



HARMENY EDUCATION TRUST LIMITED

PARTICIPATION POLICY

The right to participation is underpinned by a range of policies and legislation including:

- The Children Scotland Act (1995)
- Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Protecting Children and Young People: The Charter

Article 12 of the UNCRC states, *“Parties shall ensure to the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age range and maturity of the child.”*

Within Harmeny, we are highly committed to: seeking the views of children; enabling them to participate fully in their care and education; and encouraging them to participate as fully as possible within their local and wider communities. We aim to work alongside parents and carers and encourage their participation in their child's education and care and their involvement in the life of the school. In addition, we have a collaborative approach to working with professionals from the key agencies involved in a child's life, under the principles of *Getting it Right for Every Child*.

Within Harmeny, we take pride in creating and maintaining a vibrant and supportive community ethos. Our highly skilled and committed staff group, unique natural environment, high quality learning and living spaces, and wide range of resources greatly contribute to this. In addition, the whole school and community initiatives we offer assist in developing a sense of involvement and engagement. Most important, we believe that children are more able to develop in a secure and happy environment, where they can build positive relationships and attachments with trusted adults.

The Shier Model of Participation is about enhancing children's participation in decision making. It is a model based on five levels of participation with three stages of commitment being identified at each level. This provides a sequential process to measure and plan involvement. This model will be embraced within the Harmeny Participation Strategy to further underpin the participatory work undertaken within Harmeny. This will provide a model to quality assure our participation and ensure development in this area is progressed.

We have a number of ways in which we endeavour to enable participation and engagement from children, families, professionals and other stakeholders, some of which are outlined below.

(1) CHILDREN

1.1 Care Planning and Reviews

Staff involve children as much as possible in care planning and review processes, providing opportunities for their views to be heard, both verbally and in writing, for example through the 'Having Your Say' and 'What Helps Me' forms. Children are supported to attend at least part of their formal reviews and Children's Hearings, with opportunity to talk with their Keyworker or another trusted member of staff leading up to or after these meetings.

1.2 Education

Under the principles of the Curriculum for Excellence, we seek the views of children in relation to topics they are interested in and offer a diversity of learning styles, which are engaging, creative, challenging and fun. We have a range of approaches, including technology, to assist children who require additional support, ensuring every child is as fully included and engaged in learning as possible.

1.3 Care

Children are encouraged to fully participate within their care environment. Within their cottage there are regular cottage meetings, they are involved in choosing menus, encouraged to think about looking after and developing their environment, are supported to develop skills through daily household tasks, and learn how to make different and safer choices around their behaviours and reactions to challenging situations. Children have regular one-to-one time with their Keyworker in order to build independence skills. They are encouraged to make choices in relation to a wide variety of leisure activities, both indoor and outdoor, and learn many new skills which will sustain them into adulthood. The opportunity to join clubs and youth groups within the local community is particularly encouraged around their talents and interests.

1.4 Harmeny Children's Council

Our full and active **Harmeny Council**, comprising representation from across the school and meeting regularly, allows the opportunity for children's views to be heard. Examples of initiatives, which the Council has led on have included: participation in consultations on children in residential care; revising and editing the children's brochure - 'My Book About Harmeny'; developing new systems in the school to support children raising concerns; designing the school uniform for the secondary provision; as well as influencing many other day-to-day issues. **Board members are invited to attend Harmeny Council and once a year children on the Council attend the Board, in order to share their views regarding the services provided.** Children's meetings are held within each cottage and issues raised at these can be fed back to the Harmeny Children's Council / and vice versa.

1.5 Who Cares? Worker

A *Who Cares?* Worker regularly visits the school, offering the opportunity for children to talk in confidence, to an independent person about any issues they might have regarding their residential school or family life. In addition, through our partnership work with *Who Cares?*, we have assisted their staff in developing their learning in how to communicate with and advocate for *younger* children, as well as run outdoor sessions, in preparation for groups of *Who Cares?* staff about to work overseas in developing countries. There is an on-going commitment from *Who Cares?* Scotland to include articles from children in Harmeny in their 'Speak Out' Magazine which is circulated to Looked After Children throughout Scotland.

(2) FAMILIES

2.1 Education, Care and School Events

Parents and Carers are fully encouraged to engage with their child's learning, with regular feedback and communication regarding their child's education, opportunities to meet their class teacher, attendance at weekly Children's Meetings, and an annual questionnaire. Reports on children's progress are also produced annually and shared with parents / carers and appropriate associated professional staff. Care and Education staff regularly communicate with parents and carers and support regular contact in a variety of ways. We produce regular Harmeny Newsletters, including the '*Harmeny Herald*', '*Harmeny Health*' and '*Education Newsletter*', which keep everyone who is involved with the school up to date with current news and developments. There are also various events throughout the school year, which parents, carers and their families are invited to, such as: Sports Day, Highland Games, Christmas Show and regular events run by residential cottages and the Day Service.

