

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

**The Role of Parent Managers in School Management  
Committees in Secondary Schools in Hong Kong**

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Doctor of Education  
School of Education  
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2006

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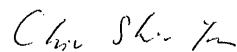


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## **Declaration**

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(Chiu Shiu Yim, Vincent)

January 2006

# **The Role of Parent Managers in School Management Committees in Secondary Schools in Hong Kong**

Thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Education, University of Leicester, 2006.

Vincent Shiu-yim CHIU

## **Abstract**

The thesis investigates the role of parent managers in school management committees in Hong Kong and explores the policy development and intentions of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in introducing the reform to enhance parent participation.

This study focuses on the impact of the reform and the match/ mismatch between the reform aims and the expectations of the parents. It comprises a survey of the role of parent managers in school management committees in government and aided schools and interviews with principals and parent managers in three selected schools.

The findings show that the reform has had little impact on the aided schools and there is strong opposition from the sponsoring bodies. There is also a mismatch between government aims and parent expectations. The government considers the most effective form of parent participation to be in school governance, while parents care mainly about their children's learning. Parents lack the knowledge, skills and the

time to perform the monitoring role and hold schools accountable. They have little influence in decision-making and they have strong trust in the school heads. Partnership has not developed as parents are regarded as unequal partners and they are willing to perform roles assigned to them by the heads.

Parents' attitude towards participation in decision-making is found to be more positive and they can even perform a better job than the principals in explaining school policies to other parents and gaining parent support.

The findings suggest that the government should re-establish the harmonious working relations with the sponsoring bodies and match government aims with parent expectations. Schools should develop shared goals with parents and identify issues that require their active participation.

## **Acknowledgement**

I wish to thank all those very nice people who have assisted me in the course of my studies. I am especially indebted to Dr Bernard Barker, my supervisor, who has helped to sharpen the focus of my thesis and supported me with valuable suggestions and encouragement throughout. I am also grateful to Dr Marianne Coleman for her advice during the early stage of my thesis and Professor Pam Lomax, my former supervisor, for reviewing and commenting on the early drafts of chapters one to three.

I must thank Mr Cheung Siu Sing and Mr Lui Kei Cheong for providing me with the useful background information on the organization of school management committees in secondary schools and suggestions to refine the draft questionnaire to principals and parent managers. I would also like to thank all the principals and parent managers who have completed and returned the questionnaires to me. My particular thanks are due to the three principals and three parent managers who have agreed to be interviewed. Their opinions have been most useful in helping me understand the actual operation of school management committees in Hong Kong.

I am also very much grateful to some of my colleagues and students. Their encouragement and spiritual support have helped me to continue my studies. I am especially grateful to my best friend, Prof Hau Lee, for his sharing, kind words and prayers. My special thanks also go to The Hong Kong Institute of Education for the approval of my application for staff development fund and study leave and the Head

of the Department of Social Sciences for the special arrangement of my teaching duties to facilitate my studies.

Finally, I must express my deepest gratitude to my wife Janet Leung and my two sons Isaac and Clement for their patience, understanding and unfailing support.



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## List of Abbreviations

ACSM	Advisory Committee for School-based Management
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
LEA	Local Education Authority
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
P1	Principal 1, interviewed on 19 February 2003
P2	Principal 2, interviewed on 6 March 2003
P3	Principal 3, interviewed on 15 March 2003
PM1	Parent manager 1, interviewed on 22 February 2003
PM2	Parent manager 2, interviewed on 6 March 2003
PM3	Parent manager 3, interviewed on 15 March 2003
PTA	Parent-teacher Association
SMC	School Management Committee
SMI	School Management Initiative
SSB	School Sponsoring Body
UK	United Kingdom



## **Chapter 1    Introduction**

### **Background**

Parental involvement is the flag we salute whenever it is hoisted (Merrtens, 1993, p. 2) and parental involvement has often been regarded as beneficial to children's learning (Jennings, 1990; Karther & Lowden, 1997; Ballantine, 1999). There is evidence that parental involvement improves student achievement (Epstein, 1984; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994) and contributes to the enhancement of school effectiveness (Epstein, 1992; Bastiani, 1993; Golby, 1993; Munn, 1993; Hornby, 1995). In fact, many studies show parent participation contributes to other desirable outcomes for students – better attendance, higher student aspirations, improved classroom and school climate, and more positive relationships between parents and teachers (Black, 1993, p. 30).

In the past decades, the role of parents in schools and education has undergone significant changes. Different researchers have listed different roles of parents (Gordon, 1977; Sandow et al, 1987; Meighan, 1989; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Chrispeels, 1996; Epstein, 1997) but many regard the highest level of parental participation to be in decision-making when parents become members of governing bodies or school management committees (SMCs).

Many countries are increasing parents' involvement in education for a number of different reasons, such as democracy, accountability, consumer choice, lever for raising standards, tackling disadvantages and improving equity, addressing social

problems and saving resources (Kelley-Laine, 1998, p. 343). Beattie (1985) considers parent participation as a reform measure was attractive to government because it appeared to be relatively cheap and capable of rapid implementation (Beattie, 1985, p. 228).

In the United Kingdom (UK), through the implementation of a series of reports and education acts (Plowden Report 1967; Taylor Report 1977; Education Acts 1980, 1981, 1986, 1992, 1993), the number of parent governors in the school governing body has increased and the powers of the governors in the governing bodies have also been extended. The aim of the government is to enhance consumerist and managerial modes of accountability (Arnott & Raab, 2000, p. 9) and promote parental participation in decision-making. It also aims to foster a working partnership of staff, parents and community in the governance of schools (Department of Education and Science, 1977, p. 17). Parent and schools should be seen as equal partners in the educational process in a share task for the benefit of the child (Woods, 1988; Jowett, Baginsky & MacNeil, 1991).

As a former British Colony, Hong Kong's educational policy has often been influenced by developments in the UK. It is not surprising that the Education Department in Hong Kong has also placed greater importance on home-school liaison towards the end of the 1980s. Like the UK, greater parent participation has been encouraged through a series of reports and measures (Education Commission Report Number 4, 1990; School Management Initiative (SMI), 1991; Education Commission Report Number 5, 1992). In 1993, the Committee on Home-School Co-operation was formed. The number of schools with parent-teacher associations

(PTAs) increased from 223 in 1993/94 to 1,395 in 2002/03.

In Hong Kong, the movement to involve parents in education was intertwined with the drive to decentralize control of schools under the school-based management policy. In order to grant greater flexibility to schools at the site-level, the government wanted to encourage parents to hold schools accountable (Manzon, 2004, pp. 82-83). In 1999, parent managers have been included in the SMCs of all government primary and secondary schools. The government planned to introduce school-based management in all aided schools from the academic year 2000-01. Parent managers would be included in the SMCs, which would also be registered as incorporated bodies (Advisory Committee on School-based Management, 2000, pp. 10-12).

However, the government plan met with strong opposition from the sponsoring bodies, especially those sponsoring bodies which operate a large number of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. As a result, the original plan has been modified and the date of implementation has been postponed. Finally, the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002 was passed in the Legislative Council on 8 July 2004. All aided schools have to include parent managers in SMCs, which must be registered as incorporated bodies from 2010.

#### **Statement of the problem**

The drive to enhance parent participation in schools in Hong Kong is an import from the UK but the literature suggests that the reform in the UK has not achieved its purposes. A mismatch can be observed between government aims and parent

perspectives (Manzon, 2004, p. 15). Parent governors have failed to perform their monitoring role and do not hold schools accountable as the government hopes and expects (Golby, 1993; Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995; Shearn et al, 1995; Creese, 2000; Munn, 2000). The research findings on the successful implementation of the role of parent governors are not very positive. Parent governors face the tension of whether they should voice their personal views or voice the views of parents. It is not easy to be parent representatives as they have difficulty in collecting parent views and reporting back to them (Golby, 1993, p. 72).

Other studies also show that parent governors are not clear about their role (Morgan, 1990, pp. 86-87). They make little contribution in school board meetings, as they lack the knowledge and the time to become more informed. They also make little contribution in development-planning meetings, especially in the area of teaching and learning (Munn, 2000). Many governors devote a great deal of time to the governance of their schools and yet the evidence from Ofsted inspection reports suggests that a significant number of governing bodies are having little impact upon their schools (Creese, 2000, p. 57).

It is also found that there are problems and barriers that make it difficult to develop partnership in home-school relations (Golby, 1993; Research and Information on State Education Trust, 1994; Riley, 1995; Crozier, 2001). Building partnerships is easier said than done (International Consultative Forum 1996 quoted in Bray, 2001, p. 3). Though legislation has given parent governors very real powers, the home-school relationship is one of unequal partners in which the parameters for approved involvement is determined and regulated by school staff (Hood, 2003, p. 260). It

seems that there is resistance in the educational establishment to sharing decision-making with parents (Riley, 1994, p. 17), whose expectations are regarded as unrealistic. Of all the proposals relating to parents in 'Excellence in Schools', the suggestion that 'parents have a greater say in the way schools are run' remains the least developed (Hallgarten, 2000, p. 92).

As a result, parent governors have failed to establish an equal partnership with schools (Vincent, 1996; Hood, 2003). Parental influence has been enhanced over the past twenty years, as a consequence of changing legislation, changing attitude, and developing practices, but parents are still not in a position to enter into genuine partnerships with schools. Conservative policy during the 1980s seems to have cast parents into the roles of consumers, managers and agents of competition rather than partners in the education process (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 4).

The literature suggests that it is most likely that the reform in Hong Kong may fail to achieve its aims too. It is regarded as an import from the UK and it has met resistance as the sponsoring bodies which operate the aided schools are sensitive and have reacted more negatively. Some sponsoring bodies are worried that parent managers may change their school tradition or even sell school premises and assets (Chong & Leung, 2003) and some suspect the government is trying to reduce their powers using the excuse of parent participation (Lam, 2004). There may also be a mismatch between government aims and parent expectations. Moreover, parent managers in SMCs may face the same problems encountered by parent governors in the UK. It is obvious that something has to be done in order to make the reform work.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the reform on aided compared with government schools, as there has already been strong oppositions from some sponsoring bodies, which operate the aided schools. I will compare the structure and organization of SMCs in government and aided secondary schools in Hong Kong to find out the similarities and differences.

Moreover, the literature seems to suggest that the government is pushing for something that the parents do not want. The government sees parent involvement in school governance but parents are more concerned with ways to improve their children's learning capacities and achievements (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 5). I will examine the match/ mismatch between the aims of the reforms and the parents' attitude and expectations. I will also study the role of parent managers in SMCs to see if there is enhanced parent participation and identify the obstacles to more genuine participation.

Furthermore, I will compare the views of principals and parent managers on parental roles in education and the contribution of parent managers in SMCs. In this way I can find out if principals and parent managers have developed shared goals and worked as equal partners.

Finally, I will identify the difficulties encountered by parent managers and suggest ways to make the most of the positive aspects of the reform.

## **Definition of terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

Aided schools – These are schools operated by sponsoring bodies in Hong Kong. They receive government subvention and are governed by the Education Ordinance and Education Regulations.

Government schools – These are schools operated by the government in Hong Kong. The principals, teachers and all supporting staff are civil servants.

Parent managers – They are parent members in the SMC in Hong Kong and are equivalent to parent governors in the UK.

School management committees – These are highest decision-making bodies in schools in Hong Kong. They are equivalent to governing bodies in the UK.

