboration and consultation between the education partners in the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the school plan.

The lack of familiarity with the requirements of education legislation and Department

of Education circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is a contributory factor.

6.3.2 Experience of Training and Support

The engagement of schools, as indicated by principals in their responses to the questionnaire, with the national initiatives Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Initiative - Primary and their support teams is very high. 88.1% of school principals intimated that their school has utilised the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and 69.0% engaged with the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary in the context of development planning. Comments noted by principals were very positive in relation to the two national initiatives. However, the principals included in the sample suggest that the legal aspects of school development planning have not been emphasised at in-career development provided by the named teams as yet. They also indicated that guidance and encouragement with respect to involving parents in school development planning has not as yet been provided. As part of the staged programme provision to assist schools through a sequence of planning operations over a period of time, the strategic plan for school development planning support at primary level, states that parents' roles as partners were explored by School Development Planning Support with teachers in stage three of the programme. (School Development Planning Initiative, National Progress Report 2002, p.10-11)

A cross-tabulation was conducted to discover were there schools that are new to the school development planning process which did not utilise the services of the Primary Curriculum Support team. A number of schools, which started the process of school development planning since the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*, have

not engaged with either of the national initiatives in the context of school based planning days. 11.9% have not as yet, availed of the support of the Primary Curriculum Support team and 28.6% have not engaged with the facilitators of the School Development Planning Support to date. These national support programmes provide school-based support at the invitation of the school community. More focused, school based, whole school in-service to support the concept of partnership in school development planning may be required.

Teachers interviewed reiterated that the focus of the support teams to date has been on the role of teachers only, in developing school policy. Comments such as ‘the focus was on teachers’ (*Case Study 3, Teacher*) and ‘I don’t remember them mentioning parents. I don’t think that they ever inferred that you should be involving parents as much as you can’ (*Case Study 2, Teacher*) were made. The teachers highlight the fact that there is no whole school in-service on the implications of new acts and Department of Education and Science directives. It was stated that there may be a lack of consistency between the perspectives and interpretations of the various management groups in relation to the implications of the legislation -

different messages coming out from various partners – DES (Department of Education and Science), INTO (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation), parents, CPSMA (Catholic Primary School Management Association).

(Case Study 3, Teacher)

The level of consultation and engagement of the partners at national level is not reviewed in this research, however, the above comment indicates that differences may remain between those who administer the education system, those with responsibility for managing schools and other education partners.

Training and support for members of Boards of Management is provided by the Catholic Primary School Management Association. A manual or handbook has been

prepared for Board of Management members, however it is suggested that it is quite complex and less than helpful in supporting new members of the Board understand their role. Courses and information talks are organised for the parent representatives on the Board of Management by the National Parents' Council - Primary. To function effectively members of Boards of Management should have access to quality training to enable them to undertake an audit of their role and responsibilities associated with the effective management of the school and to develop the skills found to be necessary. One Board of Management member suggested the possibility of accessing relevant data using information and communication technology. The majority of those interviewed however, have not attended any form of training for their role. The members interviewed from one school indicated that the training provided by the National Parents' Council – Primary in relation to their role as Board members and as the link between the Board and the Parents' Association was helpful. Some others who attended training provided by the National Parents' Council –Primary perceived that the facilitators focused primarily on issues of concern to larger schools and was of little support to schools where only a small number of parents become involved in committee work. Opportunities provided by the National Parents' Council – Primary for Parents' Associations from different schools to share experiences and good practice were considered helpful.

It is evident from the data collated in this research that school communities will have different collective skills and talents and consequently have a range of training needs which will have to be considered. In view of this diversity it is suggested that school based training involving all the education partners, members of the Board of Management, parents and teachers be considered. Research reviewed in Chapter Two, for example, Hargreaves (1994), Stoll and Fink (1996), O' Dwyer (2000), Gowran

(2004) identifies and explores key conditions that are necessary for partnership development. In-career development opportunities will also need to be provided for principals in relation to the partnership dimension of current education legislation and Department of Education and Science publications, together with skills to fulfil their leadership role in facilitating parental involvement in school development planning.

6.4 Purpose of Involving Parents in School Development Planning

Principals were requested to rank reasons for parental consultation on aspects of school policy in order from the most important to the least important. Five options were offered, which were selected as outlined in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.4 with reference to *Parents as Partners in Education, OECD, 1997*, the Irish Constitution and Department of Education and Science policy guidelines. 42.9% of the principals in the sample selected ‘one of the characteristics of an effective school is salient parental involvement’ as their first choice. A further 35.7% opted for ‘recognition that parents are the prime educators of their children’. The figures for the other three options were significantly lower – 9.5% ‘awareness of parental rights and the law’, 7.1% ethical reasons and no principal chose ‘commitment to democratic decision-making’ as a first preference. Many principals in the sample therefore, consider that involving parents in the schools contributes to school effectiveness. The role of parents as the prime educators of their children is also highlighted by principals. The principals in the sample indicated that the legal context, ethical considerations and a commitment to democratic decision-making are less important reasons for involving parents in school development planning. Previously in this research, it was established that only a small number of schools have involved parents in the development of a school mission statement. Research such as Stoll and Fink, (1996, p. 51) has been reviewed which indicates that involvement in reviewing the vision and mission

statement of a school is an important step in the development of partnership between the education partners and in moving towards democratic decision-making.

Board of Management members and parents were not given a range of options in relation to involvement of parents in the school. They were asked to outline their reasons for choosing to engage with the school. Both groups offered broadly similar reasons for becoming involved including:

- they have a responsibility to be involved
- they know more of what is going on by getting involved
- it is good that parents attend activities and events for the children and it helps the children realise that education is important
- it helps build communication with the teachers and
- it is a great way to get to know other parents.

Parents and Board of Management members continue to give of their time and expertise voluntarily to the school as they perceive they have a duty as prime educators of their children to be involved and appreciate that through their involvement, bonds of trust and communication are built up with teachers. This they perceive will ultimately be of benefit to their children in their attitude and engagement with school and learning. 88.1% of the principals surveyed also consider that involving parents in the development of school policies will ultimately benefit the children in their school. Some parents continue to have difficulty knowing how best to approach teachers in relation to concerns and queries and remain unsure about the most appropriate time to discuss these matters with teachers.

Teachers highlighted the importance of continuity between home and school and the benefits for children when home and school are working in tandem with one another.

Caution was expressed in relation to managing the relationship with parents and ensuring that ‘the line is not crossed’ (*Case Studies 1, 2 and 3, Teachers*). The lack of clarity with respect to guidelines for consultation between parents and teachers can leave both teachers and parents feeling vulnerable and cautious. Some teachers lack confidence in engaging with parents and can become defensive. Fullan (2003 p. 43) states

that one of the interesting by-products of engaged learning communities is that they become more proactive with parents and the public. (p.3)

Some teachers interviewed indicated that barriers remain and that currently ‘we want them to be helpful on our terms’ (*Case Study 2, Teachers*). Difficulties in striking a balance in a situation where a parent becomes involved in the school because he or she has a particular agenda were also raised.

A small number of principals (9.5%) indicated a negative or ambiguous response to the statement that involving parents in the school development planning process will ultimately benefit the children in their school. The importance of not ‘undervaluing the expertise teachers have as professionals’ was named by one principal while another suggested that parents need to know what the policies are, in order to gain their co-operation and support. All of the principals who indicated a negative or ambiguous response are new to the school development planning process as their school communities began developing a school plan since the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*.

The above summary of the findings of the data in relation to the purpose of involving parents in the school shows the need for opportunities to be provided for the education partners to come together to develop trusting relationships, to dialogue and to plan together for the future development of the school.

6.5 Process of School Development Planning with Particular Reference to Policies Developed In Consultation with Parents

6.5.1 The process of school development planning

The questionnaire to principals confirms the perception that school development planning to date in schools remains primarily within the domain of teachers, with the role of Parents' Associations and the Board of Management in many instances being to ratify policy drawn up by teachers. Most principals (40.5%) selected the option that the principal seeks consensus on policy at staff meetings and that the Parents' Association and Board of Management ratify the policies. A further 14.3% chose the option that the principal delegates the development of certain policies to post-holders who draw up draft policies, which are then presented to staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management. 4.7% of principals crossed out Parents' Association in selecting the above options indicating that in some schools the Board of Management members ratify policies drawn up by the teachers, but these policies are not presented to the Parents' Association. It should be remembered also that a significant number of the schools in the sample, 23.8%, with an over-representation from schools serving designated areas of disadvantage do not have a Parents' Association. It is evident from the data obtained in the context of this research therefore, that it is the two parent representatives on the Board of Management who have most exposure to the school plan and policies being developed in the sample schools.

During the focus group interviews with members of the Boards of Management it emerged that a range of approaches are used to glean the perspective of Board members in relation to policy. Approaches can differ when developing organisational as against curriculum policy. The data gathered indicates that members of the Board do not have a clear picture of what a school plan should encompass. The policies for

development had not been selected by the members of the Board. It is evident, however, that the policies reviewed by the Board of Management members interviewed have been selected with reference to education legislation and Department of Education and Science policy guidelines. The formation of the Code of Discipline, health and safety policy and the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy are areas where each of the schools had a degree of parental involvement. There is a level of awareness among Board members of obligations in respect of school attendance and admissions policies. In two of the schools, the role of the Board of Management was to ratify the policy drawn up by others. In the third school, Case Study 2, the Board has been active in promoting a consultative process in reviewing and updating the Code of Discipline, health and safety and the admissions policy as required by recent legislation. Members of the Board of Management, representatives of the Parents' Association and teachers worked together on a school based planning day revising the above policies. This Board also sought to develop some school policies in accordance with requirements of Department of Education and Science directives. School policy regarding Relationships and Sexuality Education, for example 'was very largely parent-driven' (*Case Study 2, Board of Management*).

Each of the three groups of parents interviewed have had different experiences of involvement in schools development planning. In Case Study 1 the parents interviewed were all members of the Parents' Association. The Parents' Association in this school reviewed the anti-bullying policy prior to its ratification by the Board of Management. Engagement with school development planning is a very new experience for this group of parents. It may be that the completion of the questionnaire by the principal raised awareness of the importance of consultation with parents in the development of the school plan. Case Study 2 parents have had a deeper

engagement with the school development planning process and have been involved in working with teachers in relation to the school mission statement and ethos, enrolment, homework, Code of Discipline, health and safety and Relationships and Sexuality Education policy. A variety of approaches have been used to obtain the perspective of parents including questionnaires to the wider body of parents, the circulation of draft copies of policies to all parents encouraging responses, suggestions and amendments and working groups of Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives and teachers. It should be noted however, that consultation with parents regarding pupils with special educational needs is generally conducted on an individual basis and that in most instances parents have not been involved in the development of school policy with respect to pupils with special educational needs. Case Study 2 parents who have had some experience of working with teachers with respect to the policies named above expressed some anxiety in relation to parental involvement in the development of formal curriculum and the implications for the professional role of the teacher. The home/school/ community liaison coordinator has been a support to parents in Case Study 3 and has organised groups of parents to meet, to provide input on policies such as the Code of Discipline, healthy eating and the school substance use policy.

6.5.2 Consultation with parents with respect to specific policy areas

The following table shows the response of the principals to a question designed to elicit the level of engagement of schools with parents with respect to specific policy areas. It shows the numbers of parents not consulted in relation to the policies named in the sample schools.

Table 6.3: Consultation with Parents With Respect to Specific Policy Areas

Policy Area	No Consultation with Parents
Code of Discipline	4.8%
Uniform	4.8%
Relationships and Sexuality Education	19.0%
Homework	19.0%
Enrolment	35.7%
School Attendance	47.6%
Mission Statement	52.4%
Special Education Policy	57.1%

The principals were not required to elaborate on the process of consultation when answering the above question. The table confirms the experiences of the partners, Board of Management members, parents and teachers interviewed that to date parents are more likely to be consulted with respect to certain organisational policies and certain policies identified by the Department of Education and Science. These include policies, such as the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy. The *Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and Sexuality Education* (1995), outlines

the manner in which school policy and school programmes on Relationships and Sexuality Education can be developed and implemented. (p.2)

In instances where the Department of Education and Science has issued a circular letter or guidelines outlining how the education partners should be included in the process of developing a particular policy, generally some effort is made to obtain the perspective of parents. Strategies include a questionnaire to the parent body, working groups including parental representation, presenting a draft policy to the Parents' Association for review and ratification and eliciting the views of the parent members of the Board of Management.

6.6 School Structures – Board of Management, Parents' Associations

6.6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the appointment of Boards of Management according to Section

14 (1), is to ensure ‘that a recognised school is managed in a spirit of partnership’ and to make this partnership real, the composition of the Board is to be agreed by all the education partners. In seeking to discover the current level of participation by parents in school development planning, this research sought information initially from principals on the role of the Board of Management and Parents’ Association in policy formation in the sample schools. Focus groups interviews were then undertaken with Board of Management members, parents and teachers to ascertain the perspective of the education partners. Principals indicated that a Board of Management has been appointed to manage all of the schools in the sample, however, ten schools, seven of which serve designated areas of disadvantage do not have a Parents’ Association.

6.6.2 Board of Management and School Development Planning

With respect to the role of the Board of Management and school development planning, principals indicated that 40.4% of Boards, as stated previously, ratify policies drawn up by the staff and the principal of the school. A significant number of schools (37.2%) employ a range of strategies to obtain the perspective of Board members including actively seeking input and reaction to certain organisational policies and Board of Management representation on working groups relating to policy development. Issues relating to time and the availability of Board members were named by principals as reasons why involvement in policy formation working groups is limited.

The evidence gathered at interview with members of the Boards of Management in the three Case study schools indicates that they do not have a clear picture of what a school plan should encompass and their role in its development. It is evident that these Boards of Management have not made any provision for the systematic review

and updating of policies and procedures. Policies for development and review were not selected by the Board. Teachers with the support of the national initiative School Development Planning Support engage in a review process and set the agenda for policy development. Consideration is given to prioritising policy areas required by education and other legislation and those areas of policy on which the Department of Education and Science has issued guidelines and directives. The formation of Codes of Discipline, health and safety policy and Relationships and Sexuality Education policy are areas where each of the case study schools had a degree of parental involvement. Aspects of school policy and procedure are also reviewed on occasions, when issues arise locally such as the procedure relating to the administration of medicines or the reporting of suspected child abuse. There is evidence of an increasing awareness among Board members of obligations in respect of school attendance and enrolment/admissions policies. However, the development and documentation of policies in relation to provision of appropriate resources for the education of all pupils, especially those with a disability or other special educational needs requires further involvement of the education partners. Policies on gender and other equality issues were also not raised in the discussion. Also none of the case study schools have an agreed home/school links policy.

The members of the Boards of Management generally do not meet with parents and teachers formally. They attend certain school functions, fund raising events and school social occasions. The teacher representative on the Board has responsibility for bringing issues of concern to teachers, to the attention of the Board. Some members of the Board of Management interviewed indicated that they do not meet with the Parents' Association but they feel that communication is maintained, as two Board members are also members of the Parents' Association. This perspective was not

shared by all Board representatives. The Board members of Case Study 1, perceive a gap in relations between the Board and the Parents' Association. They suggested that the Board and Parents' Association should meet on occasions so that issues of mutual interest could be discussed.