2.2 Parent and Carer Group

Over the years, parents and carers have become more and more involved with the life of the school and the Parents and Carers Group has developed and grown from strength to strength. This group offers the chance for parents and carers to regularly get together and talk about issues in common, support each other, and consider ways in which they can influence practice and policy – within the school and beyond. Examples of initiatives which the parents group have been involved in, include: the recruitment and induction of staff; the strategic direction of the organisation; making a DVD with the University of Strathclyde, called '*Working In Partnership With Parents*', and national debates on the future of the residential education sector.

(3) PROFESSIONALS

Harmeny is highly committed to working with all professionals within a child's life to ensure continuity and consistency in relation to their care plan, under the *Getting it Right for Every Child* and *Curriculum for Excellence* frameworks. We take very seriously, the importance of clear communication within the parameters of data protection guidelines and have high standards in relation to our professional practice. We maintain strong links with all key agencies, including social work, health, police, and other voluntary organisations, in order to ensure the child's needs are fully met at the right time for them.

We arrange speech and language, play and other specialist therapies for individual children, according to need. Where appropriate, children access specialist community services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and enuresis clinics. Meetings with these external professionals can be facilitated in the school if appropriate or at community bases. There are also very strong working relationships with the LAAC Nurse and local GP, Dentist and Optician, as we care for the holistic developmental needs of children. We also have a team of two Therapeutic Consultants, who provide invaluable, weekly consultation for staff and management.

We strive to build positive relationships with professionals in order to ensure positive outcomes for children – and wish to resolve any potential areas of conflict at the earliest possibility, in order to work effectively together.

(4) COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Children live and learn in small groups within Harmeny. We take a number of opportunities to come together as a whole school community, however, such as weekly 'Children's Meetings', Sports Days, Highland Games, Christmas celebrations, annual Burns Lunch, Health Promoting events and fun days.

Children are also encouraged to play a role within the wider community. They attend various clubs and societies external to Harmeny, ranging from Cubs, Brownies and Sunday School, to rugby, Judo, dancing and swimming lessons.

Pupils from neighbouring mainstream primary schools join our children for curricular events, including 'community days', with themes in past years including: Science, Africa, the environment and Fairtrade. Children from Harmeny may also attend a local mainstream primary school if they are being prepared for a return to mainstream schooling – and we have particularly strong links with Dean Park, Currie and Nether Currie Primaries, as well as Balerno and Currie High Schools.

The local community also plays a significant role within the school. Local sports clubs use our facilities, and corporate and individual supporters volunteer time and effort, working under supervision with the children on environmental projects.

We also work closely with the police as part of the risk assessment process for children, to ensure police involvement in children's plans, where appropriate. Work is undertaken to ensure children understand the positive role of the police and the local community officers have become a regular attendees at Harmeny events, as well as attending classes to discuss their role with children.

(5) INFLUENCING

As well as providing direct services, Harmeny believes that we have a role to play in influencing those in political power or those who have a responsibility for developing policy. Children and families have participated in consultations regarding policy and practice issues and, from time to time, there are opportunities to meet with local and national politicians, in order to 'tell their story' or raise key issues about resources.

We are committed to working alongside our partners within the residential school sector and beyond, in order to contribute to learning and influencing policy around special education and residential care. We are members of Educating through Care Scotland (EtCS) and through this group, have contributed in the past to consultation on strategic commissioning. We have been highly involved with the NRCCI (National Residential Childcare Initiative) and maintain strong links with CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland). We believe we have a lot to offer the sector, in relation to knowledge, skills and expertise and are committed to sharing best practice, which includes expertise in a range of evidence based theoretical approaches.

(6) FEEDBACK

We constantly strive to provide services of the highest quality and are always keen to hear from children, families and professionals about how these are of benefit and also how they can be improved. Comments can be made at any time, verbally, or in writing. There are opportunities to provide feedback at children's reviews, and to write articles for our Newsletters and our website. We also regularly seek the views of parents / carers and professionals through regular questionnaires and surveys.

(7) COMPLAINTS

Should a child, family member or professional be unhappy with any aspect of the service, we encourage them to let us know, so we can put it right. We have a Complaints Policy which clearly outlines: procedures for children, parents, carers or professionals, should they wish to make a complaint; how the complaint should be handled and responded to; as well as the addresses of relevant Care Commission regional offices, should an individual wish to make a complaint directly to the Care Inspectorate.

Policy Updated: April 2015