## **Research questions**

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the impact of the reforms on aided compared with government schools?
2. What is the match/mismatch between the aims of the reform and the attitudes and expectations of the parents?

3. Has greater parental participation been achieved in both types of school?
4. What are the obstacles to more genuine participation?
5. What can be done to enhance parent participation and establish partnership in home-school relations?

#### **Significance of study**

This study is significant because it is the first study on the role of parent managers in SMCs in government and aided secondary schools in Hong Kong. It is also the most comprehensive study in this area as it collects information directly from principals and parent managers through a survey and interviews. This is important as the government schools must include parent managers, while aided schools are at present not required by law to include parent managers. As a result, very few aided secondary schools have parent managers and several large sponsoring bodies are opposed to the inclusion of parent managers in SMCs.

After the Education (Amendment) Bill was passed in 2004, more and more aided schools will include parent managers in SMCs in the coming years. This study can provide valuable information on the structure and organization of SMCs in government and aided schools. The impact of the reform on government and aided schools can also be examined by comparing the data obtained from the two different types of schools. It can provide the government with additional information to re-consider if legislation is necessary to enhance parent participation.

This study also examines the match/mismatch between the aims of reforms and



parent expectations. It can identify parents' perspectives and priorities to see if they can perform the government aim of holding schools accountable to parents. The expectations of parents can be identified and a better matching of aims between schools and parents can be achieved.

Moreover, this study compares the views of principals and parent managers on parental roles in education and the role of parent managers in SMCs. A better understanding of the different expectations of principals and parent managers may help to remove barriers in home-school relations and establish a partnership. The information collected can help schools to involve parents in areas where they have the interest and the ability to perform well. Furthermore, parents, educators and decision-makers can develop shared goals for the education of their children.

Finally this study will make recommendations to schools on ways to enhance parent participation and establish partnership in home-school relations.

### **Summary of the thesis**

In chapter 1, I discuss the background and state the problem. The purpose of the study, the definition of terms, the research questions and the significance of the study are presented. Chapter 2 starts with a literature review on the powers of school governing bodies in the UK and Hong Kong, accountability themes and parental engagement in education. Then I discuss levels of parent participation, examine parent's monitoring role in governing bodies and evaluate the effects of legislation on parent participation. Finally, the factors affecting parent participation, the obstacles

to more genuine parent participation and ways to develop real home-school partnerships are listed. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the questionnaire and the interviews. Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the findings. Chapter 6 is the conclusion.

## **Chapter 2 Literature review**

### **Increase in the powers of school governing bodies in the UK and Hong Kong**

In the past decades, the powers of school governing bodies have been increased. It started first in the UK with the publication of the Taylor Report of 1977, a New Partnership for Our Schools, which proposed that all schools should have their own individual governing body (DES, 1977, p. 17). The responsibilities of the governors should include staff appointment and dismissal; pupil admission; internal organization and curriculum; finance and the care and upkeep of the premises (DES, 1977, p. 6).

Through a series of Education Acts in the 1980s and the 1990s, governing bodies were given some jurisdiction over aspects of curriculum, the internal organization of schools, financial and resource decisions, staffing priorities, business and community relations and the hiring and firing of staff (Munn, 2000, p. 97). Deem remarked that governors now have the power, in theory, to run the school (Deem, 1990, p. 169).

In England and Wales, governing bodies have also become a corporate body, that is, a separate legal entity. This protects individual governors as long as they act within the law and as agreed by the whole governing body. However, it also makes all members of the governing body liable for the actions of individuals who have been given delegated powers (Martin, Taylor & Rashid, 1995, p. 5). In Scotland, school boards have a largely advisory role. Most powers have been devolved to the head teacher. School budgets are also delegated to the head teacher (Munn, 2000, pp.

96-99).

As a former British colony, Hong Kong has often been affected by educational developments in the UK. In 1999 an Advisory Committee on School-based Management (ACSM) was set up. In February 2000, it published a school-based management consultation document "Transforming schools into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities", which set the framework for changes in the SMC. It proposed one SMC for each school to ensure responsibility for decisions on major school policies, procedures and practices and SMCs be registered as incorporated bodies so that individual school managers would no longer incur personal liability in the performance of their school manager duties (ACSM, 2000, pp. 10-12). This is a significant change and development as the supervisors and managers of the present SMCs in aided schools are only volunteers appointed by the sponsoring bodies. There has been little participation or involvement in school policy. The government is proposing that school managers should have more powers and participation in school policy.

#### **School accountability and governing bodies**

Gann considers accountability and the ownership of schools were central to the changes. Since 1976, there has been a change in the society's expectations of schools and there has been a requirement for greater accountability. Though accountability has been the rhetoric in education for many years, and particularly so under the Conservative governments of 1979 to 1997, no mechanisms had been built into the system (Gann, 1999, p. 7). Accountability is a word much used but little

understood – and perhaps even less practised (Gann, 1998, p. 163). The White Paper ‘Self-Government for Schools’ stated that each school should take responsibility for achieving high standards and should account for its performance to parents and the local community against the standards set by the National Curriculum (Department for Education and Employment, 1996, p. 1). However, apart from the annual duty of the governing body to publish results and report to the parents’ meeting, there was no guidance on how to do such accounting (Gann, 1999, p. 8). Accountability seems to be synonymous with publicity (Gann, 1998, p. 163).

Accountability is an attempt to improve the quality of education, and, it is sometimes added, to prove that this is being done (Sokkett, 1980, p. 10). Demands for greater school accountability have generated debates in academic circles. Responses ranged from professional autonomy of teachers accountable to a code of conduct to ‘democratic accountability’, where schools would be responsive to parents and the wider community (Munn, 1993, p. 170).

Kogan classifies accountability into three types: public or state control, professional control and consumerist control. Public or state control entails the use of authority by elected representatives, appointed officials and the heads and owners who manage schools. Its main characteristic is that of a managerial hierarchy. The head is accountable for the work of the school and has authority to discharge that accountability. Professional control is control of education by teachers and professional administrators. With this is associated self-reporting evaluation. Accountability would be for adherence to principles of practice rather than for results embodied in pupil performances. Consumerist control takes the form of a

participatory democracy or partnership in the public sector or market mechanisms in the private sector. Professionals should involve parental consent to what is being provided such as consensus about objectives, methods and some dialogue to discuss the success of what has been done. It firmly predicates parity between provider and client (Kogan, 1988, pp. 139-151).

Arnott & Raab (2000) consider that the government wanted to restructure the education systems of the UK and dependencies to enhance consumerist and managerial modes of accountability (Arnott & Raab, 2000, p. 9). Schools have traditionally been accountable to local and central government. Local Education Authority (LEA) advisers and Her Majesty inspectors have been the agents of that accountability, although the criteria against which they evaluate schools have in the past not been made public (Munn, 1993, p. 172). The government's policy is to promote lay, especially parental, participation in school decision-making in order to make teachers and other educational professionals accountable to parents.

According to Gann, the two themes of accountability and ownership came together in the first educational legislation of the new Parliament, in 1997 and 1998. The increasing rigour demanded of schools is expressed in the government's requirement that all schools set targets for pupil performance. The public ownership of schools is reinforced by the fact that these targets will be set and monitored by the school governing body made up of professional and lay people (Gann, 1999, p. 2).

#### *Role of governing bodies*

The governing body carries the ultimate responsibility for school performance and it

has to answer to the community, the local authority and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Strategic governance has three elements: planning, monitoring and evaluating. The governing body will lay down its aims and objectives for the school and plan its policies and procedures. It will ensure that the school implements these and it will monitor pupil progress and evaluate the school's achievement (Gann, 1998, p. 46). Gann remarks that in law the governing body is demonstrably in charge, but checks and balances can be brought into play by the local authority (Gann, 1999, p. 10).

Packwood comments that the range and scope of authority exercised by the governing body depends on the discretion allowed to the governors. With minimum delegation of authority the governing body would function as a sub-committee of the LEA, enforcing the decisions of the appointing authority. With maximum delegation of authority, the governing body can determine the objectives of the school and take primary decisions, such as the selection of staff, the nature of the curriculum and the allocation of money (Packwood, 1988, p. 157).

Burgess remarks that if governors are to do, on their own initiative and by their own action, all the things for which they are responsible, they would have to be full-time officials. He considers the chief function of a governing body to be the body to whom the professionals, the head and staff, are accountable (Burgess, 1992, pp. 9-10). It is also a link between the headteacher and the professional staff, the LEA, parents and community and all the stakeholders who comprise the local partnership. Schools are accountable to their governors, and the governing body is accountable to the parents, the community and the LEA (Creese & Earley, 1999, p. 108).

### **School accountability in Hong Kong**

Under the Education Ordinance, each school is managed by its own management committee, which employs the staff and is responsible for the proper education of the pupils and the operation of the school. One of the managers must be registered as the supervisor, whose main role is to be the point of contact between the management committee and the Education Department. Each aided school is operated by its sponsoring body, which contributes the full cost of furnishing and equipping the premises (Hong Kong, 1993, p. 120).

The SMI was introduced in 1991 to give school management in the public sector more decision-making power. The SMI was based on the school-management model which gives schools greater control in finance and administration. SMI policies were intended to cut bureaucratic control and to bring decision-making closer to schools. It was believed that this devolution of financial and administrative power would enhance school efficiency and effectiveness (Wong, 1995, p. 519).

The SMI report published in 1991 identified the following weaknesses in the management structure of the education system: inadequate management structures and processes; poorly defined roles and responsibilities; the absence or inadequacy of performance measures; an emphasis on detailed controls rather than frameworks of responsibility and accountability and an emphasis on cost control at the margins, rather than cost effectiveness and value for money (Education and Manpower Bureau & Education Department, 1991, p. 9).



The SMI report recommended that the role of the Education Department should shift from one of detailed control over all aspects of school management, including funding, equipment, student placement and curriculum, to one of support and advice within a framework defining responsibilities and accountabilities (Education and Manpower Bureau & Education Department, 1991, p. 33). It also recommended that each SMC should prepare a constitution setting out the aims and objectives of the school and the procedures and practices by which it will be managed and that the roles of the sponsor, the supervisor and the principal be defined (Education and Manpower Bureau & Education Department, 1991, pp. 35-37).

Further accountability was proposed in the form of annual school plan and an annual school profile made available to parents, students and the general public (Education and Manpower Bureau & Education Department, 1991, pp. 41-42). In exchange for greater flexibility in finance, the participating schools were expected to set up an accountability framework, which would include the participation of teachers and parents in the SMC (Education and Manpower Bureau & Education Department, 1991, p. 37).

School-based management is being implemented in stages. All public sector schools were required to submit a school report for the 1998-99 school year and to prepare an annual school plan before the end of that school year. They were also required to put in place a constitution for the SMC, with a participatory decision-making mechanism and a staff performance management system by 2001-02 (Hong Kong, 1999, p. 152).

In 1999, the ACSM was set up to develop a framework of governance for school-based management which will enhance the transparency and accountability of schools. In 2000, it published the consultative document “Transforming schools into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities” which set out the details proposed for the structure and operation of SMCs and the associated impact on School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs).

#### *Role of SMCs and SSBs*

In Hong Kong the majority of schools are aided schools operated under the SSBs, which in turn manage their schools through an SMC. There is no requirement in the Education Ordinance covering either the membership or the operation of SMCs. Some SSBs have a central SMC with local school advisory councils or school executive committees which answer to the central SMC. The advisory council and school executive committee have no substantive decision-making powers. Few SMCs include parents or teachers. Furthermore, existing legislation does not require SMCs to disclose the names and particulars of school managers and managers are not required to declare personal interests that may be in conflict with the best interests of the school. This lack of transparency is considered unacceptable when there is increasing demand for accountability of public institutions (ACSM, 2000, pp. 8-9).