The response of principals indicated that in a small number of schools (14.3%), Board of Management members and parents have been invited to participate with teachers in development planning on school based planning days. Board members and parents have not, as has been indicated previously always taken up that invitation. Comer suggests that

Basic to any attempt to involve parents – especially the least affluent and educated – is a climate of trust and openness to ideas. Parents sometimes avoid schools because they feel inadequate, unwelcome, threatened, or insecure due to their own past educational experiences and their children's present difficulties.

(Comer et al. 1996, p.50)

Factors named by the participants in this research which inhibit consultation with parents in the development of the school plan are explored further in section 6.7.2 of this chapter.

Those Board of Management members and parents who have been involved with teachers and parents in joint planning suggest that involvement in working groups led to greater listening, understanding and commitment to the policies drawn up in this manner.

The composition of Boards of Management did not arise as a issue in the discussion with the partners and so it must be assumed that there is fair representation of patron, parent, teacher and community members on current Boards. The principals in commenting on the contribution of Board members to the development of school policy suggest that time and the availability of Board members were significant

factors. Board members, highlighted difficulty in accessing information, the pace of progress on issues and the cohesiveness and stability of the Board as issues of concern. It would appear that the number of meetings and the challenge of turnover of Board members can effect how the Board functions.

6.6.3 Parents' Association and School Development Planning

This research shows that the role of parents in policy formation in schools is limited. 23.8 % of the sample has no Parents' Association and so for these schools, the only parents with whom policy is discussed formally, are the parent members of the Board of Management. 23.8% is a significant proportion of the sample, given as outlined in Chapter Two, Literature Review, Section 2.2.6, that the National Parents' Council was established in 1985 and that the *Education Act, 1998* Section 26 (3) stated that

The Board shall promote contact between the school, parents of students in that school and the community and shall facilitate and give all reasonable assistance to parents who wish to establish a Parents' Association and a Parents' Association when it is established.

35.7% of the sample schools either do not have a Parents' Association or if they have a Parents' Association, the principal indicated that the Parents' Association are currently not consulted regarding any school policy. Two respondents in selecting a preferred option to question 9 on the questionnaire actually crossed out Parents' Association in options (b) and (c).

A further 33.3% of principals indicated that the teachers draw up the draft policy in collaboration with the principal. The Parents' Association is then asked for input and reaction to the draft policy. Joint working groups of parents and teachers drawing up draft policies which are then presented to staff and the Parents' Association to be discussed and amended as appropriate was a less popular choice with 7.1% selecting this option.

Principals raised important issues in relation to involving parents in school development planning. In many schools only a small proportion of the wider parent group commit to being involved in the Parents' Association and the Parents' Association therefore, may not be truly representative of the parent populations. Some principals also invited parents to participate in school policy development and discovered a reticence among parents to engage in the process. Concern was also raised in relation to parents who become involved because of a single issue and their lack of understanding of the need on occasions to make decisions for the greater good.

Although the three case study schools were selected purposively, based on a continuum of parental involvement, most of the parent representatives interviewed still have limited experience of collaborative development planning and are unfamiliar with the concept of a school plan. Some parent representatives did participate with teachers in school planning on a school based planning day however, none of the parents interviewed had ever been given a copy of the school plan and / or had ever viewed the school plan in its entirety. Successful Department of Education and Science initiatives in encouraging partnership in relation to school policy development include Relationships and Sexuality Education, the Code of Discipline, anti-bullying and more recently in schools serving designated areas of disadvantage, the school substance use policy. It is clear from the evidence gathered from the parents interviewed that parental involvement in school development planning remains at the invitation of the principal, teachers and in some instances the Board of Management. Parents engage with the school primarily by supporting activities and initiatives. It is generally perceived that it is easier to engage with the parents of pupils in the infant classes. This finding confirms previous research conducted by the Halton Board of Education outlined by Stoll and Fink (1996) which states

It would appear that elementary schools, because of their size and the age of their students have an advantage. (p. 135)

Decisions relating to priorities with respect to school development planning generally remain the prerogative of teachers. The principal is regarded by the education partners as the link person between the Parents' Association and the teachers. Parents indicated at interview that schools communicate information to them regularly, request their cooperation in supporting their children's education and dialogue with them with respect to their own children's progress. Dialogue with parents in relation to the objectives and operation of the school is less prevalent. There is generally, more openness to involving parents in policies relating to social, personal and health education and some organisational policies. Involving parents in formal curriculum remains a topic which requires further deliberation and debate. Issues relating to parents and teachers working together on formal curriculum policy were raised by principals, teachers and parents themselves, some of whom were concerned not to encroach on the professional domain of the teacher. The need to provide parents with knowledge of curriculum and methodology is not being addressed. The provision of opportunities for the partners to explore attitudes and values together must be considered.

Consultation with parents regarding aspects of school policy remains a relatively new experience for most teachers. The teachers interviewed indicated openness to some level of consultation on aspects of social, personal and health education policy development and certain organisational issues. The teachers overall showed a reticence with respect to involving parents in aspects of formal school policy. This may be, in part because they have not been encouraged to date through the national initiatives to engage with parents in school planning relating to curricular areas.

Barriers named include the perception that collaboration with parents would undermine the professionalism of teachers, the perceived lack of expertise and interest in education among many parents and the issue of time.

Most schools have embraced the notion of parental involvement at the level of some form of consultation with elected parent members on the Board of Management and in schools which have a Parents' Association with representatives of the Parents' Association. However, in most schools currently there are no formal opportunities for the Board of Management, Parents' Association and teachers to develop a shared vision for the school, to develop trusting relationships, to dialogue, to self-evaluate and to plan together for the future development of the school. Parental involvement at a deeper, more participatory, accountable level will require further support and training for all the partners.

6.7 Relationships – Facilitating or Inhibiting Factors to Parental Involvement in School Development Planning

6.7.1 School Development Planning - Facilitating Factors

The principals in the sample were asked to rank factors which enable parental involvement in school development planning. They ranked the enabling factors in the following order:

- leadership of the principal (20)
- cooperative, well-motivated staff (12)
- respect for each others' roles as parents and teachers (6)
- collective ownership of schools' aims and objectives (3)
- encouragement of parental involvement (1)

It is interesting to note a pattern emerging in the responses of principals. Collective

ownership of the schools' aims and objectives was given a priority (1) or (2) ranking by only 9% of the sample. The responses of the principals to question 12 indicated that 52.4% of schools had not engaged parents in the development of the school mission statement. 16.7% indicated that consultation had occurred on one occasion and 11.6% on each occasion the policy is reviewed. A number of principals did not select any option. The *Management Board Members' Handbook*, (2004) states

A school's ethos is best expressed, helped to develop and enriched as a result of continuing interaction between a shared dialogue on the core values of the school (involving the Patron, Trustees, Board of Management, Principal Teacher, Staff, Parents, and Students) and the daily practices which endeavour to embody these values. (p.5)

With respect to assisting the Board of Management to articulate their role within the overall mission of the school, the handbook states at page 28 that

An effective Board of Management is one which has a shared sense of purpose and of commitment to the school for which it has collective responsibility.

This research is showing a pattern whereby real dialogue between the partners with respect to ethos, mission statement, vision and the objectives of the school is not happening for many school communities. This may result in a lack of cohesion among the partners.

Parents and Board of Management members named at interview, the leadership role of the principal as the most critical factor in relation to involving parents in the school. The importance of the principal taking time to listen and setting the tone for relationships with the wider school community was noted. The influence of the principal on school climate and on the attitudes of teachers to engaging with parents was also highlighted. Research reviewed in Chapter Two, Sections 2.4.2-2.4.5, relating to school effectiveness, identifies purposeful leadership by the principal, where the principal understands the school's needs and is actively involved in consulting the school community, especially in planning and decision-making as a

significant contributing characteristic to school effectiveness. In the case study school serving a designated area of disadvantage, together with the principal, the role of the home/school/community liaison coordinator in facilitating parental involvement in the school in general and in school development planning was named as important by the parents. The openness of the Parents' Association in welcoming and encouraging new members was discussed at one focus group meeting with parents.

Teachers in the school serving a designated area of disadvantage indicated at interview an awareness of their role in facilitating dialogue with parents, particularly parents who may have been early school leavers. The need to work with parents rather than approach issues in a confrontational manner in the context of fostering positive relationships was also named by teachers. In Case Study 1, which is at an earlier stage in relation to partnership with parents in school development planning, there remains as outlined in Chapter 5, Section 5.8.4 a degree of formality with respect to dialogue with parents. Teachers at interview indicated that they prefer parents to make an appointment and parents are fearful of disturbing teachers when they are engaged with their class. Some concern was raised by teachers about the approach of parents, when discussing a query or complaint. The need for defined practices and procedures regarding partnership with parents was discussed. None of the case study schools have formal home/school links policy. The importance of parents understanding and engaging with their crucial role as the primary educators of their children was discussed as a factor which enables parental involvement in school development planning.

6.7.2 School Development Planning - Inhibiting Factors

Factors which inhibit parental involvement in school development planning were

ranked as follows by the principals surveyed:

- Option 1: lack of flexibility within traditional time limits (21)
- Option 2: partnership in school development planning not regarded as a priority by staff (6)
- Option 3: lack of accommodation, for example, Parents’ Room (7)
- Option 4: teachers’ lack of confidence in their relationship with parents (6)
- Option 5: lack of in-service regarding partnership with parents in school development planning (0).

Further analysis of the options selected by the principals yielded an interesting pattern. The frequency of selection of the various options was calculated taking the top three priorities of principals into consideration. The issue of time (32) remained the factor selected most often, with the lack of in-service regarding partnership with parents in school development planning (30) moving into second place. Teachers’ lack of confidence in their relationship with parents was selected (22) times and lack of accommodation, for example, Parents’ Room (18) and partnership in school development planning not regarded as a priority by the staff (16) was considered the least important inhibiting factor. The following table summarises the frequency each option was selected taking three choices into consideration:

Table 6.4 School Development Planning – Inhibiting Factors – Frequency of Selection when Three Choices are Included

	Option 1 Frequency	Option 2 Frequency	Option 3 Frequency	Option 4 Frequency	Option 5 Frequency
1 st Choice	21	6	7	6	0
2 nd Choice	10	7	9	10	4
3 rd Choice	1	3	2	6	26
Total	32	16	18	22	30

Inhibiting factors named by members of the Board of Management include the lack of continuity from one Board to the next. This can cause frustration in relation to the pace and efficiency with which tasks are completed and policies put in place. The

level of commitment, expertise and experience of Board members influences the effectiveness the Board. The lack of adequate communication between the Board and the Parents' Association was raised as an issue, as was the feeling among some Board members that they do not possess adequate knowledge which inhibits their ability to contribute to the process.

The discussion among some of the parents indicated that if parents had a bad experience at school themselves this might prevent them from becoming involved with the school. Parents suggested that some parents' perceive that teachers come from a different social class and this may result in a lack of confidence in dealing with teachers. They also stated that selecting an appropriate time and forum to discuss issues of concern with teachers can be difficult.

While most teachers realise that there are significant gains to be made from improving relationships with parents, it was acknowledged by the teachers interviewed that barriers to involving parents in school development planning remain. The teachers acknowledged the importance of reaching out to parents who left school early and lack confidence in working with teachers. However, the prospect of parents 'getting too close' and being 'too well up' was discussed in the context of the prospect of involving parents in curriculum planning. Principals acknowledged in their response to the questionnaire, a lack of confidence in some teacher in their relationship with parents. Also Case Study 1 teachers identified a lack of focus at pre-service and in-career development training in relation to working in partnership with parents.

Difficulties in striking a balance where a parent becomes involved in the school because he or she has a particular agenda to pursue were also highlighted. This point has been identified in previous research outlined in Chapter Two, Section 2.5.3.

Parents as Partners in Schooling, (1997) elaborates on this point

...the commitment of individual parents to their own children does not mean that their views would necessarily lead to a fair and effective education system, meeting the needs of all. For example, groups of parents often have conflicting interests, and the demands of some parents may impinge on the rights of others. This is particularly clear with regard to various forms of selective, streamed or segregated schooling.

(p.16-17)

Consultation with parents in the development of the school plan seeks to include the perspective of parents on whole-school issues. Opportunities must also be provided for parents with concerns in relation to matters such as:

- educational provision for their own child,
- curriculum content and implementation, or
- organisational issues

to dialogue with respect to their concerns with teachers, the principal and the Board of Management.

6.8 Concluding Comments

Previous research relating specifically to parental involvement in school development planning as outlined in Chapter Two and referred to briefly in Section 6.2 of this chapter suggests that

- parents engage with their children's school at different levels (Section 2.5.2)
- a minority of parents become involved in management and policy development (Section 2.6.2-2.6.3)
- generally it is parents who are actively involved in the school who contribute to the planning process (Section 2.6.2-2.6.3)
- teachers and parents are more positive about working together in the development of the Code of Discipline and special programmes such as Relationships and Sexuality Education than in other areas (Section 2.3.1)

This chapter confirms the findings of the previous research detailed above and

highlights an increasing awareness among the education partners of the obligation to include the perspective of parents in school development planning. Some insights into the partnership process which can be deduced from this research include:

- the finding that almost all schools with experience of schools development planning prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*, sought the support of the national programmes, Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Support, thereby indicating an awareness that the process of school development planning is complex
- a degree of formality exists in those schools which are at an early stage in the development of consultation between parents and teachers, with some apprehension on both sides in relation to making sure that appropriate procedures are in place
- school size and whether the principal is an administrative or a teaching principal can effect the level of consultation in relation to school development planning among the education partners and
- the consensus among the sample included in this research is that, the leadership role of the principal is the single most important facilitating factor in encouraging the engagement of parents with the school, and that the principal has a key leadership role in facilitating consultation within the school community.

It is obvious that some progress is being made in the preparation of a school plan in the schools studied however, involvement of parents to date in most instances is confined to the development of some organisational policies and aspects of policy development in social, personal and health education, particularly those aspects on which the Department of Education and Science has issued guidelines and circular letters. The evidence presented in this chapter shows that the consultation process differs depending on the individual circumstances of the school. The role of the principal in fostering an open school climate, in encouraging a positive attitude among teachers to engaging with parents and in encouraging parents in their role as the primary educators of their children, is highlighted. Fear and apprehension of partnership is compounded by a lack of clear policy guidelines in relation to effective home/school links.

Opportunities for Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives and teachers to meet and to dialogue need to move beyond social occasions and informal communication at school events. Real engagement will not occur between the education partners without the support of a structured training programme such as that outlined in "*Opening Doors: School and Community Partnership in Social and Political Education Initiatives*", *Draft Guidelines for Partnership Development*, (Gowran, 2004). This programme needs to support the school community to discuss their hopes and fears in relation to working in partnership and to help them to develop a shared vision for the school which will inform future development.

Research detailed in Chapter 2, Section 2.7 shows that all educational changes of value require new skills, behaviours and beliefs or understandings. This research investigates consultation with parents in the development of the school plan. However, implicitly, the research is reviewing the implementation of a significant national reform in planning and decision-making processes in Irish primary schools. The development of a more centralised role for parents in Irish education and particularly the obligation on schools to consult with parents in the process of school development planning is the background to this research. Table 6.5 provides an overview of some changes identified by participants in the research.

