

PE1730/A

Families Need Fathers Scotland submission of 28 August 2019

FNF Scotland works to support families where there are problems in sustaining meaningful parenting contact for children when their parents do not live together. The majority of those who contact us are fathers but approximately 20% of contacts are from mothers, grandparents, sisters, and new partners.

Where communication breaks down it is not only one parent whose parenting relationship may be stopped or minimised. The disruption is also likely to extend to all other members of that side of a child's family and heritage.

Even when parental contact is minimised or limited by agreement or court order to a pattern of alternate weekends and some holidays we have always seen engagement with a child's education as a crucial component of meaningful parenting. If a parent is spending little time or even no direct time with his/her children knowing what they are learning at school gives meaning, substance and content to their conversation.

It is part of parenting to know what this term's project is, what their favourite subjects are and, later on, what subject options they are considering for exams.

FNF Scotland has been an active member for a number of years with the Education Scotland Parental Involvement Working Group and now the working group revising the statutory guidance to the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

We published "Equal Parents", a user guide for parents who do not live together on how to establish a constructive relationship with their children's school in their joint interest of engaging with the children's learning.

The statutory underpinnings of that relationship are the 1980 Education Act and the 2006 Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act along with a number of regulations along the way.

We have reservations about the 2006 Act in respect of its creation of two classes of parent and therefore two streams of information they can expect about their children even when both have equal Parental Rights and Responsibilities. However, we have worked hard with parents and schools to use existing legislation to build relationships. It is generally accepted, including by the Scottish Government in its recently published Action Plan, that research shows that children do better in education and general wellbeing and relationships when both parents are engaged in their learning.

Our concern with home schooling is that it removes the legislative underpinnings of parental involvement and education and their associated benefits for the children at a stroke.

If parents living together make a decision to opt for home schooling than that is not our concern. However, where it is a decision made by one parent only without the agreement or even discussion with the other then it removes the rights of both the

other parent and the children to the policy objectives of parental involvement legislation and regulations.

It is explicitly stated in the legislation and the accompanying guidance that there are benefits to the children and the provider of education in engaging with both parents. It is similarly set out in the guidance to the 2006 Act that no parent has the right of veto over the relationship between the education provider and the other parent.

It seems to FNF Scotland therefore perverse that such a strong statement of the benefit of engaging with both parents should be allowed to casually disappear when one parent makes a unilateral decision to home school.