The document made recommendations on the membership of SMC and outlined the roles of the SSBs, the SMCs and the Education Department. It is proposed that the SMC should have the following members: managers nominated by SSB (maximum 60% of the total membership), the principal (an ex-officio member), teacher

managers (numbering two or more), parent managers (numbering two or more), alumni managers (numbering one or more) and independent managers (numbering one or more). It is also proposed that school managers may not register as a manager of more than five schools in order to ensure that managers' available time is effectively invested in the schools under their charge (ACSM, 2000, pp. 12-13).

It is proposed that SSBs maintain control of the use of private funds and assets, take part in the selection of the principal and nominate the SSB managers. It will oversee SMCs as they govern schools in the light of the vision of the SSB and the requirements of the Education Department (ACSM, 2000, pp. 14-15).

The SMC will be entrusted with the responsibility of governing the school and will be accountable to the Education Department, the SSB and parents for the overall performance of the school. It will ensure that the Education Ordinance is complied with and the vision of the SSB is fulfilled. It will set the mission and goals of the school and determine policies on teaching and learning. It will also be responsible for programme planning, budgeting and human resource management and establish a community network and support system (ACSM, 2000, p. 15).

#### *Accountability of schools*

Since September 1997, the government has been conducting quality assurance inspections using the whole school approach instead of a subject-based approach. The inspections aim to provide the government and the public with information on the current position regarding the overall quality of school education. Performance

indicators have been developed to provide a basis for assessing schools' performance in school's self-evaluation and inspection (Hong Kong, 2000, pp. 152-153). The government firmly believes that rigorous and systematic school self-evaluation can ensure public accountability for the quality of education delivered. The evaluation reports should be accessible to stakeholders for transparency and accountability (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003, pp. 1-3)

The ACSM considers participatory decision-making increases the transparency of school governance. Schools have to be more transparent and accountable to the community for their performance and the proper use of funds. The proposed accountability framework is based upon a combination of internal self-evaluation through annual planning, budgeting and review by the school and external assessment and benchmarking by the Education Department. In the event of unresolved conflict between an SSB, SMC and the principal, the Education Department will intervene as required in the interests of the students and the school. The Education Department will seek amendment to the Education Ordinance in order to seek last-resort powers, e.g. the obligation to take over a school to deal with a crisis of governance in either an SMC or its school by nominating an interim management committee or appoint an acting principal (ACSM, 2000, pp. 18-19).

The Education Department acknowledges that the new legislation may pose short-term difficulties for schools as they set about restructuring SMCs, since some schools are without teacher or parent managers and some schools may not have PTA in place. After the enactment of the provisions in 2001/2002 school year, a transition period of three years is therefore proposed (ACSM, 2000, p. 19).

### **School accountability and parents**

Another new element in school accountability procedures is the enhanced role for parents in making sure that schools operate efficiently, effectively and provide value for money. Parents' role has been enhanced through parental voice on governing bodies (Munn, 1993, p. 172). Parents would expect to have a representative who would serve on the governing body. The accountable person would be the parent governor who would be responsible to the parents as a whole and also to the governing body. This representative would therefore fulfil a completely new role for a parent within the educational process (Lello, 1979, p. 4). Kogan (1988) regards this form of accountability as consumerist control in the form of participatory democracy or partnership (Kogan, 1988, p. 139). The introduction of market forces also serves the additional purpose of stripping LEAs of many of their powers (Vincent, 1996, pp. 30-31).

In regard to participation in school education, Woods (1988) suggests three different perspectives: instrumental (which values participation principally for the benefits it offers), market-oriented (or parent or consumer influence) and partnership (Woods, 1988, p. 325). Participation by parents is regarded as instrumental because parental involvement has often been regarded as beneficial to children's education. Studies in different parts of the world have shown how parental involvement or participation in children's education brings positive outcomes. Jennings (1990) suggests these benefits to include: more positive parental attitudes towards teachers and schools; more positive student attitudes and behaviours; improved student performance;

improved teacher morale and improved school climate (Jennings, 1990, p. 20).

Karther and Lowden (1997) consider the benefits of parental involvement to be: student gains in various areas, increased self-confidence of parents, increased parental satisfaction with schools and overall school improvement (Karther & Lowden, 1997, p. 41). Ballantine (1999) suggests the positive outcomes of parental involvement include: improved communication between parents and children; higher academic performance; high school attendance and less disruptive behaviour; increased likelihood of completion of high school and colleges; higher parental expectations of children and improved children study habits and increased likelihood of parents deciding to continue their own education (Ballantine, 1999, p. 170).

Participation is also another tactic to promote parent or consumer influence. By bringing consumers and producers together in the decision-making process, it contradicts the separation between the two that is characteristic of market systems (Woods, 1988, p. 325). Affected by customer-service and total quality developments in business, the government legislates to get lay people and consumers to apply pressure for enhanced performance by professionals. In the UK, the Plowden Report (1967) suggested the inclusion of more parents as governors in school governing bodies but it was regarded as reflecting a social class bias as schools mainly included those parents who were cooperative and supportive (Vincent, 1996, p. 25).

The Taylor Report of 1977 sees its new-style governing body as a means of ensuring the accountability of schools to their communities and gives parents an equal status with other parties in the process (Sallis, 1979, pp. 114-115). It recommended the

inclusion of parents in the governing bodies to develop a closer relationship between homes and schools (DES, 1977, p. 27). It also recommended that parent governors should have at least a quarter of the places on the governing bodies. The Taylor Report certainly advocated a shift from professional to lay or 'public' accountability (Kogan, 1988, p. 142).

Increasingly the idea of school accountability is being used to legitimate a transference of power over educational decision-making from the teaching staff in schools to those groups and agencies outside the schools claiming a legitimate interest in what happens to the pupils who attend (Elliott, 1979, p. 67). School governance is a way of asserting parental and community ownership of a professional process (Gann, 1999, p. 21). Many school heads also considered 'a genuine commitment of the school governors to their schools' and 'a readiness to work as part of a team' more important than governors' individual specialist skills. The House of Commons Education and Employment Committee also agreed that being a school governor should not be seen as a job that only professionals could do (Earley & Creese, 2003, p. 249).

In Hong Kong, after the change of sovereignty in 1997, school accountability has shifted gradually from the government bureaucracy towards the school parents as users (Pang et al, 2003, p. 1072). There are indications that reforms in Hong Kong represent the ascendancy of consumerist control. Owing to the falling birth rate, the government has been using consumer choice to justify the effective use of public money. Schools which fail to enroll sufficient students will result in reduction of classes or school closure. To assist parents of primary six pupils in making choices of

the secondary schools in the Cycle of the Secondary School Places allocation system for their children, the Education Department publishes the Secondary School Profiles annually. The profiles provide parents with basic information such as school characteristics, facilities, class structure, extra-curricular activities, fees and the Language Proficiency of in-service teachers etc. (Committee on Home-school Co-operation, 2006, p. 1).

In 2000, the government introduced measures to enhance consumerist and managerial modes of accountability. The role of parents in influencing the effectiveness of their children's learning was reaffirmed in the school-based management consultation document "Transforming schools into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities". Ways in which parents could support their children's learning were suggested. These included homework supervision and guidance, undertaking ancillary learning activities at home, meeting and sharing with other parents on ways of fostering loving relationships and performing voluntary services at school (ACSM, 2000, p. 16).

Parent managers, numbering two or more, were suggested to be elected by members of the PTA for a two-year term, renewable for once only (ACSM, 2000, p. 11). By serving on an SMC, parent managers are expected to share in decision-making in the interests of student education, form a vital link between school management and other parents and raise concerns on all matters relating to the education and development of students (ACSM, 2000, p. 16).



As in the UK, no specific qualifications were specified for school managers so that lay participation can be enhanced. Secondary education was considered to be a desirable minimum qualification for new managers. School managers were proposed to be aged between 21 and 70 and managers wishing to serve after 70 had to produce medical certificate of fitness (ACSM, 2000, p. 14).

#### **Establishment of a partnership with schools**

Pugh (1989) defines 'partnership' as a working relationship that is characterized 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, p. 3).

The term partnership has featured in major government sponsored reports in the UK. The Plowden Report (1967) stated 'that teachers are linked to parents by the children for whom they are both responsible. The triangle should be completed and a more direct relationship established between teachers and parents. They should be partners in more than name' (Jowett, Baginsky & MacNeil, 1991, p. 2). The Taylor Report (1977) also aimed to foster a working partnership of staff, parents and community an equal part with the LEAs in the governance of the schools (DES, 1977, p. 17). Sallis (1979), one of the Taylor Report Committee members, elaborated on the desirable kind of partnership between schools and parents. She emphasized that clients should participate in a partnership and not in a relationship where the client is dependent on the professional (Sallis, 1979, pp. 114-115).

The Warnock Report (1978) stated 'the successful education of children with special educational needs is dependent on the full involvement of their parents and parents should be seen as equal partners in the educational process' (Jowett, Baginsky & MacNeil, 1991, p. 2). In 1985, the White Paper 'Better Schools' asserted that once a child starts school 'parent and school become partners in a shared task for the benefit of the child' (Woods, 1988, p. 323).

PTAs and school governing bodies are manifestations of the idea of partnership between producers and consumers. The PTAs aim to encourage informal contact between parents and teachers, to keep parents informed about educational issues and to inform school governing bodies, LEAs and others of the needs of the school. However, in practice, much of their activity is concerned with fund-raising rather than educational matters (Woods, 1988, p. 330). PTAs actually produced little direct powers for parents. They had no standing in law and were principally bodies which raised extra funds, held social events or at best consulted over decisions the head and staff intended to implement (Partington & Wragg, 1989, p. 124).

#### **Levels of parent participation and measures to enhance parent participation in education in the UK and Hong Kong**

The literature suggests there are different levels of parent participation. In the UK, the level of parent participation was low before the reforms. From the 1970s onwards, the government legislated to enhance parent participation. Gordon (1977) suggests three models of parent participation: family impact model, (in which parents help the child to fit the school and the system's aims), school impact model (in which parents

and teachers and school administrators work together in common decision-making) and community impact model (in which parents are engaged in all possible roles from home to local community) (Gordon, 1977, pp. 74-77).

Meighan (1989) lists six different roles of parents. Parents are regarded as a problem; police; para-professional aide; partner; pre-school educator and the prime educator. The last four roles are more positive and define parents as having a constructive role to play in the education of their children (Meighan, 1989, pp. 106-111).

Parents and teachers in England and Wales have little or no formal voice in decisions as to what their children are taught. The curriculum is drawn up by central government committees which do not include parents. However, schools are legally obliged to consult parents on religious and sex education. In other words, parents are only given more power over less important and less relevant subjects. Parents are encouraged to help their children's learning both at home and at school. Typically, they help individual pupils with their work, hear children read aloud, organize small group studies and contribute their skills and experience in crafts, computer studies, cookery, language work, making story books, run lunchtime and after school reading clubs (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1997, p. 101).