Table 6.5 Educational Reform – Partnership in Management and Planning

	Traditional model	Partnership model
Management	Single manager	Shared management
Decision-making	Top-down	Combination of top-down and bottom-up
School Development Planning	Teachers only	Education partners
Change	Isolated teachers	Learning communities

The continuum of parental involvement in school development planning outlined in Chapter Four, indicates that schools are at different stages with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan. This was confirmed during the qualitative phase of this research as outlined in Chapter 5. However, the data shows that at school level there is a developing awareness of a need to move from the traditional model of management and decision-making to a more consultative model which would include the perspective of parents. Complexity theory as outlined in Fullan, (2003) provides some helpful strategies for establishing the conditions and process to enhance the likelihood of greater ownership and commitment to this type of reform

In common sense terms:

- Start with the notion of moral purpose, key problems, desirable directions, but don't lock in.
 - Create communities of interaction around ideas.
 - Ensure that quality information infuses interaction and related deliberations.
 - Look for and extract promising patterns, i.e., consolidate gains and build on them.
- (Fullan, 2003, p.23)

Having some insight into the change process can provide a clearer understanding of what remains to be done.

It is clear from the evidence presented in this chapter that the enactment of legislation and the publication of circular letters, policy guidelines and various Department of

Education and Science publications alone, will not ensure that school policies are developed in a spirit of partnership. If meaningful partnership between parents and teachers in school development planning is to become a reality, it is time to review and evaluate the training and support available to Board of Management, Parents' Associations and teachers. A more focused intervention programme, developed in partnership by the bodies with responsibility for training and support, the Catholic Primary School Management Association, the National Parents' Council, the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary, is required. The possibility of developing some pilot projects to enhance knowledge of the consultation process between parents and teachers in developing the school plan, should be explored.

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the data as it relates to previous research and of some initial observations when the perspectives of the various partners in the school community are linked together. *Chapter Seven*, the concluding chapter will draw together the conclusions of this research with reference to the hypotheses and research question, detail the implications for policy and practice outline suggestions for future research and elaborate on the distinct contribution this research has made to the body of knowledge with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This research as indicated in Chapter One, Sections 1.4 and 1.5 has as its focus a research problem which seeks to establish whether

the aspiration of partnership espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is being realised through the process by which parents are being currently consulted in the context of school development planning.

The research problem, hypotheses and research questions were developed having identified and reviewed appropriate literature as outlined in Chapter Two. This review indicated that salient parental involvement has been identified consistently as a contributory factor in the context of school effectiveness, school improvement and school development planning research. Also, the principle of partnership is fundamental to Irish education legislation. The development of a more centralised role for parents in decision-making and school development planning is a significant educational reform. This research seeks quality information with regard to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

The methodology as described in Chapter Three was designed to provide data to investigate the research problem, hypotheses and subsidiary but related questions. It was deemed appropriate to use a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure more perspectives on the phenomena being studied. Data gleaned from the research are outlined in Chapters Four and Five and are analysed in Chapter Six.

Sections 7.2-7.5 of this chapter will outline the conclusions with respect to the three hypotheses central to this research and the research problem. Section 7.6 details the implications for policy and practice drawn in light of the conclusions described.

Before the concluding comments, Section 7.7 will make some suggestions for further research in light of the limitations of the present research and will bring this study to a close.

The conclusions and implications described in this final chapter, are a synthesis of the findings outlined in the earlier chapters of this research. The process of bringing together and interpreting the findings from the two methodological approaches used in the research, reveals a high degree of consistency in outcomes. This level of consistency suggests that the conclusions and recommendations described, can be relied upon as the generally held perceptions of these Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives and other involved parents, principals and teachers in relation to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

7.2 Conclusions about Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 proposes that

there is a difference between the aspiration of partnership in the development of school policies as espoused in education legislation, Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications and the process by which parents are currently consulted in school development planning.

Chapter 1, Section 1.1.4 explores the nature of parent/teacher partnership in school development planning and shows that the concept of partnership and the process of consulting with education partners is a rather recent development. Policy statements such as those included in the *White Paper on Education* (1995), the *Education Act* (1998) and in the Department of Education and Science publications and circulars on school development planning are very general and do not provide clear direction on how partnerships are to be managed at local level. An analysis of the usage of the term partnership in the context of parent-teacher partnership in Chapter 1 Section

1.1.4, shows the importance of fostering opportunities for dialogue, establishing guiding ethical principles, developing an understanding of the complementary roles of parents and teachers and recognising professional authority as it relates to schools and teachers.

Chapter Six, describes evidence of significant progress being made by some schools which have utilised a range of approaches to glean the perspective of parents including circulating a questionnaire to parents (23.8%), setting up working groups of parents and teachers to draft aspects of school policy (23.8%), consulting with the Parents' Association (40.5%) and involving the Board of Management (50.0%) in the process of school development planning. Progress in consulting parents with respect to the development of the Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy and the Code of Discipline constitutes an excellent first stage in mobilising parents into the partnership process. Research evidence indicates that only in a small number of school communities (7.1%) has there been no consultation with parents with respect to school development planning.

Data presented in Section 6.3.1 of this research indicates however, a lack of awareness and knowledge among the education partners at school level of the requirements of education legislation and Department of Education and Science documents. The education partners do not have a clear picture of what a school plan should encompass and have minimal knowledge of requirements for consultation, review and circulation of the school plan.

In conclusion therefore, while there appears to be a commitment at school level to deepening and intensifying the role of parents in school development planning the implications of this process remain unclear. Based on the above this research

concludes that the first hypothesis proposed is substantiated.

7.3 Conclusions about Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis proposes that partnership with parents remains a relatively new concept for Boards of Management, principals, teachers and parents themselves. Principals were asked to indicate if their school was involved in school development planning prior to the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. The responses show that 73.8% of the schools in the sample began the process of school development planning after the enactment of the Act.

The evidence presented indicates an increasing awareness of the importance of including the perspective of parents, particularly in the context of certain organisational policies and in the area of social, personal and health education. The process of consultation has been influenced by Department of Education and Science guidelines. The research shows that there are differences between patterns of consultation in small and large schools. Many of the small schools in the sample, with principals who have teaching duties together with their administrative responsibilities, are at an early stage of development of consultation with parents with respect to the development of the school plan.

Data outlined in Chapter Six, provides evidence that the process of school development planning is relatively new to the sample of schools included in this research. School communities are at different stages in their engagement with parents in school planning as is evident from the continuum developed. Hypothesis 2 is also therefore, affirmed as correct.

7.4 Conclusions about Hypothesis 3

The final hypothesis states that

support is required to encourage school communities to develop from an acceptance of parental representation on the Board of Management and the establishment of Parents' Associations to more accountable, diverse, partnership which should involve parents in a central way in school development planning.

Each group of education partners included in the research, principals, Board of Management members, parents and teachers, indicated the need for training and support with respect to education and the law. They acknowledged that they lack knowledge of Department of Education and Science circular letters and documents which provide guidelines and directives with respect to the process of school development planning. It was also named by those interviewed that opportunities should be provided for the partners to meet, to dialogue, to develop a joint vision for the school and through a process of working together to promote mutual respect and understanding. Many of the unresolved issues and questions that arose in the context of this research could then be explored through a training programme including:

- hopes and fears, attitudes and values
- the complementary roles of parent and teacher and the nature of professional authority as it relates to schools and the teachers
- a shared understanding of the importance of parental involvement in the school including parental involvement in decision-making and policy development
- strategies to improve communication between the established structures and the education partners within the school community

Fullan (2004), provides a model for change and development which he suggests teachers and organisations must attend to and develop if they are to be successful.

Five core themes, or capabilities must be developed including: moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing and coherence making (Preface, xiv). The research work of Fullan and others could

provide a framework for the development of the implications for policy of this research outlined in Section 7.7.

The data from this research supports Hypothesis 3.

7.5 The Research Problem

The central question of this research seeks to establish

whether the aspiration of partnership as espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications is being realised through the process by which parents are currently consulted in the context of school development planning.

Consultation with parents in the school development planning process represents a system reform, which is encouraging a more centralised role for parents in education and symbolises a move towards more participative decision-making and planning within schools. In seeking to understand and extend knowledge with respect to systems change, complexity theory as outlined by Fullan (2003), and referred to previously in Chapter Six, provides a useful framework. In the context of the research problem central to this research, policy makers had a *moral purpose*, and were acting with the intention of making a positive difference. Their *moral purpose* in the context of this research is the aspiration of partnership, as espoused in the *Education Act 1998*. Through the process of school development planning and the engagement of the whole school community, the potential is there to develop *quality relationships*.

Quality relationships result from the creation of ‘communities of interaction around these ideas’ (Fullan 2003, p.23). He also suggests that ‘if social interaction converts information into knowledge then sustained interaction produces wisdom.’ (Fullan 2003, p.47). To date the process of consultation in the case study schools has not however, been informed by *quality knowledge*. The third set of ‘social attractors’ is quality ideas: knowledge building, knowledge sharing and constantly converting

information into purposeful knowledge use (Fullan 2003, p.35). Quality information, could emanate in this instance from the development of ‘communities of practice’ or field-based pilot projects, which would involve whole school communities in school development planning and review. These pilot field-based projects must be supported by training opportunities which focus on understanding the change process to help the school community become more explicit about their change strategies and develop action plans relating to partnership in practice. The work of Fullan 2003, 2004 and others (Hoban 2002, Morrison 2002), relating to the theory of change, provides a model for a way forward in the development of partnership between parents and teachers in school development planning. This model or framework is explained further in Section 7.8.

Table 7.1: The Paradigm of Change - Implications for Policy and Practice

‘Social Attractors’*	Process	Development
Moral Purpose	<i>Education Act 1998, Section 21, The School Plan</i>	A Whole School Approach
Quality Relationships	School Structures – Board of Management, Parents’ Association	Consultation with the Partners in School Development Planning
Quality Knowledge	Training / Support – Understanding Change, Partnership	Pilot Projects Involving Whole School Communities and Review

* Originally strange attractors in chaos theory, Fullan 2003, p. 23

It is evident from data obtained in this research and outlined in Chapters Four to Six that while progress has been made with respect to consultation with parents in the development of the school plan, the aspiration of partnership as espoused in the *Education Act 1998* and in Department of Education and Science policy guidelines, circular letters and publications remains elusive for many school communities. The implications of the research to the body of knowledge and recommendations for policy and practice are outlined in Section 7.7. The three headings which have

been informed by complexity theory social attractors, as described by Fullan (2003):

- Moral Purpose – The School Plan – A Whole School Approach
- Quality Relationships – School Structures – School Development Planning
- Quality Knowledge – Training and Support – Pilot Projects and Review

provide a framework for planning and strategic thinking with respect to developing and enhancing strategies to engage parents in the process of school development planning.

7.6 Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

7.6.1 The Context of Change

This research seeks to review an aspect of educational reform. This reform reflects a move towards a partnership model in school management and decision-making. The School Development Planning Initiative – Primary is an important initiative aimed at facilitating and influencing the introduction and management of change at individual school level. The initiative affords school management an opportunity and a challenge to involve the main partners in the system in this planning exercise. Because, as pointed out in the introductory section of the thesis, this represents a new departure in consultation at local school level, the research seeks to track the implementation of this policy and analyse the degree to which the consultation process has developed some four or five years after the introduction of school development planning.

Implementing new policies is a slow and complex process. Principals and teachers are coping with the ever increasing pace of demographic, social, economic and technological changes and the demands those changes are making on their capacities to adapt personally and professionally. In Ireland, significant imposed change has become a pressing and immediate feature of working lives of teachers and principals.

The implementation of the 1999 Curriculum, the introduction of information and communication technology, the integration of pupils with special educational needs and initiatives providing support to the economically, socially and educationally disadvantaged - these are just some of the changes which teachers and principals are addressing. Within the context of school planning it must be remembered that the *Education Act* requiring school management to prepare a school plan was enacted in 1998 and the national support initiative School Development Planning Initiative – Primary established in September 1999. Data outlined in Chapters Four, Five and Six of this research indicates significant progress towards more parent-participative whole-school planning in certain aspects of school planning. In this context teachers are commended for their openness to engaging with parents, particularly in the context of certain organisational policies and policy relating to aspects of social, personal and health education. Bastiani (1998, p.6) writing about teacher-parent relationships and increasing demands on teachers states:

...a number of policy and discussion documents have emerged, in which uplifting rhetoric about 'partnership' is tempered by strong reservations about increasing demands on teachers beyond reasonable limits.....

Schools are very busy organisations, with, as pointed out in research such as Hargreaves and Hopkins (1991), most of the energies of staff directed on maintenance, leaving limited time and opportunity for development. In these circumstances, it is to be expected that progress will be gradual and incremental, at best.

7.6.2 The Nature of Partnership

The concept of partnership and the process of consulting with stakeholders is a rather recent development in education systems, arising as outlined in Chapter Two, from school effectiveness and school improvement research findings. An analysis of

definitions of the term 'partnership' provides as described in Chapter One, some broad principles to be considered when guidelines on how partnerships might be managed at local school level are being developed.

These include:

- the importance of parents and teachers having opportunities to dialogue and to share their unique insights and experience of the child
- the need to foster partnership through such behaviours as collaborating, planning, communicating and evaluating
- a recognition of the professional training and expertise of teachers particularly in curricular areas and
- the necessity for establishing guiding ethical principles to assist parents, teachers and school management in promoting consultation in school planning and decision-making.

Within the parameters of the broad principles gleaned from an analysis of definitions of partnership, it is important to note patterns regarding consultation with parents in the development of the school plan which have emerged through this research. The following are some significant observations:

- The inclusion of the perspective of parents in aspects of school policy development is a very recent experience.
- Policy statements on partnership such as those in the Education Act (1998) and in Department of Education and Science publications and circulars are general in nature and do not provide a clear statement of how partnerships are to be conceived, planned and managed at school level.
- The implications of the nature of partnership such as, does partnership imply equality of partnership in all policy decisions, or are there some areas where particular partners have by virtue of their professional training and expertise and therefore an entitlement to a more significant contribution in such areas. Parents on the other hand, indicated at interview that they would like to know more about curriculum and teaching methods however, they are unsure of their role in formal curriculum development.
- Primarily the role of parents in education remains a supportive role with parents fund-raising for the school and supporting school events at the invitation of management and teachers. Many schools inform parents of particular school policies through school brochures and at induction meetings for parents.
- A variety of processes and procedures are used by school communities to facilitate consultation with parents, such as through a questionnaire to the general body of parents, parental involvement in working groups with teachers, the Parents' Association

reviewing a draft copy of a policy or Board of Management amending and ratifying policy.

