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To the Joint Committee on Education and Skills - Tuesday the 21st of March 2017

Opening Statement from 'The National Parents Council Post Primary'

Committee members,

The National Parents Council Post Primary (NPCpp) are grateful to the joint Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016.

The Constitution enshrines a parent's right to educate their child. It states that Parents are the Primary Educators of their children. The research shows that parental involvement in schools leads to better educational outcomes for our children. We believe that the proposed bill will create a more inclusive, open and transparent educational system.

Parents want the best educational system that enriches the student life and produces an individual confident that they have been well served and prepared for life as a young adult in their community. Thus every student attains an education that realises their full potential and contribute positively to society in their adult life.

We appreciate and support the positivity of the proposals in the Parent and Student Charter as it places students in the centre of school life and respects and values the role of parents in education. Under the Parent and Student Charter schools will develop listening culture and will actively look for input from parents in relation to school policies and plans. Hopefully this will include things like subject choice. Schools should be open about their performance and transparent around school costs. School costs cannot be a barrier to participation in free education system. Consultation with parents in regards to the cost of books, school uniforms and extra-curricular activities is very important.

Parents feel excluded from having input into the current educational system at secondary level. We want to be consulted on all aspects of our children's education and development and work jointly with schools management, staff and students on improving communication.

The majority of queries we receive from parents relate to guidelines around grievance procedures in post-primary schools. Parents are unsure about how to address problems and issues, parents are unaware of their right to appeal decisions and great number of parents who have engaged with us on this matter have described themselves as feeling alone and intimidated by the process. Parents are often afraid to raise an issue with their school fearing possible reprisal. We hope that more parental involvement will ameliorate problems, however if problems arise there needs to be a clear process to enable parents and schools to resolve issues locally together rather than having to resort to official procedures. Should a complaint escalate and be brought to the attention of the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman's office must be properly resourced in order to deal with the issue.

The ability for us to communicate effectively with all parents at a school is also a matter of serious concern and we feel strongly that every school must facilitate an independent communication conduit between the Parent Association and the parent body at that school.

The National Parents Council post primary welcomes the opportunity to be involved in the consultation along with students, school management bodies and staff to prepare guidelines for the Parent and Student Charter. Since the announcement of the Bill in December 2016 we have commenced a consultation process with parents through our Constituent Bodies. On Thursday we are going to publish a National Survey for parents of post-primary students on our website www.npcpp.ie. On 8th April we will host a free information event in St Tiernan's Community School in Dublin which will again provide parents with an opportunity to have their voices heard. We are looking forward to sharing the results of the feedback with the Department of Education and Skills and the Committee.

Thank you.

NPCpp – Working towards a better education system for all

National Parents Council (Post Primary) Limited.

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