Parental involvement in the classroom has two aims: to free teachers from mundane tasks and make parents aware of classroom environment and constraints. Teachers do not welcome parents to observe teaching in the classroom. They regard parents as incompetent to comment on teaching methods and expect parents to support the professionals by assimilating their value and behaviour (Vincent, 1996, p. 45).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a series of reports and education acts have increased parents' involvement in the schooling of their children. The Taylor Report of 1977 encouraged the formation of parent organizations and recommended that governing bodies should ensure that parents have access to the school and the means of publicizing parental activities (DES, 1977, p. 42). Parents' rights were acknowledged but were seen to be in harmony with the interests of the teachers (Cullingford, 1996, p. 2).

The Parent's Charter, first published in 1991 and updated in 1994, informed parents that they could get information to keep track of their children's progress and to find out how the school was being run and to compare local schools. It is a legal requirement for schools to draw up home-school agreements and produce newsletters for parents and booklets explaining the school's attitude and aims. They have also made sure parents feel welcome in the school (OECD, 1997, pp. 102-3). Schools are also required to ensure that parents have access to policy and procedures by providing information in community languages or tapes and other arrangements to make parents feel comfortable about coming to the school (Hornby, 2000, p. 11).

Parents are also provided with channels to voice their dissatisfaction with schools. They can complete a questionnaire and meet with registered inspectors. They can also make their views at the annual meeting when parent governors present an annual report of the school and review progress over the previous year. However, most of these meetings attract very small numbers and the aims have not been achieved (OECD, 1997, pp. 103-4). Perhaps parents are too busy to attend the meetings or

they are satisfied with the schools. Or the accountability dimension may have damaged a thrust for popular democratic involvement and the offer of partnership in the legislation may also be a false or misleading one.

Parents at every school can form parent associations but most such associations have become vehicles for social contacts and fund-raising rather than as a forum for parental views about the school which the governors and head might accept as genuinely representative. Most school-based associations of parents confine themselves to supporting the school, for example by fund-raising through a minority of active parents with help from the teachers (Ulrich, 1996, pp. 54-56).

Legislation provides for parental participation to the level of decision-making, which is the highest level considered by many researchers. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) identify six different parental roles in education. Parents are regarded as audiences, learners, teachers, volunteers or para-professionals and decision-makers (Greenwood and Hickman, 1991, p. 279). Chrispeels (1996) presents a typology of roles arranged in a pyramidal, overlapping fashion to suggest that they build one on another. In this home-school-community partnership, the parents' roles are co-communicators, co-supporters, co-learners, co-teachers and co-advisors, advocates and decision-makers (Chrispeels, 1996, pp. 308-309).

Epstein (1997) identifies six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with community. Decision-making means a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals. Sample practices include active PTAs/ parent

organizations, advisory councils or committees for parent leadership and participation (Epstein, 1997, pp. 264-267).

In Hong Kong, parents have not been actively involved since the introduction of western education in Hong Kong as most parents have not received much education. Parents send their children to schools to receive education, which most believe can lead to upward mobility. Parents in Hong Kong do not participate in the management of schools. They are only required by law to send their children to school, if their children's ages are above 6 and under 15. Moreover, the Chinese tradition shows a high respect and trust in the teachers and schools. Up to the 1980s, the level of parent participation was very low.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the Education Department in Hong Kong started to place greater emphasis and importance on home-school liaison. Through the publication of a booklet on "Better parenting", a seminar on "Towards better co-operation between parents and schools" for principals of secondary schools, the "Note on school-parent liaison" and a circular on "Strengthening home-school communication", parent-school communication has been encouraged and strengthened. However, the following two studies on parent participation show that the level of parent participation is still rather low.

In 1989, Chan studied home-school liaison by sending questionnaires to teachers in 100 aided secondary schools, randomly selected from the population of about 300 aided secondary schools. She found that home-school communication was mainly in the form of schools giving information to parents. About four-fifths (78%) agreed

that parents' participation in school activities would encourage students to perform better. About half of the schools considered that parent assistance was necessary in fund-raising campaigns. However, less than one-tenth of the schools would invite parents to assist in extra-curricular activities or sports activities. Though teachers were ready to co-operate and talk with parents, they were protective of what they saw as their professional territory. A great majority (94%) would not allow parents to observe classroom teaching. Chan concluded that teachers were generally opposed to the suggestion that parents should be invited to participate in pedagogy and choice of curriculum. Parents in Hong Kong were not welcome to infringe the professional autonomy of teachers (Chan, 1990, pp. 93-98).

In 1991, Wan studied parent involvement in secondary school management in 37 schools in Shatin, a new town in Hong Kong. The findings show that parent involvement in school activities was low. Less than one-tenth of the schools enlisted parents to assist in extra-curricular activities or classroom teaching. The majority of schools (over 70%) would consult parents on student behaviour and academic results. About one-fifth of the schools would consult parents on medium of instruction and school rules. Less than one-tenth would consult parents on curriculum change and planning and the school development plan (Wan, 1992, pp. 81-86). On the other hand, parents expressed a higher desire to be consulted on school matters. About half expected schools to consult parents on medium of instruction and school rules. About one quarter considered that parents should be consulted on curriculum change and planning and the school development plan (Wan, 1992, p. 91).

As the level of parent participation was low, the government introduced more

measures to raise the level of parent participation. In 1991, the government recommended that parents should be allowed to participate in decision-making to an appropriate degree by the introduction of the SMI (Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991, p. 37). In 1993 the Committee on Home-School Co-operation was formed to promote home-school co-operation by conducting surveys, allocating project grants to schools, developing training materials, publicizing better home-school relations and encouraging the establishment of PTAs (Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 2004, p. 1).

An obvious development was the increase in the number of schools with PTAs. The number of PTAs increased from 223 in 1993/94 to 1,395 in 2002/03 (Table 1).

School-year	Number of schools with PTAs
1993-94	223
1994-95	287
1995-96	378
1996-97	479
1997-98	579
1998-99	619
1999-00	816
2000-01	1,095
2001-02	1,282
2002-03	1,395

Table 1

Number of Schools with PTAs 1993- 2003

(<http://embhsc.hkedcity.net/english/main.htm>)

By 2002-03, 100 per cent of the government schools have PTAs and 90 per cent of



the aided primary and secondary schools have PTAs. The number of secondary schools with PTAs increased from 250 in 1999-2000 to 347 in 2002-03 (Table 2).

School-year	Number of secondary schools with PTAs
1999-2000	250
2000-2001	313
2001-2002	328
2002-2003	347

Table 2

Number of Secondary Schools with PTAs 1999- 2003  
(<http://embhsc.hkedcity.net/english/main.htm>)

The government has also provided funds for Home-School Co-operation Projects. The approved funds disbursed to schools subsidizing their activities increased from \$ 1.3 million in 1993-94 to \$ 9.3 million in 2002-03 (Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 2003, pp. 3-4). (Table 3)

School-year	Activities Applied/ Approved	Total Amount Applied/Approved (\$ million)
1993-94	450 / 450	1.3 / 1.3
1994-95	686 / 627	3.1 / 1.4
1995-96	1,019 / 988	4.2 / 1.9
1996-97	1,188 / 1,040	5.6 / 2.2
1997-98	1,714 / 1,499	6.9 / 2.4
1998-99	1,235 / 1,120	8.8 / 4.1
1999-00	1,297 / 1,121	10.2 / 6.1
2000-01	1,580 / 1,476	12.7 / 7.6
2001-02	1,735 / 1,683	14.7 / 9.2
2002-03	1,833 / 1,806	14.6 / 9.3

Table 3

Home-School Co-operation Project Funds  
(<http://embhsc.hkedcity.net/english/main.htm>)

In 1994, the University of Hong Kong Research Team, commissioned by the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, published the Home School Co-operation Report. It reported that the most desirable level of cooperation of schools and parents was at the level of informing or being informed. There was reluctance in both parties to further their cooperation at higher levels (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, p. 422). The setting up of PTAs seemed to be getting some support from supervisors, principals and teachers. However, the interest of parents in joining PTAs was not great. Only about half would like to join as members and less than one-tenth were willing to serve as PTA executive committee members (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, p. 203).

Pang, one of the researchers of the University of Hong Kong Research Team, furthered analysed the data to study the functions of PTAs. He found that some schools took the PTAs as a stepping stone to parent involvement in school management. In 1996, one SMI school set up the PTA and invited the PTA representative to the school board (Pang, 1997, p. 90). According to Pang,

The PTA is important in the eye of the government because it can help to generate a parent representative in the SMC (Manzon, 2004, p. 41).

On the other hand, 60-72 per cent of the school supervisors worried about the possible interference of PTAs in school management. Some even speculated that parents, after joining the school board, might change the purposes of the school (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, p. 91).

Meanwhile the government has continued with legislation to enhance parent and lay participation in the SMCs, because there are very few parent managers in SMCs and the government is not satisfied with the slow progress. However, there is strong opposition from the sponsoring bodies, including a number of large sponsoring bodies such as Sheng Kung Hui and the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. Many sponsoring bodies are still concerned that their school mission and religious policies would be affected by the inclusion of parent managers in SMCs (Ming Pao Daily News, 27 November 2000, p. B17). Some sponsoring bodies have expressed concerns on the change of school tradition, such as school emblem and school uniform. Some even worry about the sale of school premises and school assets (Chong & Leung, 2003, p. A13).

On the other hand, parents also have several concerns on their participation in SMCs. The first is the lack of understanding of school operations and educational policies. They worry that schools may be non-open, non-encouraging and non-active. Some of them also fear that schools or teachers may victimize their children if they voice complaints or different opinions (Ta Kung Po, 28 April 2000, p. A07). In a recent survey, it is found that though over 70 per cent of the parents support the government proposal, about 50 per cent of the parents do not know if there are SMCs in their children's schools. Over 65 per cent do not know how the SMCs operate (Hong Kong Economic Times, 14 May 2004, p. A26).

Moreover, the issue has become more political. Some sponsoring bodies suspect that the government is trying to reduce their powers and tighten control over them, using the excuse of parental participation. There have been heated arguments between the

Education and Manpower Bureau and the Catholic Diocese and Sheng Kung Hui. Each has conducted surveys and issued pamphlets to parents expressing their point of view (Wen Wei Po, 24 May 2004, p. A34 & Hong Kong Economic Times, 5 June 2004, p. A20). At the same time the Secretary for Education and Manpower Bureau has also had heated exchanges with the legislative councilors, who have to address the concerns and worries of the sponsoring bodies as there are a considerable number of Catholics and Christians in Hong Kong and 2004 is the election year (Apple Daily News, 9 July 2004, p. A13).

In the end, the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002 was passed in the Legislative Council in July 2004 with the following revisions:

- ☉ The number of parent and teacher managers would be reduced to one each. Schools may have more than one parent or teacher manager, but the additional member would be an alternate member without voting rights.
- ☉ School managers can manage more than five schools, if discretion is given by the Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower.
- ☉ School managers over the age of seventy can continue to serve as Honorable School Managers but they would have no voting powers.
- ☉ The transitional period would be extended from three to five years.

According to the legislation, SMCs of all aided schools have to be registered as incorporated bodies by the year 2010.

**Has parent and lay participation enhanced the monitoring role in governing bodies?**

The joint publication from the Audit Commission and Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) entitled *Lessons in Teamwork* (1995) identified five roles that a governing body might perform. These included the steering role, accounting to parents, the executive role, the supporting role and the monitoring role. The last one was further divided in terms of the monitoring of plans, budgets, standards of education and the achievements of the school (Earley, 2000, p. 199). The literature suggests that parent and lay participation is not able to perform the monitoring role effectively. Creese (1997) analysed nearly 100 school inspection reports and found that governors were frequently commended for their work in monitoring the school's finances, invariably through a finance committee but comments were less complimentary concerning their wider monitoring role (Creese quoted in Earley, 2000, p. 200).