- Good progress has been made by some of the schools in involving parents in developing policies such as the Code of Discipline, Relationships and Sexuality Education, uniform and homework policies. These findings constitute an excellent first stage in mobilising parents into the partnership process and could be built on in the next planning cycle in the schools.
- It is more likely that the view of parents is sought with respect to policies developed in compliance with legislation and Department of Education and Science guidelines and circular letters.
- Parents who were provided with the opportunity to engage with teachers in working groups to develop school policy, were very positive and enthusiastic about their experience. Significant outcomes from the process included the modification of the language in school policy to ensure accessibility for all parents and greater understanding, knowledge and interest within the school community with respect to aspects of the School Plan.
- This research indicates that relationships between the Board of Management, Parents' Association and teachers are under-developed.
- The lack of a home/school links policy and clear guidelines for communication and dialogue between teachers and parents can result in more formal, cautious relationships.
- Parents come to engaging with the school for a variety of reasons. This can result in difficulties in balancing the rights of individual pupils and the greater good of the majority of pupils.
- Training provided by the National Parents' Council has supported some school communities in the establishment of a Parents' Association and in sharing practice between schools. However, significant numbers of schools either have no Parents' Association or the Parents' Association is not affiliated to the National Parents' Council.
- Parents identified the leadership role of the principal as the most significant factor which facilitates parental involvement in the school.
- Inhibiting factors identified by parents include time, availability of parents, receptiveness of teachers to involving parents and parents' own experiences of education.
- Education legislation indicates that ultimate responsibility for promoting school development planning and consultation with parents in the process of development planning rests with the Board of Management. Data collated in this research shows that currently the main responsibility for engaging parents rests with the principal. This issue needs to be addressed.

The observations outlined above must be taken into consideration in the development of new approaches to ensuring that consultation with parents becomes an integral part of the process of developing the school plan. It must be recognised that building

genuinely productive partnerships is a long-term project. This process requires planning, review and the development of strategies for transforming what has been learned into more widespread practice.

7.6.3 The Establishment of a Consultative Committee on Home School Relations

The discussion in Chapter Six, shows that the main responsibility for engaging parents appears to lie with the principal, at a time when principals have been experiencing severe overload in implementing a plethora of emerging mandates, curricular and others, in addition to managing the school. Education legislation indicates however, that the ultimate responsibility in this area rests with the Board of Management. This research recognises that members of Boards of Management act in a voluntary capacity and have different collective skills and talents. They do not have the expertise to deal with the technicalities involved in school development planning, and may not have the time to attend training courses in this or other areas. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Science establish a committee representative of all interests in education to devise and publish guidelines on the promotion and development of good home school relations and to clarify roles and responsibilities in this regard. A number of issues have been identified in the context of this study which require further discussion and clarification if consultation between the partners in policy and decision-making at school level is to continue to grow and develop. They include:

- the nature of partnership and its implications, in particular the issue of equality of participation in planning and policy decision-making,
- a deeper engagement and understanding of the complementary roles of parents and teachers,
- concerns raised with respect to perceived encroachment into the professional domain of teachers and

- the involvement of the school community in review and evaluation.

School communities need guidelines to support them in developing a home school links policy so that recommended practice and procedure is clearly stated and available to all, as required. It is recommended that these issues be considered by a consultative committee representative of the patrons, national associations of parents, recognised school management organisations, recognised trade unions and the Department of Education and Science. This consultative committee should be established to facilitate a deeper engagement and discussion of the nature of partnership and the concomitant issues involved.

7.6.4 The Development of Field-Based Pilot Projects

School development planning is a strategy for improving learning outcomes for pupils. The quality of pupil learning should be the core focus in development planning activities. Partnership and consultation among the school community are important aspects of development planning. Schools themselves have a key role in the task of identifying existing good practice as well as areas for further development. A recent Department of Education and Science publication *Looking at our School – and aid to self-evaluation in primary schools* (2003), is designed to assist the school community in reviewing and evaluating the work of their school. A process of school self-evaluation described by MacBeath, (1999) considered what part teachers, pupils, parents and other groups could play in the production of their own frameworks and instruments for self-evaluation.

The process yielded important and illuminating insights. It confirmed experience from elsewhere that ‘stakeholders’ in schools welcome discussion and clarification of priorities as challenging, empowering and important in the context of their school’s development. (p.23)

This research describes evidence of increased awareness of the importance of

consulting parents with respect to aspects of school policy. The five-point scale outlined by Gordon (1969) and referred to previously in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2, describes parents as supporters, parents as learners, parents as teachers of their own children, parents as aides and volunteers in the classroom and parents as policy-makers and partners (in Bastiani, 1998, p.49). A small but increasing number of the parents interviewed have experience of the fifth point of the scale – parents as policy-makers and partners.

The theory of change suggests that *moral purpose* is a critical motivator for addressing the sustained task of complex reform.

If people believe they are doing something worthwhile of a higher order they may be willing to put in the extra sacrifices and effort. (Fullan 2003, p.34)

An analysis of the data gathered from the perspectives of the education partners in this research, indicates that further opportunities should be provided to facilitate Board of Management representatives, parents and teachers coming together to develop a shared vision for the school, such as would be contained in a mission statement, together with aims and priorities for the school. What is recommended is a similar process to that outlined in the *Management Board Members' Handbook* (2004), which encourages the school community to come together to develop a shared understanding of the ethos of the school

A schools' ethos is best expressed, helped to develop and enriched as a result of the continuing interaction between a shared dialogue on the core values of the school (involving the Patron, Trustees, Board of Management, Principal Teacher, Staff, Parents and Students) and the daily practices which endeavour to embody these values. (p.5)

This process could assist the school community in reviewing the work of the school and involve an audit of the schools' strengths and help identify areas for development and policies for review. To support this self-evaluation process it is recommended that the Department of Education and Science commit as an initial step to the

establishment of a number of field-based projects.

Systems change when enough kindred spirits coalesce in the same change direction.
(Fullan, 1993, p.143)

The purpose of establishing field-based projects is to identify, develop, monitor and evaluate models of good practice which in turn will provide *quality information* on procedures and processes for engaging the school community in school development planning.

Energy should now be put into transforming what has been learned into more widespread practice; and strategies need to be developed for moving good practice out from among a small band of enthusiasts into the mainstream parent / teacher population.
(OECD, 1997, p.59)

The setting up of field-based projects and the provision of support and training for school communities in the development of processes to engage parents in the development of the school plan will help ensure that *quality information* infuses interaction and that knowledge building and knowledge sharing means that quality ideas are informing action planning. Regular review and the ability to consolidate gains help develop in schools the capacity of school communities to become more explicit about their change strategies.

A training programme designed to support the development of *quality relationships* among the whole school community could focus on developing an understanding of key elements of practice in relation to stages in the partnership approach, as identified by previous research. “*Opening Doors: School and Community Partnership in Social and Political Education Initiatives*”, *Draft Guidelines for Partnership Development*, suggests five stages

- Establishing links
 - Building partnership
 - Partnership action
 - Review and evaluation and
 - Planning further action
- (Gowran, 2004, p.11)

This is a useful framework or guide for school communities engaged in the process of developing working relationships between the education partners.

To facilitate the process of establishing field-based projects, the following recommendations should be considered.

- (1) The field based projects should be set-up utilising the expertise and experience of the support teams of the national programmes School Development Planning Initiative – Primary and Primary Curriculum Support Programme.
- (2) The purpose of establishing field-based projects as stated previously is to identify, develop, monitor and evaluate models of good practice which in turn will provide *quality information* on procedures and processes for engaging the school community in school development planning;
- (3) The process could involve the support teams identifying and seeking the co-operation of a representative number of school communities serving urban, town and rural areas, together with schools serving designated areas of disadvantage who would agree to participate in a focused whole school review programme over a period of a school year. This research has identified a continuum of factors which could be taken into consideration in selecting school communities for participation;
- (4) The programme of training, review and action planning should build on models of good practice and experience within the system and work previously conducted by the national initiatives. The programme should include as outlined previously in this section aspects of the theory of change (Fullan, 2003), key elements of a partnership approach (Gowran, 2004) and school self-evaluation (MacBeath, 1999, DES, 2003);
- (5) School based planning days be allocated by the Department of Education and Science over a period of one year to facilitate the programme and Board of Management members, Parents' Association representatives and teachers invited to participate. It is acknowledged that a limited number of parents and community representatives may be in a position to attend, however strategies such as questionnaires, focus group interviews and information and communication technology could be used to broaden the consultative process.
- (6) Previous research (Senge, 1990) indicates that best results emanate from small focused efforts and so it is suggested that an audit is conducted involving consultation with the whole-school community, a small number of areas are identified and that a plan is drawn up to ensure school-wide development of them.
- (7) A process of review and evaluation is designed to facilitate a rigorous analysis of the field-based projects which would inform future planning for consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

It is important also to recognise that teachers should not be expected to be involved in all working groups on all development goals or priorities at a high level.

Teachers are more likely to view involvement as worthwhile if they participate selectively. (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1994)

This research recommends therefore, that a number of field-based projects involving schools of different sizes, urban and rural be established. These school communities should be supported to come to an understanding of the complexity of change and assisted in reviewing and evaluating the work of their school through the development planning process so that images of best practice are generated, grounded in people's experience. This is a model of an intervention which would strengthen and deepen consultation with parents in the development of the school plan.

7.8 Limitations

Chapter One Section 1.9 has previously outlined the limitations of the research due to its design. This section discusses other limitations that became apparent during the progress of the research. One parent (*Case Study 3, Parent*) interviewed commented on perceived differences in attitude of newly qualified teachers to involving parents in their classrooms. Another parent with children in the same school suggested that teachers who are teaching for a long time in the same school, know the families and community well and this helps them understand the difficulties some families have in accessing education better. Both of these parents have children in the school serving a designated area of disadvantage. In developing this research and in seeking further insights into teacher attitudes to parental involvement in school development planning issues such as age and gender might be considered. The teachers interviewed in each of the case study schools agreed to participate in the research. They were not selected with reference to any personal characteristics.

The parents interviewed in this research were, as explained previously in Chapter One Section 1.9, elected parent representatives and parents who actively support and participate in a range of school initiatives. The perspective of parents who were not actively involved in the sample schools was not included. Chapter Two detailed research which indicates that it is primarily parents who become actively engaged in the school who contribute to school planning and decision-making. It should be noted also, that no parents of children from the traveller community or parents of non-national pupils presented for interview. Given the changing face of Irish society and the significant increase in non-national pupils in our schools, future research in this area would need to include wider representation of the parent body.

Differences emerged in the focus group interviews in relation to patterns of parental involvement generally in schools. A number of those interviewed, both parents and teachers referred to greater engagement with the school when children are in the infant and junior classes. It was also noted that parents of pupils with special educational needs like to have regular contact on an individual basis with teachers. There was some evidence that there may be different concerns from parents in relation to aspects of policy depending on the age of their children. This arose particularly in the context of policies relating to health and safety issues. Further insights into this topic could be obtained from a study of patterns of parental involvement in school development planning taking school size, type and the age-group of pupils into account. Removing some delimitations outlined in Chapter One Section 1.9, together with those outlined in this section would provide opportunities for further research.

7.9 Concluding Comments

In reviewing this research it must be remembered as outlined in Chapter Two, that the concept of giving a voice to parents in the education of their children is still very new. Significant progress is being made. Since 1975, management of most national schools is shared by a Board of Management. In schools which have a Parents' Association the parents' representatives on the Board are *ex-officio* members of that association. The majority of school communities only began the process of developing a school plan since the enactment of the *Education Act, 1998*. Teachers are complimented for embracing the inclusion of the voice of parents particularly in the development of Codes of Discipline and in policies relating to health and safety issues. This study shows that some schools have made good progress in mobilising parents into the partnership which could be built on in the next planning cycle in the schools. The national initiatives – Primary Curriculum Support Programme and School Development Planning Initiative – Primary are phased initiatives and focused initially on working with teachers. There are signs that the focus is changing with the provision by the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary in the academic year 2004-2005 of training for members of Boards of Management as part of a pilot programme and the distribution of an information leaflet to parents on school development planning.

However, research relating to the process of change indicates that:

Change can only come and be sustained by a community, which has learnt to be autonomous, to develop and use its own resources. Outside inputs of materials and resources can be no more than a catalyst for learning by those already present who have ultimately to construct, control and sustain development.....

(Spring 1981 issue of the Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter)

There is evidence of increased awareness of the importance of including the perspective of parents in the school planning process and that some steps are being

taken to ensure that

the aspiration of partnership espoused in Irish education legislation and in Department of Education and Science circular letters, policy guidelines and publications.

is reflected in the School Plan. School communities are at differing stages with respect to consultation with parents, particularly in decision-making and school development planning. Fullan (2003), in commenting on case studies of schools in Toronto, York Regional and Edmonton, cites:

We have found that involvement of parents and the community is the most difficult, least developed aspect of school improvement (Edge et al, 2001, 2002, Mascall et al., 2001) (p.43)

The relationship between parents and teachers is subtle, complex and ever-changing. In Ireland recent reform of the education system has resulted in parents having a voice at both national and school level of the system. Parents have been given a wide range of statutory rights in relation to education. However, this research shows that, together with legislation and Department of Education and Science directives, a partnership approach to including the perspective of parents in the development of the school plan, requires regular opportunities for dialogue and interaction so that each can bring their unique insights and experience to the joint task of educating children.

What is needed is a more equal sharing of agendas, open dialogue between parents and teachers, and concerted efforts to value and encourage genuine collaboration and partnership. (Cairney, in Educational Review, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2000, p. 167)

APPENDIX ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE

1.1 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRINCIPALS

Name of School: _____

Name: _____

(You may omit this information if you wish to remain anonymous)

1. Please indicate the size of your school. (Please tick one)

1-4 teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>
5-9 teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 -14 teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 + teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Is your school serving a designated area of disadvantage under the Department of Education and Science scheme? (Please tick one)

Yes No

Was your school involved in the school development planning process prior to the enactment of the Education Act, 1998? (Please tick one)

Yes No

4. Do you feel sufficiently informed regarding the implications of current legislation on the school development planning process? (Please tick one)

Yes Unsure

Please explain you answer:

5. Has your school utilised the services of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme in the context of development planning? (Please tick one)

Yes No

Please give examples to support your answer:

6. Has your school utilised the services of the School Development Planning Initiative – Primary in the context of development planning? (Please tick one)

Yes No

Please give examples to support your answer:

7. Has your school a Parents' Association? (Please tick one)

Yes No

8. Please indicate which one of the following statements best represents the content of your school plan. (Please tick one)

The school plan in existence:

a) concentrates more on organisational issues and to a lesser extent on curricular matters

b) concentrates more on curricular matters and to a lesser extent on organisational issues

c) devotes equal attention to both organisational issues and curricular matters

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Which of the following statements best describes how policy is generally formulated in your school? (Please tick one)

a) The principal determines policy and outlines it to the teaching staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management

b) The principal seeks a consensus on policy at staff meetings. The Parents' Association and Board of Management ratify the policies

c) The principal delegates the development of certain policies post-holders who draw up draft policies, which are then presented to staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management

d) Policy committees including representation from the teaching staff, Parents' Association and Board of Management draw up draft policies which are then presented to the general body of teachers, parents and board members

e) Other (Please explain)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

10. The following are reasons offered for parental consultation on aspects of school policy. (Please rank them from most important (1) to least important (5))

- a) Commitment to democratic decision-making
- b) Awareness of parental rights and the law
- c) Ethical reasons e.g. School Ethos, Relationships and Sexuality Education
- d) Recognition that parents are the prime educators of their children
- e) One of the characteristics of an effective school is salient parental involvement

11. How are parents consulted in your school regarding the development of school policies? (Please tick **one**)

- a) Through the Parents' Association
- b) Questionnaire to all parents
- c) Working groups of parents and teachers
- d) Parent representatives on the Board of Management
- e) No formal consultation with parents
- f) Some combination of the above (Please explain)

12. How often have parents been consulted about the following policy issues?

- a) Mission Statement for the School
- b) Uniform Policy
- c) Code of Behaviour
- d) Enrolment Policy
- e) Pupils with Special Educational Needs Policy
- f) Homework Policy
- g) School Attendance Policy
- h) Other (Please name other school policies in the development of which parents have been consulted)

Not at all	Once	Each occasion policy is reviewed

- i) _____
- j) _____
- k) _____

- 13.** What process was used to draw up a policy for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) for your school?
Please explain

- 14.** What partners were involved in drawing up your Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy?
Please name

- 15.** Was the partnership process used in drawing up your Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy effective in your opinion? (Please tick one)

Yes No
Why?

- 16.** How does your school communicate its code of behaviour to parents?
Please rank the methods described in order from most frequently used (1) to least frequently used (5)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| a) Printed in homework journal/newsletter/school brochure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) Outlined at induction meeting | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) Circulated as part of the School Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) Policy brochure brought to homes by the home/school/
community liaison coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e) Policy brochure brought to homes by parent home visitors | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please explain your answer:

17. Do parents have a role, in your opinion regarding the development of policy in curricular areas? (Please tick one)

Yes
No
Sometimes
Please explain

18. Do you consider that involving parents in the development of school policies will ultimately benefit the children in your school?

Yes No
Please explain

19. Have parents attended any of your school based planning days?

Yes No
If Yes, what aspect of the policy were you working on?

If No, were parents invited to attend?

20. Which of the following statements best describes the role of the Parents' Association in policy formation in your school? (Please tick one)

- a) The staff draw up the draft policy in collaboration with the principal. The Parents' Association is then asked for input and reaction to the draft policy.
- b) A joint working group of teachers and parents draw up the draft policy which is then presented to staff and the Parents' Association to be discussed and amended as appropriate.
- c) The Parents' Association are currently not consulted regarding any policy in our school.
- d) We do not have a Parents' Association.
- e) A combination of the above (Please explain)

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Which of the following statements best describes the role of the Board of Management in policy formation in your school? (Please tick one)

- a) The Board of Management is represented on all working groups relating to policy development in our school.
- b) The Board of Management ratify policies drawn up by the staff and principal of the school.
- c) Board of Management input and reaction is sought in developing some school policy on organisational issues and in relation to curricular areas.
- d) The school uses a combination of the above (Please explain)

22. Listed below are enabling factors that facilitate partnership in school development planning (SDP).
Please rank from Highest Priority (1) to Lowest Priority (5)

Factors that facilitate partnership include:

- a) cooperative, well-motivated staff
- b) leadership of the principal
- c) encouragement of parental involvement
- d) collective ownership of school's aims and objectives
- e) respect for each others' roles as parents and teachers

Rank

23. Listed below are constricting factors that inhibit partnership in school development planning (SDP).
Please rank from Highest Priority (1) to Lowest Priority (5)

Factors that inhibit partnership include:

- a) lack of flexibility within traditional time limits
- b) partnership in SDP not regarded as a priority by staff
- c) lack of accommodation for example a Parents' Room
- d) teachers lack confidence in their relationship with parents
- e) lack of in-service regarding partnership with parents

Rank

Thank you for your patience in filling out this questionnaire.

Please use the enclosed pre-paid envelope to return the completed questionnaire to reach

**Anne O' Gara,
23, St. Fintan's Crescent,
Sutton,
Dublin 13.**

APPENDIX TWO: TOPIC GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

2.1 PARENT REPRESENTATIVES

- **How have you been involved in the school?** (Personal experience of partnership between parents and teachers)

- **Why did you get involved?** (Literature review - purpose)

- **What makes it easy to approach the school?** (Facilitating factors)

- **What makes it hard to approach the school?** (Inhibiting factors)

- **Experience of policy** (Curriculum / organisational policies)

- **Is there a home/school links policy?**

- **School Structures** (BOM, PA)

- **Training / Supports / Competence**

- **Broadening the consultative process** (Accessibility / availability other parents)

- **Awareness of rights and responsibilities under the law**
 - Discipline
 - Enrolment
 - School Attendance
 - Pupils with Special Educational Needs
 - School Aims / Mission Statement
 - RSE
 - Substance Misuse Prevention Policy
 - The School Plan

2.2 BOARD OF MANAGEMENT MEMBERS

- **Achievements proud of?**
- **Challenges?**
- **How have you become involved?**
- **What makes it easy to be involved in the school?**
- **What makes it hard to be involved in the school?**
- **Logistics** (How often meet? Attendance? Issues re membership?)
- **Current Priorities of Board** (Organisational / Curricular / Pastoral)
- **Board of Management and Policy** (Policy areas, Process, The School Plan)
- **Board of Management, Staff and Parents' Association** (Communication [eg. Parents on BOM and members of Parents' Association], Meetings - How often?)
- **Board of Management and Home/School Links** (Policy?)
- **Board of Management and the Law – Awareness of responsibilities under the law**
 - The School Plan
 - School Aims and Objectives
 - Enrolment Policy
 - Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying
 - Pupils with Special Educational Needs
 - School Attendance ‘ Statement Of Strategies re School Attendance’
 - RSE
 - Substance Misuse Prevention Policy
- **Board of Management / Training / Support - CPSMA**

2.3 TEACHERS

- **What makes it easy to involve parents in the school?**
- **What makes it hard to involve parents in the school?**
- **How are parents currently involved in the school?**
- **Should parents be involved in the school? Why?**
- **Strategies for developing home/school links**
- **Is there a home/school links policy? Would it be helpful to develop one?**
- **Parents and Policy** (The School Plan, Organisational / Curricular Areas)
- **Board of Management and The School Plan**
- **Parents' Association and The School Plan**
- **Supports** (PCSP and SDPI – Primary generally and their support or lack of support For Partnership with Parents)
- **Awareness of rights and responsibilities under the law**
 - Discipline
 - Enrolment
 - School Attendance
 - Pupils with Special Educational Needs
 - School Aims / Mission Statement
 - RSE
 - Substance Misuse Prevention Policy
 - The School Plan

APPENDIX THREE: CORRESPONDENCE

3.1 PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE

[Home Address]

8th January 2003

Re: Pilot Study - Postgraduate Studies

Dear _____,

With reference to our recent telephone conversation, enclosed the questionnaire we discussed. I would be very grateful if you could complete the questionnaire and return it to me at the above address (SAE attached). As this is a pilot study, there is an additional page at the back for your comments and observations. Please note the following on that page

- the length of time it took to complete the questionnaire
- the questions you considered ambiguous, if any
- the questions where the instructions were unclear, if any
- any aspects of partnership between parents and teachers in school development planning, which are not addressed in the questionnaire, if any
- and any additional comments.

Thanking you in anticipation for your cooperation and apologies for this additional demand on your time.

Yours sincerely,

Anne O' Gara

3.2 TO PRINCIPALS REGARDING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

[Home Address]

18th March 2003

Re: Postgraduate Studies

Dear _____,

I am currently involved in postgraduate studies in a private capacity in the Education Department of University of Dublin, Trinity College. The working title of my research is 'Perspectives on Partnership between Parents and Teachers in School Development Planning'. The main objective of the research is to ascertain whether there is a gap between the aspiration of partnership in school development planning as espoused in current legislation and the process by which parents are currently consulted regarding policy formation in schools.

The initial phase of my research has involved the development of a questionnaire for principals on the topic, a copy of which I have included. I would be very grateful if you could help me by completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to me (SAE attached). I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that your responses will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Nothing that you say will be attributed to you or your school in any communication to a third party.

The responses to the questionnaires will provide base-line data, themes and new knowledge, which will facilitate a more in-depth study involving interviews with the key partners in education in a small number of schools during the academic year 2003-2004.

Thanking you in anticipation for your cooperation and apologies for this demand on your time.

Yours sincerely,

Anne O' Gara

3.3 REMINDER TO PRINCIPALS REGARDING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

[Home Address]

25th April 2003

Re: Postgraduate Studies

Dear _____,

I wrote to you previously in March enclosing a copy of a questionnaire entitled 'Perspectives on Partnership between Parents and Teachers in School Development Planning'. Given the multiple demands on principals, it may not have been possible for you to take the time to complete the questionnaire prior to the Easter break. With a view to increasing the response rate in my research, I am writing to you once again, encouraging your cooperation. I have enclosed a copy of the questionnaire for your convenience. I would be very grateful if, by the 10th May, you would help me by completing the questionnaire and returning it to me (SAE attached). Again I apologise for this demand on your time.

I am deeply indebted to those who have completed the questionnaire. I hope that the research will contribute some insights in respect of practice in relation to parental involvement in school development planning in Irish schools.

Le gach dea-ghuí

Anne O' Gara

3.4 LETTER REQUESTING COOPERATION WITH RESEPECT TO THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

[Home Address]

14th January 2004

Re: Postgraduate Research – Partnership Between Parents and Teachers in School Development Planning

Dear,

Last March you kindly returned a comprehensive reply to my questionnaire in the context of the above research. I am extremely grateful. The results of the questionnaire are most valuable.

To validate and confirm these results it is necessary to look more closely at a sample of schools. A small number of schools were selected by an independent researcher and include your school. As a result I am approaching you for a further kindness. Would you be able to facilitate the following during next term February – April 2004 at some time suitable to you:

1. A focus group interview with some members of your teaching staff;
2. A focus group interview with a group of parents;
3. A focus group interview with members of the Board of Management.

Focus groups consist of a small group of people, usually between six and eight in number and the interview would take approximately forty minutes.

I would like to assure you and everybody that I meet that all data gathered will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. Nothing that emerges in them will be attributed to you or your school in any communication to a third party.

Le dea-ghuí,

Anne O' Gara

APPENDIX FOUR: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

CASE STUDY 2, TEACHERS

Attendance:

Facilitator and five teachers

Facilitator: Just to say first of all that I'm here in school with a group of teachers and we're going to talk about parental involvement in the school in general, people's understanding of the role of parents in education but also how teachers and parents can work together particularly with reference to school policy development, for the benefit of the children in the school Maybe initially if you'd like to give me any ideas you have in relation to what ways you feel that your school has been successful in involving parents.

Speaker 1: This would be from an economic point of view – fund-raising point of view?

Facilitator: Everything, anything.

Speaker 1: Well, I suppose the Parents' Association does a lot of work in relation to fund-raising for the school, every teacher involves parents in their own work and accommodate parents who come to the school and who just want to meet teachers and...

Speaker 2: One of the things I would just say here is in terms of literacy. A lot of children from the school would have very little background in literacy and so, lately I went to an Adult Literacy Training Centre and we hope set up this system to carry it all the way through so maybe if we could draw them (*parents*) in when it's non-confrontational and something that maybe we could work on from there so we'll see how that goes.

Facilitator: So parents are involved in this school in supporting the literacy development of their children and obviously funding-raising. What kind of things have they purchased from this, made a contribution to?

Speaker 1: Computers.

Speaker 3: Some of the money goes into the Board of Management funds and some of the money the Board of Management would use.

Speaker 4: What I would have said is that in 90 plus percent of cases, involvement with parents if you want any help, they are prepared to be supportive and they will be helpful...it's only a minority of parents that aren't supportive-I don't know if that's the fault of the school or the environment or a combination of both. But we would like them to actually come through on the promises they make...they tend to be...what you might label as more disadvantaged, even though it's not a disadvantaged area, there would be a small percentage of disadvantaged families, they're probably in the main the ones that we don't have enough contact with and that's where we could do with a home-school liaison teacher. It's not in the school; it's within the parish.

Speaker 3: We are probably at the bottom range of those who didn't get disadvantaged status a number of years ago, we probably would have been a disadvantaged school compared to some of the ones who are.

Facilitator: And I suppose in many ways if you look at the fact that you are now involved in the School Completion Programme, an intervention programme to encourage pupils to remain in school, which is one of the newer interventions and you have got some funding through Giving Children an Even Break (additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils), there is a recognition that you have a proportion of children who have needs.

Speaker 5: The Rainbows programme, which focuses on supporting children to cope with separation and loss, is operating here through teachers and parents so that is positive....you notice an improvement

Facilitator: And the whole issue of separation and loss is a big one...

Speaker 1: Are we here to talk about the Parents' Association and teachers or parents and teachers?

Facilitator: Both.

Speaker 1: I think that we tend to identify the Parents' Association with parents being more active and with the contribution they make in terms of funding sometimes, rightly or wrongly because the school is in debt. Other than that if we want opinions on policies or to make contact with the parents we do it through the Association. Also if we want to get feedback or something from the parents. There isn't an involvement in the school on an academic level at all, which I think is something that should be looked into. Easy enough at junior level but up the line, how do you get them involved? How do you get more parents involved at the academic level? Rather than all the time go through the Parents' Association. I don't know how but I do think there should be more involvement in what's going on in the school and how they can make a contribution and how we can handle that.

Speaker 2: We used to have classroom group meetings at the beginning of the year with parents and one thing I found about that is that some parents saw it as an opportunity of criticising a particular teacher's homework policy or whatever. We found them fractious, that sometimes a teacher was portrayed as unfair or was accused of something. If that could be worked better I think it was a good thing because you could set forth what they would like parents to do to support the curriculum and so on and that is a very good idea but there's got to be structure and the parents have to be told that it's not a time for individual cribs.

Speaker 5: It should be very early in the year, in September, not at Christmas.

Speaker 2: Some teachers found that it was a difficult experience if it wasn't chaired properly. It was a worthwhile time for teachers to explain - this is what I want to do, this is what I expect, this is what I'd like you to do at home to support that. They were very good, by and large but as said one of the main problems was that the children whose parents or guardians you need to see most, you just don't see and I

think part of that is if they've always got bad news from school they're not likely to turn up in a hurry.

Facilitator: And that actually leads me in nicely to what makes it easy to involve parents and what makes it difficult. Obviously one of the difficulties which has been expressed to me is their own experiences in terms of education or also their own experience of coming into the school if it is always bad news.

Speaker 1: Some of the time bad news can be (*the school*) continuously looking for money, more fundraising including letters, more brown envelopes (*which give the impression that*) all the school are looking for is money.

Speaker 5: It's a very small brown envelope by the way. It's annoying everybody.

Speaker 3: Communication-you're looking for people to do bag-packing

Facilitator: And what do you think makes it easy for parents to come into a school?

Speaker 4: The first thing is not having to work. There's two classes of parents I consider. There's the working parent and the stay-at-home parent. Now the working parents find it very hard to come into schools, which is fair enough and the non-working parents there isn't anything to bring them into the school. Maybe there should be something like a coffee morning, a literacy group, what we're teaching your child in maths next year, something that will attract them, to bring them in on a non-fundraising, non-negative, your child is in trouble again.....

Speaker 2: I was wondering in some of the schools, say in the Gaelscoileanna, Educate Together, there would appear to be, for good or for bad to be far more parental involvement, they seem to be able to get more parents in, doing stuff that isn't necessarily fundraising. They're involved in the running of activities. Could the rest of us learn maybe from that as well, how to get them on board, it's not begging and not confronting them, because some of them appear to have more of a parental input there.