Munn's observation of boards and governing bodies and interviews with a sample of members of these bodies showed the following four features: their main role was to support the school and its teachers; there was little desire for greater lay participation in decision-making either by parents and teachers; there was strong parental trust in the head teacher's professional expertise and judgement; and head teachers used school boards and governing bodies to put pressure on the education authority regarding matters such as admission and budget. Members of school boards and governing bodies were reluctant to challenge the head teacher. They were mainly supportive of the school (Munn, 2000, p. 103). In a study of 21 primary and secondary schools in North England, Shearn et al, (1995) conclude that the governing bodies were happy to delegate everything to the head (Shearn et al, 1995, p. 178).

A closer examination of the role of governors in school board meetings also confirms that they have not performed the monitoring role. The agenda for school board meetings were set by the head teachers, sometimes in conjuncture with the Chairs of boards or governing bodies. These items were under the control of the Chair but it was usually the head teacher who determined what was actually discussed. Although head teachers often gave very full accounts and encouraged the asking of questions, this procedure did not give members much opportunity to prepare for the meeting. In fact few members requested the head teacher to circulate the papers in advance (Munn, 2000, pp. 104-105).

Very few schools had parent representation in school development planning groups and those that did so were mainly due to head teachers who were committed to an open and consultative management style (Munn, 1998, p. 386). The school development plan in most cases was prepared by the head and endorsed by governors (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995, p. 6). Though legislation has provided governors with real powers, the evidence is clear that it is the headteacher who controls the school and the governors' contribution is largely determined by what the headteacher is prepared to allow. For most schools, the governors' role seems to be very limited, sometimes being no more than 'supportive' and advisory (Shearn et al, 1995, pp. 186-187). If the head chooses to 'keep out' the governing body it is extremely difficult for it to perform its roles effectively (Earley, 2000, p. 205).

Nevertheless, though head teachers have the dominating influence in the boards or governing bodies, they cannot disregard the members' existence. In major policy development, they would wish to take the board with them (Golby, 1993, p. 107).

Perhaps it is natural for the heads to be powerful. They are full-time professionals. They also possess the relevant knowledge and skills, lacking in most parent governors who are amateurs.

The governors' role in curriculum, the budget and staffing is also reported to be of loose monitoring. Shearn's study in 1991 indicates that governors liked to be informed about the curriculum in broad terms and they did not see themselves as educationalists and felt that they did not possess the expertise in making decisions in this area. Heads and teachers have worked hard to retain their professional autonomy in curriculum matters and they have succeeded (Shearn et al, 1995, pp. 176-177). In his review of the role of school governors, Martin, Ransom & Rutherford (1995) found that governors felt least comfortable in the area of curriculum and took refuge in the view that this was the head's business, not theirs (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995, p. 7).

Earley (2000) also comments that the curriculum and its delivery are still regarded by governors as a matter for professionals and not for the lay governing body. Some governors seem content to entrust the delivery of the curriculum and the maintenance of high standards to the headteacher (Earley, 2000, pp. 200-201). In fact, the majority of governors are lay people with limited educational experience and they may not be able to make informed judgement about teaching methods either (Creese & Earley, 1999, p. 37).

There are different findings about the role of governors in relation to school budgets. Martin, Ransom & Rutherford (1995) remark that governing bodies have not been

very proactive. Though governors are required to review the salary of heads and deputies, they felt very uncomfortable (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995, pp. 9-10). However, Earley's findings in his small-scale project into effective governance in seven less advantaged primary and secondary schools are more positive. Governors were reported to feel comfortable with monitoring and evaluating the school's finances, though some governors expressed doubts on their own skills and knowledge and also whether they should be responsible for this finance as well (Earley, 2000, p. 201).

The governors' monitoring role in personnel matters, such as appointment and dismissal, seems to be more successful. They have also taken on board discipline and grievance procedures and codes of conduct, which were the responsibility of the LEAs before the 1988 Education Act (Shearn et al, 1995, p. 177). Headteachers often like to have governors on appointing panels, perhaps to safeguard their position in case there are unsatisfactory appointments or disapproved promotions (Hood, 2003, p. 186). However, without sufficient professional help and competent advice, governors, especially those from industry, find the process very complex and frustrating (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995, p. 10).

Riley's comments may explain why parent and lay participation fail to perform the monitoring role and hold schools accountable to them. According to Riley, most educators are comfortable with roles that are more or less defined by the school and which afford little parental voice in decision-making or visible presence in the school. Many parents too are content with their role being defined by the school and have little desire to participate directly in decision-making (Riley, 1995, p. 11).



### **Has legislative intervention increased or enhanced parent participation?**

According to Golby (1993) parental involvement has taken a number of forms but the focus has been on individual parents' responsibility for their own children. It is often argued that the middle class has been more successful in this. Parents, after taking up the role of parent governors, implies a change in focus from getting the best in education for their own children's education to getting the best for all children (Golby, 1993, p. 66). In asserting the parental point of view, the stance of parent governors must be mediated by the governing body as a whole. As one among many, a parent governor is responsible for the general conduct of the school and a parent governor has no special power or responsibility (Golby, 1993, pp. 70-72).

Deem, Brehony and Heath (1995) suggest that members of a governing body can be divided into two groups, those who operate at the core and those who remain at the periphery, with parent governors disproportionately represented in the latter grouping (Deem, Brehony & Heath, 1995, p. 56). The exercise of collective parental 'voice' is a rare phenomenon (Vincent, 1996, p. 57).

It is clear that parents as governors are generally in a stronger position as regards consultation than parents as members of PTAs or pressure groups (Research and Information on State Education Trust, 1994, p. 8). Parent governors generally greatly respected the endeavours of professionals. They had no strong desire to control the schools though they hoped to be involved and consulted thoroughly (Golby, 1989, p. 140). In his exploratory study of four parent governors in a primary school, Morgan (1990) found that parent governors had little preparation for their role as governors.

They did not know what the curriculum tried to achieve and how the curriculum was delivered. Indeed supporting the school was the reason cited for their wishing to be governors (Morgan, 1990, pp. 86-87).

At the same time, many teachers still resist parent participation in decision-making. In a survey of 2000 primary and secondary teachers, Hallgarten (2000) found widespread disapproval of all the suggested areas in which parents could become more involved in decision-making. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the respondents rejected the government assertion that parents should have a greater say in the way schools are run (Hallgarten, 2000, p. 94). The parental roles that are acceptable to and encouraged by schools appear to be principally those that support and uphold the values and interests of the school as defined by professionals. Parents are welcomed in supporter/ learners' roles in support of their children's education, e.g. home-reading schemes, volunteers in the classroom and as active fundraisers and events' organizers in PTAs. Parental involvement is less acceptable in areas such as curriculum, budget and teacher appraisal (Hood, 2003, p. 259).

In Hong Kong, the level of parent participation is still rather low, despite government measures to enhance parent participation to decision-making level. In 1994, the University of Hong Kong Research Team published a Home-school co-operation Research Report for the Committee on Home-school Co-operation. Based on the returns from 90 secondary schools, less than 50 per cent of the parents considered that home-school cooperation could monitor the work of the school or help the school to formulate school policy. Very few parents had helped schools in organizing various functions. Many teachers disagreed that parents' opinions on teaching were

useful to them (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, pp. 201-202). There were many areas that most parents had no participation. Only 24 per cent participated in appointment and deployment of teachers, 33 per cent in implementation of new curriculum, 41 per cent in policy of PTAs and medium of instruction and 44 per cent in arrangement of split classes (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, p. 15).

In another study conducted five years later, the level of parental participation was reported to remain low. Most parents mainly participated passively in Parents' Day and Parent Talks. Very few parents actually assisted school activities. Only 3 per cent taught interest classes, 5 per cent performed voluntary services and 7 per cent were responsible for extra-curricular activities. About one-fifth (22%) participated in PTA. About one quarter (27%) assisted in fund-raising (Education Department and Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 1999, pp. 13-15). About 80 per cent of the parents regarded the principals to be responsible for the school's development plan (Education Department and Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 1999, p. 59). Only about a quarter (27%) of the parents considered themselves capable of participating in the school's development plan (Education Department and Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 1999, p. 20).

The supervisors were more reluctant to involve parents as managers since about half of them did not agree that it would improve the quality of the school. The researchers reported that 'schools should well inform parents first and invite them to discuss school matters, before asking them to make decisions on and to monitor school work in SMC' (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, pp. 430-431).

There are very few studies conducted on parent participation in school-based management. Nevertheless the findings show that there is little parent participation in SMCs, which are regarded as the highest level of decision-making. In 1992, Wan found that over 90 per cent of the principals considered that parents should not be involved in school management affairs, as compared to about one-fifth of the parents who opined that parents should be involved. Only about one quarter (26%) agreed that the SMCs should consist of at least one parent representative. However, about two-fifths (42%) of the parents in schools with PTAs agreed that SMC should consist of at least one parent representative (Wan, 1992, pp. 93-95). Wan concluded that schools were not ready to elect a parent representative in SMC. Principals were apathetic towards this proposal (Wan, 1992, p. 122).

In 1994, the University of Hong Kong Research Team also found that parent participation in SMCs was low. There was no parent representative in SMC of private schools in the sample. There were parent representatives in only 12 per cent of the government schools and 3 per cent of the aided schools. Only one-third of the principals felt that including parents in SMC would enhance home-school cooperation (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, p. 172). On the other hand more than half (55%) of the parents indicated that they were quite sure that the inclusion of parent representatives in SMCs would increase transparency of SMCs and strengthen parents' influence on the school. However, only about one-third (35%) of the parents thought that there should be parent representatives in SMCs. The report concluded that parents had very little knowledge and understanding of SMCs (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, pp. 204-205).

In 1999, Ng conducted a case study in a primary school and came to the conclusion that parents were not keen on becoming members of the SMC. They thought that they were not experts in management and that they had insufficient knowledge to be managers. A parent preferred staying at home helping the child to do homework instead (Ng, 1999, p. 556).

In August 1999, the Education Department and the Committee on Home-School Co-operation published "A survey on parents' views on the rights and responsibilities in their children's education". The responses from 2,437 parents from 18 secondary schools and 18 primary schools show that 63 per cent of the parent respondents agreed that parents had the right to participate in decision-making and 49 per cent agreed parents had the right to monitor the school. However, in actual school management, many parents would still be satisfied with just being informed or consulted. The findings also indicated that parents' participation in school management was very low. Participation in SMCs was the lowest. 84 per cent of the parents had no participation (Education Department and Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 1999, p. 11).

In the same year, Ho also conducted a study on home-school co-operation. She asked the views of parents on 14 school management affairs. Her findings were similar. Only 30 per cent of the parents showed interest to participate in decision-making on policies related to PTAs. About one-third (30-40%) of the parents wished to be consulted on matters directly related to students' learning such as medium of instruction, streaming policies, implementation of new curriculum, arrangement of classes and evaluation of school quality. An equal proportion of parents (30-40%)

wished to be informed on matters such as extra-curricular activities, student affairs, school goals, student discipline, school development plan and student behaviour. Parents were not interested in teacher appointment and deployment. More than half (50-60%) opined that parents need not participate. Only a very small percentage (4%) were interested in the work of parent managers in SMCs (Ho, 2002, pp. 29-31).