Speaker 1: Well I respect all that, but a lot of parents care desperately about what happens to their children but they left school themselves at primary level and there's a definite barrier. Even having met some of the parents I've dealt with on the Parents' Association whom I thought, they would have been the ones who least needed to become involved and you could see the problem there, explaining things to parents. I think the Gaelscoil, the background, the people are more professional, if they bothered to choose a Gaelscoil they have a huge input. Once it comes to the academic, once you talk about school policy or academic, I think there's a barrier there for our parents.

Speaker 2: They are coming from their own experience, one of the things that I found interesting when I went to *the adult literacy centre* was some of the people who left school unable to read, felt the school was quite negative. Once they were reasonably proficient with reading, some of them were able to go back up to the school and talk about their children and that was a huge change. I've asked the centre to have one of the eighteen or nineteen year olds who'd have reading difficulties to

come in and speak to my kids who'd have reading difficulties and talk about reading as a life skill. I thought it was an interesting perception that they felt inadequate and when they were able to read, they felt far better about approaching the school.

Facilitator: What purpose do you see parental involvement fulfilling in the context of the way things are in the school?

Speaker 1: I know that when parental involvement was first talked about, I forget when it was in the eighties, there was a definite barrier and I think there is in a way still. We want them so far, we don't want them in our classrooms, telling us what to do or getting too close, being too well up, telling us - you didn't do Irish today, there is that fear, there's no two ways about it I think that we're in there, we're the professionals-that's what I feel anyway there is a bit of a barrier, bringing them too close - keep them fund-raising.

Speaker 2: We want them to be helpful on our terms?

Speaker 1: Get them at the beginning, it's like nearly having a classroom assistant in at times in one way and suddenly they might start making some recommendations, I still think in a natural way with professionals, with any professional body, bringing someone too close, they see exactly what you are doing.

Speaker 2: And that would be a philosophical debate as well, as how much will parents dictate the curriculum to the professionals who are actually at the core-face providing it. Where is the balance, the structure, could it be a case of individual parents coming in on an individual and saying I think Johnny should be doing this... Homework is a thing-some classes there you have a parent who thinks that the child gets far too little and other parents think that the child gets far too much. So as a professional we have to kind of balance that and take it towards the medium and it's an interesting debate as to whether the user should be the person who is dictating or whether it's the service provider.

Speaker 3: One of the dangers is coming with a chip on their shoulder for parents...trying to set the agenda for...

Speaker 4: I don't think there's any debate- I would draw the line at curriculum, curriculum is pursued by the teacher and that's the one area that parents should have no involvement in-none.

Speaker 5: Only in a supportive fashion for example, impressing upon the children and the parents the need for regular reading. The way I function is that reading is more important than anything else you do at night. And eventually it begins to click. And going to the library I often meet parents wandering across when we are going to the public library and they're very positive.

Speaker 4: But they are not setting the curriculum

Speaker 5: No, but supporting it.... The support here is phenomenal from parents, the atmosphere is just so rewarding, I get a marvellous buzz.

Facilitator: Parents are involved in aspects of the curriculum, S.P.H.E. is an aspect of the curriculum and parents are involved with R.S.E. and drugs awareness

Speaker 4: But they're not setting it,

Speaker 5: But, they're very good for attending....when you have their co-operation, you get almost 100%.

Speaker 2: In terms of the world outside, people are working in the workplace and so on, people can see, should there be some consultative process for input from parents as to what the curriculum might be?

Facilitator: They were represented on all the NCCA (*National Council for Curriculum and Assessment*) working groups in relation to drawing up the curriculum.

Speaker 3: Whether they were represented is another thing.

Speaker 1: I would question as a parent myself to the teacher that I might rightfully suggest; I think there's too much time spent on Irish, I think there should be a European language. Why shouldn't a parent have an input on that? That maths you're doing is outdated! I can see as a parent of fairly well up children, if the taxpayer is paying, it's their children, they might have greater knowledge than we have.

Speaker 3: So let them make their representations.

Speaker 1: Yeah but you said they shouldn't have any input.

Speaker 3: If you're not happy about chapter 7 of the maths book, what can you do about it...that's what I'm saying. The curriculum has been set. Drawing up that curriculum, all the partners were consulted, all the partners made representations.

Speaker 1: But you don't think they should have any influence.

Speaker 3: I'm talking about within the school. I have a curriculum which I follow in my classroom and that's between me, the principal of the school and the Department and nobody else has an input into that because it has been set.

Speaker 2: What about differentiation for pupils with special educational needs?

Speaker 4: We would do that, ourselves on a professional basis. I can't expect children with an IQ of 79 or whatever to do as much in a particular subject as a kid with an IQ of 120, or a kid who's getting good support at home or kids who are out on the street all night and getting no support at home. You have to differentiate, that's a professional teacher's role to differentiate.

Speaker 2: Would a parent not approach you and say my child is finding this too hard, do they not have a right to do that?

Speaker 4: Of course they have. That's implementing the curriculum.

Speaker 1: And if a parent arrived having read the curriculum and said I notice you haven't done any history or you only did one chapter of geography and I notice you spent a lot of time on that other subject. Do parents not have a right to do that?

Speaker 4: That's not an input, that's a criticism.

Facilitator: Do you feel that on your school-based planning days in relation to the curriculum or other aspects of the curriculum that there would be any role for parents?

Speaker 4: Let's say for example take history. We're going to plan, do in-school planning in history. In what way could parents get involved in that?

Speaker 5: A special study of the First World War, someone with a fascination for the First World War could give an input

Facilitator: Moving on then. In the school itself, is there a home-school link policy?

All: No.

Facilitator: No, I know you link in a wide range, because I've seen it whereby you look at say for example information to parents, dialogue with parents, parental involvement in aspects of say I.T. or the library or things like that and then fundraising or whatever, so that it can be laid out as a policy. Would you think it would be helpful to actually have one?

Speaker 4: Well I suppose as you said there probably is one really, it's there. There probably is a policy; a policy has evolved even if we don't call it that. I think there is a policy there in that sense.

Speaker 2: It might be worth our while - see can we draw in more parents on a non kind of confrontational basis where they just don't come in when Johnny's in trouble again. Might be interesting, seems to have worked out well in some schools where the reluctant parents come in for a coffee and a chat once they're in the door a few mornings it might be easier to approach them. Or how to approach people who aren't too involved in the school to see if there was some way to draw them into the school. It's an idea that might be more successful in contact with parents.

Speaker 1: We had coffee mornings before but if you don't have anything for them to do...

Speaker 3: The interesting thing there is that it was the Parents' Association who were meeting with them. I don't think they got any teacher to help them with that.

Speaker 4: There are people who have a problem coming to school, there's no such thing as a free coffee morning. What's the bottom line here?

Speaker 2: Help your child with English or whatever, it's possible that if you've a coffee morning help your child with maths or whatever you might get some more parents if you send the word out.

Facilitator: I have seen practical maths in the classroom, even in senior classes where it's so much more difficult for children to use concrete materials where it's parents who have been trained in schools to help out. How did you find the school based planning days and having parents involved?

Speaker 4: We actually did have parents in on one particular day for discipline.

Speaker 5: It was fabulous.

Speaker 4: Discipline and enrolment policy.

Speaker 5: Very, very productive

Speaker 1: And what about the curricular areas?

Facilitator: Well you have both. School plan, the school plan is the organisational and the curriculum. So you have them in to discuss organisational issues. Discipline, but not as yet in relation to...? How do you find curriculum planning generally?

Speaker 2: Overloaded. The last time we were trying to work on a school plan for three subjects. I just began writing up a policy on spelling, but there's an enormous amount of work. It's staggering the amount of stuff you have to do, so I'd prefer if there's a better structure that if they (*the school development planning facilitators*) came along one day and said today we're going to deal with reading or whatever, then you can sub-divide it, but you are put into groups to discuss things and you come back...It's just not structured enough, there's so much involved. It should have been staged maybe over several years so that maybe one year they're going to do writing in English or whatever, I mean they can take up weeks on end. I personally would feel that they're way overloaded and unstructured.

Speaker 4: In fairness now the first day this year, that was only meant to be a review anyway, we weren't supposed to come out with a plan at the end of the day. I think maybe people were trying to be too productive in too short a time.

Speaker 2: That's the thing about it not being structured, this day we'll only tackle certain areas.

Speaker 4: I do take your point that there is a huge amount of time needed in all the sub-areas in each curriculum area.

Facilitator: And in that context the subjects that you've been working on like Maths, English and Irish are vast. So, curriculum policies for the moment anyway you're devising as a group of teachers but then the organisational issues you have involved parents to date. The next question the Board of Management and yourselves as a group of teachers - do you meet the Board of Management?

Speaker 3: We have a social night at the end of the year. Every year there is a meal...

Speaker 2: And if there are fundraising activities we come across each other occasionally but other than that...

Speaker 3: And at the end of the sixth class...

Facilitator: The graduation?

Speaker 1: We don't really meet the Board. I mean, if you missed out on the meal you would not have met the Board of Management. We don't as such meet the Board of Management. This is only a new thing, us having a meal.

Facilitator: And in relation to the Board of Management and the policies that you draw up, I mean have they ever come back with amendments and adaptations?

Speaker 2: The Code of Discipline now, a few small amendments, the last night we were joined by teachers and parents, so that certainly seemed to work out.

Speaker 1: I don't know in previous years what the policy would be?

Speaker 3: There would have been a policy...to rubber-stamp it.

Facilitator: Say RSE would have gone to the Board, would it?

Speaker 4: I think it did. Everything went to the Board.

Facilitator: Health and Safety? Who drew up the Health and Safety policy? Would it have been yourselves or the Board?

Speaker 4: We did it. That's years ago. I was involved in it. I think it was based on the INTO template anyway, plus Health and Safety statements from either other schools or other organisations.

Facilitator: And that, would it have been just teachers or was it teachers and Board members and parents?

Speaker 4: There were parents involved all right? When was the Health and Safety Act?

Facilitator: In 1989.

Speaker 4: But in fact we reviewed it, that same day we had the organisational meeting with the parent's representatives and we amended it. So the parents were there, the other Board members were there and one of them volunteered to re-type the amendments.

Facilitator: The next topic is the Parents' Association and the staff. Do you have any formal meetings with them?

Speaker 2: We see them when they are in here raising money but we never really have meetings....

Facilitator: And in relation to the money that they raise, do you make suggestions to them or is it through the Board, the teachers or the Board?

Speaker 2: Both. The principal is the main conduit, he liaises with staff members so he's the lynchpin really.

Speaker 3: If they were running an event they might ask the teachers.

Speaker 4: They might say we have X amount of money to spend-what are the priorities?

Speaker 1: In relation to policy, the Parents' Association link with the wider body of parents...minimum contact but there was contact.

Facilitator: But they have sent a questionnaire out to all parents. So that there are efforts to try and engage the wider parents' body

Speaker 4: There's always efforts to engage everybody. I honestly don't know what the response rate, is but everybody gets a copy of the draft policies

Speaker 5: Parents get bombarded with stuff so there's a lot of positive efforts.

Speaker 2: The interesting thing this year was that we had to send out an appeal to get a male member on the Board of Management because a lot of parents didn't turn up to the initial meeting. We had no male as a candidate so we had to appeal to the parish.

Facilitator: But then you got four. They had to have an election. I thought that was very positive.

Speaker 2: The interesting thing was initially the response was such that the men weren't putting themselves forward, we were appealing for representation and we had to go out and almost beg them to get involved. So that tells a story in itself too.

Speaker 3: The number voting in fairness was high which is a positive indication.

Speaker 5: But you find absolutely no difficulty, just something that came into my head, if you're going away on holiday for example an overnight, no problem getting parents to come along with you. The swimming club the same thing, parents are very, very supportive.

Facilitator: And your own experience of the School Development Planning Support facilitators and the Primary Curriculum Support Team. Have they in any way focused or encouraged the school to be inclusive of parents in school planning and in the school curriculum? Has it ever come up or has their focus been primarily to inform you how you can work together as teachers and as a staff, rather than naming involvement of the Board or the Parents' Association?

Speaker 1: Focus has been on teachers

Speaker 5: I'm racking my brains to think which probably means no encouragement to involve parents.

Speaker 2: I don't remember them explicitly mentioning parents. But I don't think that they ever alluded to the fact that you should be involving parents as much as you can

Speaker 1: Just sorry on the involvement of parents in policy...they would be very much aware of discipline, the stories going home, I'd say they were looking for more punitive sanctions

Speaker 2: As long as their children weren't involved

Speaker 1: And that it would be followed up and that it would be seen to be done.

Facilitator: And I suppose in that way it is about developing an understanding that procedures need to be put in placeJust looking then at rights and responsibilities under the law, what policy do you feel that the school is obliged now under the law to engage with parents at some level

Speaker 1: Well they have to be engaged in anti-bullying policy.

Speaker 5: If there's any hint of abuseat home...

Facilitator: And the RSE. What about children with special needs?

Speaker 2: Consulted with.

Speaker 4: It is done on an individual basis. Are you speaking in a general sense as well?

Facilitator: In the context of the enrolment policy? Assessments? Attendance?

Speaker 3: In relation to attendance, the twenty days obligation is explained. I don't know to an extent, if it's involvement or making them aware. They must provide us with an excuse. Twenty days, if you take them (*the children*) off on holiday. We're covering ourselves. I don't think there's any input.

Speaker 5: Twenty days and if it's looking tight, then they're warned and...

Speaker 3: I don't think it's fair the first time you have to inform them, give them the right to know. Give them the option of not taking their holidays. But twenty days, the middle of the year, parents already have misguidedly booked holidays, I thought that was very unfair. But all you can do is inform them. They're not having any input there. The legislation is there. We would make them aware and educate them on it. Because of legislation and that, that's it, tough luck.

Facilitator: I suppose one aspect of that Education Welfare Act is the requirement to draw up a statement of strategies in relation to school attendance. That's what schools are beginning to do now. What about the school mission statement and the vision?

Speaker 3: The whole school enrolment policy has to be updated I think. We have our mission statement and ethos. It all has to be reviewed again.

Speaker 4: Originally when that was drawn up that would have been put to parents. It was sent out to every parent in a ballot and they were asked for their comments. We probably didn't get that many back.

Speaker 5: And that is quite recent.

Speaker 2: Somebody should question the extra burden on the principal because they're into a lot of sending documents home and tabulating the results. It just strikes me in terms of administration, I'm not sure if the Department is aware, but it's an extra burden on the principal because the legislation does require someone to feed back the information. Are the Department making provision for that if they want more parental involvement?

Speaker 1: It may require qualified people to be employed ...like with the Health and Safety Authority there are officers.....

Speaker 5: Another barrier can be the lack of numeracy in parents or lack of literacy. I think less of that is occurring. The parents I'm dealing with at the moment are a lot more confident than they were a decade ago certainly.

Speaker 1: I think at the moment a lot of parents are finding that school is becoming more formal and codified and that in some ways in the sense we're talking about legislation, attendance, that's it, nothing got to do with me, the law says twenty days, the law says I can enrol my child this is the school policy, I'm obliged under the Welfare Act to have a school policy, where is the section *Section 29*, if you don't like it you can appeal. But the whole thing has become codified and formalised which is great security for us in a way, but I say I don't agree with this but this is the Welfare Act and I often wonder do they perceive the school as becoming a little bit more professional but there must be a lot of parents...I know a lot of them were annoyed when letters went out about the twenty days. By the way nothing was done about it

Speaker 2: You just want to standardise ...

Speaker 1: Yeah but the whole thing is becoming codified and formalised and I'm delighted, with the legislation

Speaker 2: Yeah but that's the way society is going they realise that...

Speaker 5: Yeah but it is unfortunate that in the school which was accessible...

Speaker 2: Yeah but I would still say that in comparison to post-primary schools, primary schools are very approachable that people can come up basically at any time, chat to you

Speaker 3: And the Parent-Teacher meetings, they're becoming formalised too, ...you got your day, you got your time, that's what the Minister wants

Speaker 5: There is a danger it's going to go like that...

Speaker 4: I want to come in and say, this that, parent-teacher meetings are very well attended, there's only a handful in the whole school that don't actually come to the meetings. Now they might not all come at the designated time but we have always accommodated them to come, every parent. I won't accommodate them any more because.....

Speaker 1: You won't accommodate them any more?

Speaker 4: There is legislation is there now, I don't agree with it, I'll tell them it's the Ministers fault

Speaker 5:so that is how we build bridges to the community.....

Speaker 4: We built the bridges, it's other people knocked them down, speaking to the parents I do notice a lack of self-esteem in a lot of them, a lack of academic ability and that's where you see it, you have a child and you wonder why is this child not progressing, you meet the parent and you know. It's very important to meet the parents and the one time you're almost guaranteed to meet them is the Parent-Teacher meeting. They may not come to the class meeting, they may not come to the discipline, the fundraising, whatever meeting is organised, but they almost invariably come up to the Parent-Teacher meeting.

Speaker 4: I have noticed a slight increase in confidence and in education and

Speaker 5: Their interest in the reading level of the children, they're delighted and that's happening to an increasing degree.....

APPENDIX FIVE: CASE STUDIES – SUMMARY TABLES 5.1-.53

5.1 OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY 1 – TABLE 5.1

	Board of Management	Parents Interviewed	Teachers Interviewed
Engagement with the school	School finance, accommodation, maintenance	'We just help out whenever we can', not affiliated to NPC	Parents support activities at the invitation of teachers
Engagement with SDP	Very recent, limited experience	Very recent, limited experience	Since <i>Education Act, 1998</i>
Awareness of implications of the law	'not up to speed'	School attendance – 'twenty days', enrolment, Code of Discipline	Parents entitled to see all policies; consultation with parents certain policies eg. Code of Discipline
Training and support	Have attended no training; Handbook for BOM members 'hard to follow'	Not affiliated to NPC, one parent attended one day	PCSP and SDPI – focus on teachers identifying planning needs & action plans
Purpose of involving parents		Responsibility to be involved, know what is going on, get to know teachers	Parents primary educators; caution 'the line isn't crossed' by parents
Process of School Development Planning	Amend and ratify certain policies only	Consulted if 'big issue' comes up	Teachers draw up policy and in certain instances present it to the PA and BOM for amendment and ratification
Specific policy areas developed	Budget plan Health & Safety Admissions Anti-bullying Code of Discipline English	Anti-bullying, given a copy of the school rules	Recently BOM and PA are given copies of draft policies for comment
Structures – BOM, PA	Meet more regularly now, BOM and PA 'there is a divide'	No formal contact with BOM, two parents on BOM	Principal and teacher on BOM, principal is link with PA
Relationships – facilitating factors	Atmosphere in school, attitude of teachers, open-door policy, small school	Atmosphere in school, attitude of teachers, open-door policy, small school	Easier at infant level, role of school secretary, easier if appointment made
Relationships – inhibiting factors	Lack of continuity from one BOM to next, communication BOM and PA	Appropriate time to discuss issues with class teachers, lack of progress on issues	Training and structures to manage relationships with parents

5.2 OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY 2 – TABLE 5.2

Engagement with the school	Experienced Board, wide range of activities, decision-making	Affiliated to NPC, Fundraising, classes and talks, library, computers	Support from parents 'phenomenal'
Engagement with SDP	A number of years	First involved in RSE 1995	Prior to <i>Education Act, 1998</i>
Awareness of the implications of the law	Policies being amended due to changes in law	Have a right to establish a Parents' Association	Good overview of implications of the law, parents and formal curriculum unresolved
Training and support	BOM members have attended talks and courses provided by CPSMA and others	Parents feel stronger as an association because have received training from NPC	Focus of PCSP and SDPI solely on teachers with no emphasis on the partnership process
Purpose of involving parents		'show an interest', 'know what is going on'	'helpful on our terms'
Process of School Development Planning (SDP)	Teachers prepare, committee formed, draft circulated, amendments welcome	Involved on school based planning day	Working groups lead to better listening, understanding and commitment
Specific policy areas developed	RSE, enrolment, health and safety, Code of Discipline Formal curriculum policies drawn up by teachers and ratified by BOM	Code of Discipline, anti-bullying, ethos, mission statement, homework, enrolment, RSE Not sure of role re formal curriculum	Mission statement, enrolment, Code of Discipline, RSE, health and safety, anti-bullying, school attendance
Structures – BOM, PA	More democratic management welcomed, regular communication with PA	PA meet regularly, good communication with principal and Board	Principal and teacher rep. link with BOM, principal link with PA
Relationships – facilitating factors	Leadership of principal, school climate	Leadership of principal, openness of teachers, PA welcoming	Working with parents
Relationships – inhibiting factors		Bad experience of school, teachers a different social class, self-esteem	Parents early school leavers, parents who do not connect with the school

5.3 OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDY 3 – TABLE 5.3

Engagement with the school	Single manager for some years prior to 2002, Practical, visible improvements to the school	No Parents' Association, back-to-work and community initiatives, HSCL activities	Parental involvement easier at infant level and with parents of pupils with special needs
Engagement with SDP	Very recent, since 2002	Recent through HSCL and community initiatives	Since <i>Education Act, 1998</i>
Awareness of implications of the law	Some awareness of policies required, limited awareness of consultative process	School attendance	Limited awareness with respect to health and safety issues
Training and support	No training	Community and HSCL initiatives	To date emphasis on teachers planning together
Purpose of involving parents	Encourage enthusiasm and a positive attitude to education within the community	Gives a positive message to children	To ensure continuity between home and school, in relation to complaints there needs to be 'a line they can't cross'
Process of School Development Planning	Ratify policies presented to the BOM	Some consultation on aspects of organisational and health education policies	Curriculum policy teachers only, working groups for named policies
Specific policy areas developed	Substance use policy, healthy eating, Code of Discipline	Substance use policy, healthy eating, Code of Discipline	Substance use policy, healthy eating, Code of Discipline
Structures – BOM, PA	No formal meetings between the BOM and PA or teachers	No elected PA, HSCL parental involvement	Teachers meet BOM at annual social function, principal, teacher rep. link with BOM
Relationships – facilitating factors	Attitude of the principal, role of HSCL coordinator, openness of teachers	Attitude of the principal, role of HSCL coordinator, new energy	Teacher awareness of need for regular dialogue with parents, attitude of parents themselves
Relationships – inhibiting factors	Climate which excludes parents	News which is always negative	Teachers who are defensive

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

Adler, L. & Gardner S., (eds.), (1994), *The Politics of Linking Schools and Social Services*, London: The Falmer Press

Ainley, J., (1993), Parents in the Transition Years in Hargreaves, A., Leithwood, K. & Gerin-Lajoie, D., (eds.), *Years of Transition: Times for Change*, Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Atkin, J., & Bastiani, J. with Goode, J., (1988), *Listening to Parents: An Approach to the Improvement of Home-School Relations*, Kent: Croom Helm Ltd.

Baker, J., Lynch, K., Cantillon, S. & Walsh, J., (2004), *Equality From Theory to Action*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Bassey, M., (1995), *Creating Education Through Research: A Global Perspective of Educational Research for the 21st Century*, Newark: Kirklington Moor Press

Bassey, M., (1999), *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*, Buckingham: Open University Press

Bastiani, J. (ed.), (1987), *Parents and Teachers 1: Perspectives on Home School Relations*, Berkshire: NFER-Nelson

Bastiani, J., (ed.), (1988), *Parents and Teachers 2: From Policy to Practice*, Berkshire: NFER-Nelson

Bastiani, J., (1989), *Working With Parents, A Whole-school Approach*, London: NFER-ROUTLEDGE

Bastiani, J. & Wolfendale, S., (eds.), (1996), *A New Agenda for Partnership in Education, Home School Work in Britain: Review, Reflection and Development*, London: David Fulton Publishers

Bell, J., Bush, T., Fox, A., Goodey, J. & Goulding, S., (eds.), (1984), *Conducting Small-Scale Investigations in Educational Management*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Bell, J. (1993), *Doing Your Research Project, A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education and Social Science*, (2nd ed.), Open University Press: Buckingham Philadelphia

Bernard van Leer Foundation, (1986), *The Parent as Prime Educator: Changing Patterns of Parenthood* (Summary Report and Conclusions), The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation

Bernard van Leer Foundation, (Spring 1981), *Newsletter*, in Paz, R. (1990), *Paths to Empowerment*, Author's Forward, The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation

- Borg, W. R. & Gall, M.D., (1989), *Educational Research, An Introduction*, (5th ed.), New York: Longman
- Catholic Primary School Managers' Association, (2000), *Management Board Members' Handbook*, Dublin: Veritas Publications
- Catholic Primary School Managers' Association, (2004), *Management Board Members' Handbook*, Dublin: Veritas Publications
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K., (2000), (5th ed.), *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer
- Coleman, J.S., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., Mc Partland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F. & York, R. (1966), *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics
- Coleman, P., (1998), *Parent, Student and Teacher Collaboration: The Power of Three*, California: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Comer, J.P., (1980), *School Power, Implications of an Intervention Project*, The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., New York
- Comer, J.P., Haynes, N.M., Joyner E.T., Ben-Avie, M., (eds.), (1996), *Rallying the Whole Village, The Comer Process for Reforming Education*, New York and London: Columbia University, Teachers College
- Conaty, C., (2002), *Including All, Home, School and Community United in Education*, Dublin: Veritas Publications
- Coolahan, J. (1981), *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration
- Denscombe, M., (1998), *The Good Research Guide, For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Devine, D. and Swan, D. (1997), *The International School Effectiveness Research Project, The Irish Study*, Dublin: University College Dublin
- Diggins, P., Doyle, E., & Herron, D., (1996), *Whole School Development, Taking Ownership of the Process*, Dublin: The Drumcondra and West Dublin Teachers Centres
- Dowling P.J., (1971), *A History of Irish Education, A Study in Conflicting Loyalties*, Cork: The Mercier Press
- Earley, P., (1994), *School Governing Bodies: Making Progress?* Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Lowe, A., (1991), *Management Research – An Introduction*, London: Sage Publications

- Edwards, V. & Redfern, A., (1988), *At Home in School, Parent Participation in Primary Education*, London, Routledge
- Farry, M., (1996), *Education and the Constitution*, Dublin: Round Hall Sweet and Maxwell
- Fullan, M., (1991), *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, London: Cassell Educational Ltd.
- Fullan, M., (1992), *Successful School Improvement, The Implementation Perspective and Beyond*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Fullan, M., (1993), *Change Forces, Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*, London: The Falmer Press
- Fullan, M., (2003), *Change Forces with a Vengeance*, London: RoutledgeFalmer
- Fullan, M. with Ballew, A.C., (2004), *Leading in a Culture of Change, Personal Action Guide and Workbook*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Furlong, C., & Monahan L., (eds.), (2000), *School Culture & Ethos: Cracking the Code*, Dublin: Marino Institute of Education
- Glendenning, D., (1999), *Education and the Law*, Dublin 7: Butterworths Ireland Ltd.
- Gowran, S., (2004), *Opening Doors: School and Community Partnership in Social and Political Education Initiatives, Draft Guidelines for Partnership Development*, Produced by the Poverty, the Curriculum and the Classroom Project, Curriculum Development Unit, Dublin: City of Dublin VEC
- Halstead, J.M., (ed.), (1994), *Parental Choice and Education – Principles, Policy and Practice*, London: Kogan Page
- Handy, C. & Aiken, R., (1986), *Understanding Schools as Organizations*, London: Penguin Books
- Hargreaves, D. & Hopkins, D., (1991), *The Empowered School: the Management and Practice of Development Planning*, London: Cassell
- Hargreaves, A., Leithwood, K., Gerin-Lajoie, D., Thiessen, D. & Cousins, B., (1993), *Years of Transition: Times for Change*, Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
- Hargreaves, A., (1994), *Changing Teachers, Changing Times, Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*, London: Cassell
- Hargreaves, A., Earl, L. & Ryan, J., (1996), *Schooling for Change: Reinventing Education for Early Adolescents*, London: Falmer Press

- Hargreaves, A. & Goodson, I. (1996), Teachers' Professional Lives: Aspirations and actualities. In I. Goodson & A. Hargreaves (eds.), *Teachers' Professional Lives*, (p.1-27), New York: Falmer Press
- Hargreaves, D.H. & Hopkins, D., (1991), *The Empowered School, The Management and Practice of Development Planning*, London: Cassell
- Hoban, G., (2002), *Teacher Learning for Educational Change, A Systems Thinking Approach*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Hopkins, D., Ainscow, M. & West, M., (1994), *School Improvement in an Era of Change*, London: Cassell
- Hughes, M., Wikeley, F. & Nash, T., (1994), *Parents and their Children's Schools*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation, (1993), *Discipline in the Primary School*, Dublin: INTO
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation, (1995), *Members' Handbook*, Dublin: INTO
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation, (1996), *Effective School Organisation*, Dublin: INTO
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation, (1997), *Parental Involvement, Possibilities for Partnership*, Dublin: INTO
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation, (1999), *An Approach to School Review*, Dublin: INTO
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation, (2002), *Discipline in the Primary School*, Dublin: INTO
- Jencks, C.S., Smith, M., Ackland, H., Bane, M.J., Cohen, D., Gintis, H., Heyns, B. & Micholson, S. (1972), *Inequality: a Reassessment of the Effect of the Family and Schooling in America*, New York: Basic Books
- Jowett, S., & Baginsky, M., with Mac Donald Mac Neil M., (1991), *Building Bridges: Parental Involvement in Schools*, Windsor: NFER
- Kane, E., (1995), *Seeing for Yourself, Research Handbook for Girls' Education in Africa*, Washington, D.C., The World Bank
- Kellaghan, T., (1977), *The Evaluation of an Intervention Programme for Disadvantaged Children*, Windsor: Berks: NFER Publishing Co
- Levine, D.U. & Lezotte, L.W. (1990), *Unusually Effective Schools: a Review and Analysis of Research and Practice*, Madison, WI: National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development