In 2001, the Committee on Home-school Co-operation commissioned the City University of Hong Kong to conduct a study on the effectiveness of parental organizations in Hong Kong. The report was published in 2003. It reported that parents' participation in education could only achieve the efficacy for enhancing home-school communication, widening parents' participation and assisting in providing part of the educational services. Parents' participation in school management still needs further development (City University of Hong Kong, 2003, p. 4).

#### **Factors affecting parental participation**

The findings suggest that parents who worked in professional or managerial occupations, with high family income and higher education level were more likely to be committed volunteers (Brown, 1991, quoted in Ho 1995, p. 43; Lareau, 1987; Ho, 1995). Parents of higher socioeconomic level tend to demand more substantive involvement (Graue, 1993). Riley (1994) remarks that those parents who accept responsibility for decision-making may be those who have the privilege of a stable income and the time (Riley, 1994, p. 18).

There are many reasons why lower socioeconomic status parents may be less involved in their children's schools. Their own school experiences may mean that they place less value on education and schools themselves may be structured to welcome middle class parents (Hallgarten, 2000, p. 17). The study conducted by Birenbaum-Carmeli in Israel from 1987 to 1991 illustrates that increasing involvement of powerful parents may result in the oppression of weaker groups and individuals (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999, pp. 63-64). However, principals are willing to include high socioeconomic status parents in policy making decisions as long as they can control and formalize their involvement (Goldring, 1993, p. 112).

In Scotland, parents have constituted a majority of the membership of school boards (Table 4), but in England and Wales they have no such majority in school governing bodies.

	Number of pupils			
	1-500	501-1,000	1,001 – 1,500	1,501 +
Parent members	4	5	6	7
Staff members	1	2	2	3
Co-opted members	2	2	3	3

Table 4

Composition of Scottish school boards

(Arnott, M.A & Raab, C.D., 2000, p. 98)

Golby and Lane (1989) analysed the parent governor membership of primary schools in Exeter and concluded that the educated, white, middle-class governor was in the ascendant. Nearly half of the parent governors came from a professional or

managerial background. The unemployed and the unskilled were poorly represented (Golby, 1993, pp. 79-80). Munn & Brown's findings in Scotland in 1989 and other studies came to similar results. Ethnic minority and working class parents were under-represented amongst them (quoted in Deem, Brehony & Heath, 1995, p. 56).

The DfEE national survey conducted by Scanlon, Earley & Evans in 1999 shows that the vast majority (83%) of the governors were in professional or managerial occupations. Nearly four out of ten 'lay' governors have, or have had, experience of an occupation related to the educational sector (quoted in Earley & Creece, 2003, p. 250). Deem, Brehony and Heath (1995) suggest that such governors play a particularly significant role because of their ability to ask pertinent questions and offer constructive advice (Deem, Brehony & Heath, 1995, p. 73).

In Hong Kong, there are very few studies in this area. Wan (1992) found that parents' socioeconomic status and education level related positively to the attitude of parents towards participation in their children's education (Wan, 1992, pp. 104-107). Ho's study of parental involvement in children's education in primary schools in 1998 finds that parents of low socioeconomic status have difficulties in participating in their children's education. They have few economic resources due to low family income. Their low education level is another barrier to communication with teachers (Ho, 2000, p. 295). Ng's study of four parents in a primary school comes to similar findings. The power of direct participation is monopolized by middle-class parents. Working-class parents act as followers whereas middle-class parents are 'power-initiators'. In working-class families, there is a lack of the culture that is compatible with the teachers' culture (Ng, 2000, p. 57).



### **Obstacles in seeking parent participation and difficulties encountered by parent governors**

Parent governors are elected by parent bodies but elections are often formalities, little contested. This reflects a shortage of candidates and further illustrates the lack of interest in performing the accountability role required by legislation. Nevertheless, they have a special relationship to the parents who elected them. However, there is no legal requirement for parent governors to report back to the parents. It seems that parent governors will be governors first and parents second unless specific measures are taken to publicize their role (Golby, 1993, p. 72). Parent governors are required to see themselves as integral parts of the governing body, rather than as representatives of parents as a group (Vincent, 1996, p. 34). According to Munn (2000) parents on school boards and governing bodies may have something of an identity crisis (Munn, 2000, p. 102).

Studies found that parent governors complained of isolation, poor communication, and disputes with heads over their right to report back to their electorate and how this should be done (Research and Information on State Education Trust, 1994, p. 14). Most parent governors often find themselves out of contact with other parents. As there are so many parents in the school, it is difficult to collect their views and report back to them. Annual parents' meetings are notoriously ill-attended events. Optimistic governors take the attendance to be a sign of satisfaction; pessimists take them to be another sign of apathy (Golby, 1993, p. 75).

Munn (1998) comments that parents would become active when there is something

to be active about, such as the closure of their schools (Munn, 1998, p. 392). Getting them involved in routine business should be re-considered. Efforts of many boards in Scotland to collect parental opinion by questionnaires, social events and parent-consultation evenings often received low response rate and turnouts (Munn, 2000, pp. 108-109). Moreover, although governing bodies must allow parents to vote on resolutions at annual parents' meetings, and the governing body is required to consider any resolution that is passed where the number of parents attending is at least 10 per cent, such meetings are often poorly attended and seem to inhibit parents' voices (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995, p. 23). It is no secret that the governing bodies tend to resent the annual parents' meeting. As few parents turn up, the whole thing is regarded as a waste of time (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995, p. 14).

Governors may also lack the necessary skills, confidence and knowledge that would enable them to give a clear direction to the school while also acting as a critical friend (Corrick, 1996, quoted in Earley & Creece, 2003, p. 247). Martin et al, (1995) even conclude that most governors would not want to take over the work of the teachers or headteachers. Many governors are not sure of their role. They have not felt the need to find out how they can contribute. If the headteacher does not encourage them, the progress will be slow (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995, p. 40).

Other studies show that parent governors also lack the knowledge and the time to become more informed. The jargon used at meetings baffle many parent governors (Munn, 2000, p. 104). It is often difficult for parents to attend development-planning

meetings, which are held during the school day. It is also rare for parent members to initiate policy development, particularly in the area of teaching and learning as they are reluctant to become involved (Golby, 1993, p. 105). Furthermore, the language of performance management in education, e.g. performance tables and attendance or exclusion rates, makes it very difficult for parents to play an active role in school decision-making. It is doubtful whether they are really in command of the information with which they are presented (Golby, 1993, p. 106).

Training for governors is also inadequate. Survey findings from the DfEE research in 1999 show that almost three-quarters of the governors reported having received some form of induction for the role but almost half had received no further training since induction. The Department of Education and Skills has developed induction training materials on three key roles of governors: to provide a strategic overview, to act as a critical friend and to ensure accountability, but the government has refused to accept the suggestion of the House of Commons Select Committee that newly appointed governors should be required to undertake training (Scanlon, Earley & Evans, quoted in Earley & Creece, 2003, p. 249). Though LEAs offer extensive governor training programmes, some governors are reluctant to attend as they may feel that they are giving enough time already.

In Hong Kong there are many obstacles in getting parent involvement in school-management. According to the principals, the main obstacles are:

- ⊗ The representation of parent representatives is low: 65%
- ⊗ Parents are not used to meetings/ discussions with school administrators: 61%
- ⊗ It is time-consuming to involve parents and efficiency would be affected: 57%

- ⊗ Parents cannot find time for involvement in school management: 52%
- ⊗ The information provided by schools is insufficient: 47%
- ⊗ Teachers are apprehensive of parent participation in school affairs: 43%

(Wan, 1992, pp. 96-97).

Most of the principals' views are shared by the parents. About half (52%) of the parents consider time constraint the greatest concern. Two-fifths (40%) agree that parents are not used to meeting/ discussion with school administrators and their representation is a problem (Wan, 1992, p. 98).

The views of the teachers towards parent involvement are also rather negative. Most teachers would prefer to inform parents only. About half (40-60%) are willing to consult parents only on matters such as evaluation of school quality, amount and quality of homework, arrangement of extra-curricular activities and other affairs directly related to students, e.g. lunch and school bus arrangement. More than half of the teachers consider that parents need not participate in SMCs (Ho, 2002, p. 76-77).

#### **Government measures to remove the obstacles and provide assistance to parent managers in Hong Kong**

In view of the obstacles and difficulties in getting parent involvement in school-based management, the Education Department commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a consultancy report on the promotion of parent education in Hong Kong in 2001. The Report recommended the establishment of a new post in schools: Home-school Liaison Officer, with reduced teaching load, to

promote parent education and participation. It also recommended the establishment of Parent Learning Centre to support parents' lifelong learning and provide the required resources, support and training programmes for parents (Ho, 2002, pp. 114-115). It even suggested that the government and employers should provide more flexible working hours, or even paid leave, to make it possible for parents to participate actively in their children's education (Ho, 2002, p. 119).

In 2001, the School-based Management Section of the Education Department published a pamphlet on "Responsibilities of School Managers". It listed the powers and responsibilities of school managers, such as direction for the school, school policies, school plans/ reports, curriculum, finance, personnel, school premises, school performance and home-school-community partnership. It also listed the support from the Education Department, which included experience-sharing seminars, reference materials for managers, school administration guide and school manager's handbook. School managers were encouraged to contact the Regional Education Offices and the School Development Officer for support (Education Department, 2001, pp. 14-19).

From November 2000 onwards, to better support school managers in performing their roles, the Education Department has been organizing experience-sharing sessions, training programmes on school management and thematic seminars for new, serving and potential managers. In the school year 2002-03, six experience-sharing sessions were held for serving secondary school managers, namely school-based management and the roles and responsibilities of school managers, curriculum development and school-based curriculum, school development: planning and

evaluation, personnel management and staff development, financial management and legal aspects of managing a school and outlook of Hong Kong education reform (Education Department, 2003).

There were also experience-sharing sessions especially for PTA parent executives of secondary schools. Most sessions were similar to those offered to serving secondary school managers, with two exceptions: parental participation in school management and Hong Kong education reform: past and the future (Education Department, 2003). In view of the great increase in the number of new school managers, much time, manpower and resources would be required to train and prepare them to perform their duties more effectively.

#### **Can real partnership in home-school relations be developed?**

Partnership implies something of value contributed on a basis of equality from each towards the achievement of a common goal (Glolby, 1993, p. 67). The Taylor Report thought of the governing body as a partnership bringing together all the parties concerned with the school's success so that they can discuss, debate and justify the matters which any of them seeks to implement (DES, 1977, p. 52). Governors are considered to have a special role as partners in the school service and the government is strengthening the vital link between the school and the community by increasing the number of parent governors (DfEE, 1997, p. 68). However, parents can be effective partners only if professionals take notice of what they say and how they express their needs and treat their contributions as intrinsically important (DES, 1978, Warnock Report quoted in Sandow, Stafford & Stafford, 1987, p. 1).

By definition, a partnership implies a relationship between equals where power and control is evenly distributed (Lareau, 1996, p. 35). A partnership cannot exist if one party always works for the other (Myers, 1995, p. 319). The use of the term 'partnership' in 'home-school relationship' implies an equal and reciprocal relationship but the school remains a powerful institution in relation to parents. Studies have shown that the partnership between parents and professionals involved in the education of the parents' child or children can never be an equal one (Dale, 1996, pp. 5-7). Schools need parents to be involved but the relationship is one of unequal partners in which the parameters for approved involvement will be determined and regulated by school staff (Hood, 2003, p. 260).

Partnership cannot exist if one of the parties is excessively weak and dependent on the other (Woods, 1988, p. 330). Vincent (1996) indicates that the literature on home-school practices acknowledges that relationship between parents, especially working class parents, and teaching professionals are characterized by an imbalance of power. Home-school relations are usually seen from the school perspective, a one-way view of parental involvement and teachers acknowledge what they wish to get from the partnership. Equal partnership between teacher and parent can only be achieved if teaching professionals transfer some of their powers to parents (Vincent, 1996, pp. 91-113).

For the teachers, it is 'safe' to allow parents of an area outside the classroom and parents should not influence any of the main concerns of teaching (Todd & Higgins, 1998, pp. 229-232). Allowing parents into the classroom and giving them some influence over the curriculum may expose weak teachers to parental scrutiny, though

most parents will respect the teacher's skills increasingly as they come to understand what goes on in the classroom (OECD, 1997, pp. 53-55).

In governing bodies or SMCs, some parent governors may also have a feeling of inferiority. It is not easy for an 'ordinary' parent to sit on an education committee dominated by experienced politicians. The atmosphere can be intimidating, the views of parents may be seldom sought and initiatives on parental involvement taken without any consultation with the parent representative (Research and Information on State Education Trust, 1994, p. 15). At the same time, many parent governors are overawed by the weight of their responsibilities and the complexity and volume of business dealt with in committees (Golby, 1993, p. 81).

Moreover, there is the problem of inequalities and differences between parents. Like all forms of civic or political activity, participation is usually skewed in favour of the middle class in schools. White middle-class parents have the social and cultural capital and material resources to make their voice heard. The kind of individualized and deracialised parental involvement may contribute in the long run to widening the gap between the involved and the uninvolved (Crozier, 2001, p. 338). Initiatives that seek to promote parental participation may serve to increase rather than reduce existing inequalities in education. It is necessary to develop strategies for parental involvement to include rather than exclude those parents who are traditionally under-represented. The use of quotas or payment for governors may be considered (Hood, 2003, pp. 260-262).

Epstein (1997) is optimistic and regards progress in partnerships as incremental. She



considers the development of a partnership as a process, not a single event. The connection of partnerships to curriculum and instruction in schools are important changes that move partnerships from public relations to student learning and development (Epstein, 1997, pp. 277-278).

However, several years have passed and the partnership has not been established. It seems that the government is pushing something that parents do not want. There are mismatches between government aims and parent expectations. Just a little fine-tuning cannot make sense of initiatives that do not seem to work on the ground.

## **Summary**

### *Literature findings*

The literature suggests that the government in the UK has been legislating to promote parent and lay participation in school governing bodies in order to enhance consumerist and managerial modes of accountability. The powers of governing bodies have been increased and governors have been given the monitoring role. However, government legislation or administrative requirements do not offer either an adequate or credible version of how things might be or a satisfactory basis for the planning of a school's work with its parents (Bastiani, 1996, p. 59). Studies show that parents and lay participation may not perform the monitoring role effectively and parents have little influence in the decision-making process of the school (Shearn et al, 1995; Munn, 2000). The school heads remain the most influential in the decision-making process. There are also many obstacles in getting parent

participation and parent governors have encountered many difficulties. Relations between parents and teaching professionals are characterized by an imbalance of power. Partnership between parents and schools has not been established as the Taylor Report recommended.

As a former British colony, legislation to enhance consumerist and managerial modes of accountability have been copied to Hong Kong. Measures and legislation to promote parent involvement in governing bodies in Hong Kong have met with open opposition from sponsoring bodies. After a consultation and negotiation period of about four years, the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002 was finally passed in July 2004. Each aided school has to include at least one parent manager in SMCs, though there is a transitional period of five years. However, the Hong Kong legislation is an import that has been copied from the UK and it has met resistance because local conditions are sensitive and have caused reactions even more negative than in the UK. Many sponsoring bodies have made it clear that they would not register SMCs as incorporated bodies.

#### *Scope of study*

In my study, I will examine the impact of the reform on government and aided schools. It seems that the reform should have greater impact on government schools, which are managed by the Education and Manpower Bureau. However, it is much more difficult to introduce the reform in aided schools, which are operated by the sponsoring bodies.

I will also examine the match/ mismatch of government aim and the expectations of the parents. The government aims at enhancing parent participation and making schools accountable to parents but the findings in the UK show that this does not seem to work. Parent governors feel least comfortable in areas such as 'curriculum', 'teaching and learning', 'budget' and 'staffing' (Martin, Ranson & Rutherford, 1995), and they lack the knowledge, time, confidence and skills to become more informed (Corrick, 1996; Munn, 2000). Munn's study (2000) also shows that parent governors have little desire for greater participation in decision-making and their main role is to support the school.

It seems very hard indeed to make anything constructive out of parent power, except in limited areas where lay people feel comfortable, like sitting on panels, helping in classrooms etc. I will examine the role of parent managers in SMCs and find out the difficulties and obstacles in the establishment of home-school partnership. I will also explain why the reform does not work and suggest ways to make the most of the positive aspects.

Finally, most studies show that it is not easy to establish a partnership between parents and teaching professionals. Partnership has not been an equal one between parents and professional (Dale, 1996; Vincent, 1996). Moreover, there is the problem of inequalities and differences between parents (Crozier, 2001). I will discuss the problems in the development of partnership in home-school relations and make some practical suggestions.

### **Chapter 3    Research methods**

#### **Introduction**

The main purpose of the thesis is to find out the impact of the reform to enhance parental participation in government and aided secondary schools in Hong Kong and whether greater parent participation has been achieved. I have decided to collect views from two main stakeholders: principals and parent managers. The focus is on the match/ mismatch between government aims and parent expectations, parental participation in SMCs, obstacles to participation and recommendations to enhance parent participation.

A combination of research methods has been planned, as a single source of data must always be to some extent suspect and that every effort must be made within available resources to check the accuracy of data by using a combination of research tools (Johnson, 1994, pp. 161-162). The original planned research methods included an exploratory survey, interviews, documents and observation. However, this study has encountered difficulties associated with gaining access and compromises have been made in different stages.

First of all, as a result of the failure to obtain access to SMC meeting documents and consent for observation of SMC meetings, only survey and interviews have been used. Moreover, there was no information on the parent managers and I had to contact them through the principals. This is not the best as the parent managers can only respond if

the principals allow them by passing the relevant questionnaires and letters to them. Furthermore, I encountered great difficulty in getting consent of principals and parent managers for the interviews. Though 29 principals and 27 parent managers returned the questionnaires, I had to be satisfied with interviewing 3 principals and 3 parent managers only and this was only possible because of my friendship with the principals.

Regardless of the above-mentioned difficulties, the research methods chosen are still relevant and fit for the purpose. They can yield useable findings though there are limits on generalizations.

#### **Reasons for using survey and interview in this study**

The survey is used as I have to identify the secondary schools with parent managers in SMCs. In the academic year 2001-2002, there were 405 secondary schools (excluding English Schools Foundations, international schools and private schools) in Hong Kong. Of these 405 secondary schools, 36 were government schools and 369 were aided schools. There was no information on schools with parent managers in SMCs. The Education Department was approached but the required information was considered to be confidential and could not be released. It was only confirmed that there were parent managers in all the 36 government schools and the number of aided schools with parent managers was between forty and fifty. Moreover, there were no parent managers in schools operated by some large sponsoring bodies such as Sheng Kung Hui, The Church of Christ in China, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, Po Leung Kok and the Catholic Diocese.

An exploratory survey can help to identify the aided schools with parent managers in SMCs and the information is useful in exploring the match and mismatch between government intentions and reality on the ground. A survey is used as there is a tendency to associate quantitative methods with the 'hard' and 'real' science (Mansion & Bramble, 1977, p. 38). Quantification often makes our observations more explicit and the survey can provide some quantitative data, which are regarded by some researchers as easier to aggregate, compare and summarize (Babbie, 2001, p. 36).

Besides the survey, interviews with principals and parent managers are conducted in three selected aided secondary schools. The qualitative data collected are used to supplement, validate, interpret, clarify and illuminate quantitative data gathered from the same subjects or site (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 41). Interviews are used in this study to obtain additional information on areas such as the appointment of parent managers and the contribution and influence of parent managers in SMC meetings. They are also used to seek elaboration on some of the findings from the questionnaire, for example involvement of parent managers in the school development plan and areas of work that parent managers can perform better than principals.

The interviews can also provide opportunities for principals and parent managers to express their views and feelings more freely. Moreover, the researcher in the interview can be more involved and in closer contact with the respondents (McMillan, 2000, p. 11). The qualitative data collected from the interviews can be more easily comprehended by most people and sometimes richer in meaning than quantified data (Babbie, 2001, p. 36).

In this study I consider the survey and the interview to be complementary and a combination of both types of methods may give a fuller picture of the nature of educational phenomena (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999, pp. 14-15). I understand that carrying out a sophisticated quantitative study while doing an in-depth qualitative study simultaneously is very difficult (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 37), as these two are different methods. The survey will collect lots of responses while there are very few interviewees. Nevertheless, the two different methods can present readers with different kinds of information and may be used to triangulate to gain greater confidence in the conclusions (Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994, p. 24).

In fact, the use of both questionnaire and interview has been quite common in Hong Kong. Most of the studies on home-school relations and parent participation in school management have used this combination of questionnaires and interviews. Examples include 'Home-school Co-operation Research Report' by University of Hong Kong Research Team in 1994; 'A Study of Home-school Co-operation' by Ho in 1999; 'A survey on parents' views on the rights and responsibilities in their children's education' by the Education Department and Committee on Home-School Co-operation in 1999 and 'A study of the effectiveness of parental organizations in Hong Kong' by City University of Hong Kong in 2003.

#### **Other research methods considered but not used**

The use of documents and observation has been considered as both methods can provide additional and valuable information for this study. The essence of a document

is that it already exists in a definitive form (Johnson, 1994, p. 58). Instead of directly observing, or interviewing, or asking someone to fill in a questionnaire for the purposes of enquiry, the researcher is dealing with something produced for other purpose and it is an unobtrusive measure which is non-reactive (Robson, 2002, p. 349). The document cannot be individually designed to suit a particular research purpose but must be drawn on as a source of data in the form in which it stands (Johnson, 1994, p. 58). Moreover, the same document can be analysed at different points in the study, and from different perspectives and for different purposes (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003, p. 283).

The documents most useful for this study include minutes of SMC meetings, constitution of SMC, letters, notes and other communications to SMC managers. They can supplement and check on data collected from the survey and the interviews.

Besides the use of documents, observation has been considered. Schwandt (2001) defines observation as 'direct firsthand eye-witness accounts of everyday social action' that answer the question what is going on (Schwandt, 2001, p. 179). A major advantage of observation is its directness. You do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes, you watch what they do and what they say (Robson, 2002, p. 310). Patton (2002) lists several advantages of observation. It enables the researcher to understand the context within which people interact, to be open and inductive, to see things that may escape awareness and learn things that people would be unwilling to talk about in an interview (Patton, 2002, pp. 262-263).



In this study, observation of SMC meetings has been considered to be most useful as it can make as full a record as possible of what went on at each meeting. It can pick up 'taken-for-granted' features of situations that would not be mentioned in interviews (Johnson, 1994, p. 55). Moreover, it can provide an alternate source of data for verifying the information obtained from questionnaires and interviews. It can also identify if there are discrepancies between what people say that they have done in questionnaire and interview responses and what they actually did (Robson, 2002, p. 310).