- Lynch, K., (1999), *Equality in Education*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd.
- Lynch, K., & Lodge, A., (2002), *Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation*, London: RoutledgeFalmer
- MacBeath, J., (1994), A role for parents, students and teachers in school self-evaluation and development planning, in K.A. Riley and D.L. Nuttall (eds), *Measuring Quality: Education Indicators – United Kingdom and International Perspectives*, London: Falmer Press
- MacBeath, J., (1999), *Schools Must Speak for Themselves, The Case for School Self-Evaluation*, London: RoutledgeFalmer
- Macbeth, A. M., Corner, T., Nisbet, S., Nisbet, A., Ryan, D. & Straghan, D., (1984), *The Child Between: A report on school-family relations in the countries of the European Community*, Commission of the European Communities, Studies Collection, Education Series, EEC
- Macbeth, A., (1989), *Involving Parents, Effective Parent-Teacher Relations*, Oxford: Heinemann Educational
- Macbeth, A., & Ravn, B., (1994), *Expectations About Parents in Education: European Perspectives*, Glasgow: Computing Services Glasgow University
- MacGilchrist, B., Mortimore, P., Savage, J., Beresford, C., (1995) *Planning Matters*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Mc Kernan, J., (1996), *Curriculum Action Research*, (2nd ed.), London: Kogan Page Ltd.
- Mahon, O., (2000), *The User's Guide to the Education Act*, Co. Clare: Clare Printers Ltd.
- Merttens, R. & Vass, J., (eds.), (1993), *Partnership in Maths, Parents and Schools: The IMPACT Project*, London: Falmer Press
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M., (2nd ed.), (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis*, London: Sage Publications
- Morrison, K., (2002), *School Leadership and Complexity Theory*, London: RoutledgeFalmer
- Mortimore, P., & Mortimore, J., (eds.), (1991), *The Primary Head, Roles, Responsibilities and Reflections*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Mortimore, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D. & Ecob, R (1988), *School Matters: the Junior Years*, Wells: Open Books, Reprinted (1994) London: Paul Chapman
- Munn, P., (ed.), (1993), *Parents and Schools, Consumers, Managers or Partners?* London: Routledge

- National Parents' Council – Primary, (1991), *Parent Associations – Making Them Work*, Dublin: National Parents' Council – Primary
- O' Buachalla, S., (1988), *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland*, Dublin: Wolfhound Press
- O' Connor, S., (1986), *A Troubled Sky, Reflections on the Irish Educational Scene 1957-1968*, Dublin: Iona Print
- O' Sullivan, E. and Gilligan, R., (1997), *No School No Future*, Dublin: Irish Youth Work Press
- Paz, R., (1990), *Paths to Empowerment: Ten Years of Early Childhood Work in Israel*, The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation
- Potts, P. (1982), What Difference Would Integration Make to the Professionals? In Booth, T. and Potts, P. (eds) *Integrating Special Education*, Oxford: Blackwell
- Pugh, G. & De'Ath, E., (1989), *Working Towards Partnership in the Early Years*, London: National Children's Bureau
- Reynolds, D., Creemers, B.P.M., Peters, T. (eds.), (1989), *School Effectiveness and Improvement, Proceeding of the First International Congress, London 1988*, Cardiff & The Netherlands: School of Education, University of Wales College of Cardiff, Great Britain and RION Institute for Educational Research, The Netherlands
- Reynolds, D. and Cuttance, P., (1992), *School Effectiveness, Research, Policy and Practice*, London: Cassell
- Rutter, M., Maughan, B., Mortimore, P., Ouston, J., (1979), *Fifteen Thousand Hours, Secondary Schools and their Effects on Children*, London: Open Books
- Ryan, S., (1995), *The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme, Summary Evaluation Report*, Dublin: Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick's College
- Sammons, P., Hillman, J. & Mortimore, O. (1995), *Key Characteristics of Effective Schools: A Review of School Effectiveness Research*, London: Institute of Education
- Sammons, P., Thomas, S., & Mortimore, P., (1997), *Forging Links, Effective Schools and Effective Departments*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Sarason, S.B., (1995), *Parental Involvement and the Political Principle: Why the existing governance structure of schools should be abolished*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Scheerens, J., (1992), *Effective Schooling, Research, Theory and Practice*, London: Cassell

- Senge, P., (1990), *The Fifth Discipline, the Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, New York: Doubleday
- Senge, P., Cambron-Mc Cabe, N. Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J. & Kleiner, A., (2000), *Schools That Learn*, London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing
- Smyth, E., (1999), *Do Schools Differ?, Academic and Personal Development among Pupils in the Second-Level Sector*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press, in Association with The Economic and Social Research Institute
- Stoll, L. & Fink, D. (1996), *Changing Our Schools, Linking School Effectiveness And School Improvement*, Buckingham Philadelphia: Open University Press
- Tizard, B. & Hughes, M. (1984), *Young Children Learning*, London: Fontana
- Tizard, B., Mortimore, J. & Burchell, B., (1988) Involving Parents from Minority Groups, In Bastiani, J. (ed.), *Parents and Teachers 2: From Policy to Practice*, London: NFER-Nelson
- Topping, K. & Wolfendale, S., (1985), *Parental Involvement in Children's Reading*, Kent: Croom Helm Ltd.
- Vincent, C., (1996), *Parents and Teachers, Power and Participation*, London: Falmer Press
- Walshe, J., (1999), *A New Partnership in Education, From Consultation to Legislation in the Nineties*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration
- Whalley, M., and the Pen Green Centre Team, (2001), *Involving Parents in their Children's Learning*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Widlake, P., (1986), *Reducing Educational Disadvantage*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press
- Wolfendale, S., (1992), *Empowering Parents and Teachers – Working for Children*, London: Cassell
- Wolfendale, S., & Topping, K. (Eds.), (1995), *Family Involvement in Literacy – Effective Partnerships in Education*, London: Cassell
- Yin, R.K. (1989), *Case Study Research Design and Methods*, London: Sage Publications

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Berliner, D.C., (1997), *Teachers College Record*, Volume 98, Number 3, Spring 1997, 381-416

Cairney, T.H., (2000), Beyond the Classroom Walls: the rediscovery of the family and community as partners in education, *Educational Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2000, 163-174

Conaty, C., (2000), The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme, *Journal of The Institute of Guidance Counsellors*, Vol. 24, Maynooth: Spring 2000

Cúram 5, (1989), *Journal of The National Parents Council - Primary*, Dublin: NPC - Primary, Summer 1989

Epstein, J., & Dauber, S., (1991), School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parental Involvement in Inner City and Middle Schools, *Elementary School Journal*, 91, 289-306, EJ 429061

Epstein, J., (1995), School/ Family /Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children we Share, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76, 701-12

Griffin, S., (1991), National Parents' Council 1985-1990: A Force for Change in Primary Education, *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Drumcondra Educational Conference*, Dublin: Teachers' Centre, Drumcondra

Hanafin, J. & Lynch, A., (2001), Money Matters: Poverty, Parents, and Educational Disadvantage, in *LEARN Journal of the Irish Learning Support Association*, September 2001

Hargreaves, A. (2001), in *Teachers College Record*, Volume 103, Number 6, December 2001, 1056-1080,

Hopkins, D. & MacGilchrist, B., (1998), Development Planning for Pupil Achievement, *School Leadership and Management*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 409-424,

Kariya, Tahehiko & Rosenbaum, J.E., (1999), Bright Flight: Unintended Consequences of Detracking Policy in Japan, *American Journal of Education*, 107, 210-30

Lysaght, Z., (1993), Partnership with Parents in Primary Education, *Irish Educational Studies*, 12, 196-205

MacGilchrist, B., (1995), School Development Planning, *Research Matters*, The School Improvement Network, Institute of Education, University of London, Vol. 4,

Mac Giolla Phádraig, B. (2003), An Examination of the Values and Perceptions of Parents and Teachers in Relation to Parental Involvement in School Policy Formation, in *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Autumn, 2003, 37-46

McGrath, D.J., & Kuriloff, P.J. (1999), They're Going to Tear the Doors Off This Place: Upper-Middle Class Parent Involvement and the Educational Opportunities of Other People's Children, *Educational Policy* 13, 603-29

Morgan, V., Fraser, G., Dunn, S. and Cairns, E., (1992), Parental Involvement in Education: How do Parents Want to Become Involved?, *Educational Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1

Murrison, E. & Webb, C, (1991), Writing a Research Paper, From the Series: *Writing Practice for University Students* (cited by University of Wollongong, accessed at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/current/results.html>)

Nic Craith, D., (2003), The School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) – Primary: Some Reflections on the Changing Role of the Teacher in Policy Action, *Irish Educational Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Autumn, 2003, 17-33

Susan Jacoby, 2005, Caught Between Church and State, *The New York Times*, January 19

Tizard, J., Schofield, W.N. & Hewison, J., (1982) Collaboration Between Teachers and Parents in Assisting Children's Reading, *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 52, 1-15

Wesselingh, A., (1996), The Dutch Sociology of Education: Its Origins, Significance and Future, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 17, 213-26

GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

Bullock Report, (1975), London: HMSO

Department of Education, (1968), *Ár nDaltaí Uile*, Dublin: The Stationery Office

Department of Education, (1971), *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, Lámhleabhar An Oide, Cuid 1

Department of Education, (1985), *National Parents' Council*, Circular Letter No. 7/85

Department of Education, (1986), *Constitution of Boards of Management*, Dublin: The Stationery Office

Department of Education, (1988), Circular Letter No. 7/88

Department of Education, (1991), *Parents as Partners in Education*, Circular Letter No. 24/91

Department of Education Explanatory Memorandum, (1991,a), Dublin: Department of Education

Department of Education, (1993), *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, Dublin: Department of Education

Department of Education, (1994), *School Attendance/Truancy Report*, Dublin: Department of Education

Department of Education, (1994a), Minister for Education, Position Paper on School Governance, Department of Education

Department of Education, (1995), *Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and Sexuality Education*, Dublin: The Stationery Office

Department of Education, (1997), *New Provisions Governing Boards of Management of National Schools*, Circular Letter No. 42/97

Department of Education and Science, (1999), *School Development Planning at Primary Level*, Circular Letter No. 18/99

Department of Education and Science, (1999a), Ministerial Announcement, 20th May 1999

Department of Education and Science, (2000), *School Development Planning*, Circular Letter No. 34/00

Department of Education and Science, (2000a), *School Development Planning Support Initiative - Primary, Annual Report, September 1999 - August 2000*

- Department of Education and Science, (2002), *School Development Planning*, Circular Letter No. 05/02
- Department of Education and Science, (2002a), *Guidelines for Developing a School Substance Use Policy*, Dublin: Department of Education and Science
- Department of Education and Science, (2002b), *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Department of Education and Science, (2002c), *Fifty Schools Report: What Inspectors Say*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Department of Education and Science, (2003), *School Development Planning Initiative, National Progress Report 2002*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Department of Education and Science, (2003a), Boards of Management of National Schools, *Constitution and Rules of Procedure*, Athlone: Primary Administration Section 2, Department of Education and Science
- Department of Education and Science, (2003b), *Looking at our School, An Aid to Self-Evaluation in Primary Schools*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1922), *Constitution for the Irish Free State, (Saorstát Éireann)*, Dublin: Government Publications
- Government of Ireland, *School Attendance Act, 1926*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1937), *Bunreacht na hÉireann, The Constitution of Ireland*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, *Adoption Acts, 1952 to 1998*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, *Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, *Programme for Action in Education, 1984-1987*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1992), Green Paper on Education: *Education for a Changing World*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1994), *Report on the National Education Convention*, Dublin: The National Education Convention Secretariat
- Government of Ireland, (1995a), White Paper on Education, *Charting Our Education Future*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1996), *Report of the Constitution Review Group*, Dublin: The Stationery Office

- Government of Ireland, (1997), *Education Bill, 1997*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1997a), *Education (No.2) Bill, 1997*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1998), *Education Act, 1998*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1999), *Primary School Curriculum*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (1999a), *School Planning, Developing a School Plan. Guidelines for Primary Schools*, Dublin: Department of Education and Science
- Government of Ireland, (1999b), *School Development Planning, An Introduction for Second Level Schools*, Dublin: Department of Education and Science
- Government of Ireland, (1999c), *The New Deal, A Plan for Educational Opportunity*, Dublin: Department of Education and Science
- Government of Ireland, (1999d), *Whole School Evaluation, Report on the 1998/1999 Pilot Project*, Dublin: Department of Education and Science
- Government of Ireland, (1999e), *Your Child's Learning, Guidelines for Parents*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (2000), *Education (Welfare) Act, 2000*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (2000,a), *Equal Status Act, 2000*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (2000,b), Department of Education and Science, *Learning-Support Guidelines*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- Government of Ireland, (2003), Department of Education and Science, *2001/2002 Statistical Report*, Dublin: The Stationery Office
- OECD, (1991), *Reviews of National Policies for Education Ireland*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- OECD, (1995), *Education at a Glance – OECD Indicators*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- OECD, (1997), *Parents as Partners in Schooling*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Plowden Committee, (1967), *Children and Their Primary Schools*, London: HMSO
- Powis Commission, *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland)*, H.C. 1870 xxviii pt.iii Primary Schools

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Race-Neutral Alternatives in Postsecondary Education, Innovative Approaches to Diversity*, Washington, D.C. 2003

UNPUBLISHED

Cannon, M., (2000), *School Development Planning in a Primary School: A case study*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, M. Sc. in Educational Management

Cluskey, M.S., (1996), *Parents as Partners in Education: An Equality Issue*, National University of Ireland, Dublin: Master of Equality Studies

Conaty, C., (1999), *Partnership in Education, through Whole School Development with Parent and Community Involvement: A Study of a National Initiative to Combat Educational Disadvantage - the Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme (2 Vols)*, NUI Maynooth: Ph.D. Thesis

Coolahan, J. (1988), *The Evolving Primary School System and Parents' Role Within It: Address to the Second Delegate Conference of the National Parents' Council Primary*, 21 May 1988

Cotter, E. (1997), *Facilitating School Development Planning*, Dublin City University, M.Sc. in Education

Mac Giolla Phádraig, B. (2002), *Models of Parent-Teacher Relationship and their Appropriateness for Irish Primary Education*, NUI Galway: Ph.D Thesis

Mc Eneaney, J.C., (2004), *School Retention – A Case Study*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, M.St. (School Leadership)

Mungovan, J. (1994), *The Board of Management of a Community School: A Case Study of Roles, Relationships and Processes*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, M.Sc in Educational Management

Nic Craith, D., (2001), *The School Development Planning Initiative – Primary: A Study in the Early Evolution of an Education Policy*, University College Dublin, M.Ed. Thesis

O' Connor, C., (2000), *School Development Planning in a Community College*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, M.Sc in Educational Management

O' Dwyer, A. (2000), *Effective Collaborative Partnership in Community Education*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, M.St. (School Leadership)

Perry, Chad, (1998), *A structured approach to presenting theses*. Available on line at <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/art/cperry.html>

Ryder, L., (2000), *Parental Involvement in a Second Level Community School, The Role of the Parents' Association*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, M.Sc in Educational Management

Starratt, R.J., (1994), *The Drama of Educational Leadership*, A public lecture given in Dublin, October 1994.

Tully, R., (2002), *A Critical View of the National Parents' Association for Vocational Schools and Community Colleges*, University of Dublin, Trinity College, M.Sc in Educational Management