Observation of SMC meetings can tell us how decisions are made at SMC meetings and observation of interruptions at meetings can also give us clues as to how people perceive their own power or status in a meeting relative to others at a meeting. People who perceive themselves as of higher power or status or more important often feel free to interrupt those whom they perceive as of lower status (Williams, 1994, p. 316).

In order to gain access to the relevant documents and obtain informed consent for observation of SMC meetings, the principals of three selected schools have been approached. It is found that the minutes of the SMC meetings are not uploaded in the school's websites and all these minutes are regarded as confidential. Though two of the principals are the researcher's acquaintances, they apologized for not being able to give consent for the observation of SMC meetings. Their worries are not too surprising as most sponsoring bodies in Hong Kong would not like to make known the operation of their SMCs. As a result, the researcher has to make some compromise in the research methods by using survey and interview only.

## **Research questions**

The research questions are as follow:

1. What is the impact of the reforms on aided compared with government schools?
2. What is the match/mismatch between the aims of the reform and the attitudes and expectations of the parents?
3. Has greater participation been achieved in either type of school?
4. What are the obstacles to more genuine participation?
5. What can be done to enhance parent participation and establish partnership in home-school relations?

## **Research design**

### ***The survey***

As very little information on parent managers in SMCs is available, I consider it necessary to conduct a survey to understand the existing situation. The purpose of the survey is to collect data from participants in a sample about their characteristics, experiences and opinions (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1999, p. 289). The information received directly from people (research subjects) can be transformed into quantitative data by counting the number of respondents who give a particular response and generating frequency data (Tuckman, 1999, p. 237).

The survey in this study is exploratory. According to Babbie (2001), exploratory studies are most typically done for three purposes: to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding, to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study and to develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study (Babbie, 2001, p. 92).

#### *Advantages and disadvantages of the use of questionnaires*

A questionnaire is used in this study as it has several advantages. First of all, it is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being administered without the presence of the researcher and often being comparatively straightforward to analyze (Wilson & McLean quoted in Cohen et al, 2000, p. 246). Moreover, respondents can fill out the questionnaire at their convenience and answer the items in any order (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1999, p. 289). Mailed questionnaires have the added advantage of being relatively inexpensive and can be done by the researcher alone or with the help of a few assistants. Questionnaires can be sent to a lot of respondents within a short time.

However, I am also aware of the disadvantages of the use of questionnaires. First of all, it takes time to design, pilot and refine the questionnaire. Filling out the questionnaires requires much time and effort from the respondents and mailed questionnaires tend to have a low response rate. Questionnaires can only gather answers to the investigator's construct and are therefore artificial to some extent. Data are collected by asking respondents rather than by observing and sampling their behaviour (Tuckman, 1999, p. 237). Furthermore, the questionnaire cannot probe into respondents' opinions and

feelings. Once the questionnaire has been piloted, finalized and distributed, it cannot be modified or re-worded even if it is found to be unclear to some respondents later (Gall, Borg & Gall, p. 289).

#### *Designing the questionnaire*

The questionnaire is based on the five research questions. Highly structured closed questions are used as this requires minimal effort from the respondents. The data collected can be subjected to statistical analysis and enable comparisons to be made across groups in the sample (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 157). The majority of the questions in the questionnaire are in multiple choice forms. Respondents are only required to tick their responses. There are also six rank order questions that require respondents to identify priorities. This enables a relative degree of preference, priority and intensity to be charted (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 252).

The questionnaire is divided into a number of sections. Section A is different for principals (Appendix A, pp. 188-190) and parent managers (Appendix B, pp. 191-192). Principals and parent managers are asked to provide the same information about their personal details, with parents providing additional information about their age and occupation. Only principals are asked for information about the structure and organization of the SMC. The rest of the questionnaire is the same for principals and parent managers. It consists of six sections: B. parent role in education, C. appointment of parent managers in SMC, D. contribution of parent managers in SMC, E. difficulties / problems encountered by parent managers, F. performance and contribution of parent managers in SMC and G. training and support for parent

managers (Appendix C, pp. 193-199).

The questionnaire was written in both English and Chinese so that respondents could choose the language with which they felt most comfortable. The draft questionnaire was piloted with a few principals and parent managers to check its clarity. It was later revised as there were a few questions that were not clear to the respondents. The final version was printed in four different colors for distribution to principals and parent managers in government and aided secondary schools. The questionnaire was coded in order that follow-up reminders could be sent to those respondents who had not replied. Cover letters, including one from the University of Leicester, (Appendix D, pp. 200-204) explaining the purpose of the research and providing assurance of confidentiality were enclosed. An offer was made to send a summary of questionnaire results to all interested respondents.

#### *Respondent selection for the questionnaire*

The study aims at collecting the views of principals and parent managers in secondary schools where parent managers are included in SMCs. The focus is on secondary sector as it is an area that is under-researched. Parent involvement in education has been regarded as more significant in the primary sector, where parents are considered to be able to make greater contributions. However, in recent years there has been greater parent involvement in secondary schools and the percentage of secondary schools with PTAs has increased from 63% in 1999-2000 to 81% in 2001-2002 (Committee on Home-School Cooperation, 2003, p. 3). Parents will be expected to

play a more significant role in secondary schools in the coming years.

In June 2002, questionnaires were sent to all 36 government secondary schools as they all have parent managers in SMCs. It was not possible to identify the 40 to 50 aided schools with parent managers in SMCs, as there was a lack of transparency. All information on SMCs was regarded as confidential. As a result, questionnaires were sent to 259 aided secondary schools (excluding those schools operated by the five sponsoring bodies mentioned above which do not have parent managers in SMCs).

I also encountered difficulty in gaining access to the parent managers as there was no information about the names of the parent managers in both government and aided secondary schools. So the questionnaires for parent managers had to be distributed through the principals. To minimize the work of the principals, the parent manager questionnaires were returned to me directly in self-addressed stamped envelopes. Follow-up letters were sent to schools which had not responded in early October 2002. A few principals were contacted directly by phone if it was confirmed that there were parent managers in those schools.

#### *Response rate of questionnaire*

In the end, responses were received from 34 schools: 15 government schools and 19 aided schools. The response rate is 42 per cent for the government schools, as there are 36 government schools. The response rate for aided schools should range from 38 to 48 per cent as the Education Department has confirmed that there are 40 to 50 aided

schools with parent managers in SMCs. (Table 5)

Type of schools	Number of questionnaires sent	Number of questionnaires received	Response rate
Government schools	36	15	42%
Aided schools	259 (Only 40-50* out of 259 schools have parent managers in SMCs)	19	38%* (19 out of 50) to 48%* (19 out of 40)

\* Response rate of aided schools is based on the information that there are only 40-50 schools with parent managers in SMCs.

Table 5

#### Response rate of questionnaire

Wiersma opines that the greater the response rate, the better the survey (Wiersma, 2000, p. 176). In fact, there is no agreed percentage of acceptable or satisfactory response rate. Cohen considers a well-planned postal survey should obtain at least a 40 per cent response rate (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 263). Babbie suggests that a response rate of 50 per cent is adequate, 60 per cent good and 70 per cent very good (Babbie, 2001, p. 256). As the response rate for this survey has exceeded 40 per cent, the results of the questionnaire findings should reflect the population to a satisfactory degree.

#### *Information on respondents*

From the 34 schools, a total of 56 questionnaires were returned. In most cases, there were responses from both principals and parent managers but there were also cases where only the principal or the parent manager responded. It was found that 29 principals and 27 parent managers responded (Table 6).

Respondents	Number (percentage)
Principals	29 (52%)
Parent managers	27 (48%)
Total	56 (100%)

Table 6

Respondents to the questionnaire

The sample of principals and parent managers was remarkably similar in respect of gender. About three-fifths of them were male and two-fifths were female (Table 7).

Gender	Principals	Parent managers
Male	17 (59%)	15 (58%)
Female	12 (41%)	11 (42%)
Total	N=29 (100%)	N=26 (100%) *There was one missing information

Table 7

Gender distribution of principals and parent managers

The majority of the respondents were relatively new to their present roles in the schools. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the principals had been in the present school for less than five years (Table 8).



Number of years as principal in the present school	Number (percentage)
5 or less	18 (62%)
6-10	8 (28%)
11-15	2 ( 7%)
More than 15	1 ( 3%)
Total	29 (100%)

Table 8

Respondents' experience as principal in the present school

About half (45%) of the parents have been parent managers for less than one year.

About one-third (37%) have been parent managers for two years (Table 9).

Number of years as parent manager in the present school	Number (percentage)
1 or less	12 (45%)
2	10 (37%)
3	2 ( 7%)
4 or more	3 (11%)
Total	27 (100%)

Table 9

Respondents' experience as parent manager in the present school

As might be expected, the principals had much higher qualifications than the parent managers. All principals had university or above qualifications. About half (48%) had

a master's degree and a very small percentage (4%) had a doctorate. On the other hand, only one-third of the parent managers had university or above qualifications. More than half (52%) had secondary 7 or below only (Table 10).

Academic qualifications	Principals	Parent managers
	Number (percentage)	Number (percentage)
Primary		3 (11%)
Secondary 5		7 (26%)
Secondary 7		4 (15%)
Tertiary		4 (15%)
University or above		9 (33%)
Degree	14 (48%)	
Master	14 (48%)	
Doctorate	1 ( 4%)	
Total (Percentage)	29 (100%)	27 (100%)

Table 10  
Academic qualifications of principals and parent managers

### *The interview*

As I am aware of the limitations of the use of questionnaires, I have also used interview as an additional methodology that strengthens validity and triangulates what comes from the questionnaires. Wragg (2002) considers that interviews are still a fruitful source of information when handled skillfully, either as the sole means of enquiry, or in conjunction with observation, diary analysis or questionnaires (Wragg, 2002, p. 144). The use of interview in research marks a move away from obtaining

knowledge primarily through external observation and experimental manipulation of human subjects, towards an understanding by means of conversations with the human beings to be understood (Kvale, 1996, p. 11). Instead of being confronted with endless technical tables, the reader is provided with essential information in a focused and conversation-like format. Moreover, the reader is presented with a well-integrated statement that points out the essentials (and their relationships) and discards the remainder (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 376).

Interviews can be used to follow up unexpected results or to go deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding as they do (Kerlinger, 2000, p. 693). Interviews with principals and parent managers are conducted to acquire additional information and gain better understanding of the areas of concern identified in the questionnaires.

#### *Advantages and limitations of the use of interview*

The use of interview has several advantages. First of all, people are more willing to talk than to write. Moreover, skilled interviewers can build up trust and establish rapport with the interviewees. Certain confidential information which respondents will not put in writing may be obtained through the interview. Finally, the interviewer can also evaluate the sincerity and insight of the interviewee (Best, 1998, p. 320).

However, there are some limitations of the use of interview. The interviewer may influence the respondent to answer questions in a certain way (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1999,

p. 290). The use of interview is also prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 269). Moreover, the identity of the respondents must be revealed to the interviewer, though the data can be analysed and reported without disclosing the participants' identity.

#### *Design of interview*

In the construction of interview questions, open ended questions have been used. This will allow the interviewee more freedom to answer the questions. The use of interview in this study is not too costly as there are only six interviews: three for principals and three for parent managers. The interview questions are listed under eight sections: A. appointment of parent managers, B. parental role in education, C. SMC meetings, D. representation, E. contribution of parent managers in SMCs, F. school development plan, G. difficulties/ problems encountered, H. training for parent managers. A copy of the interview questions is enclosed in Appendix E (pp. 205-208).

#### *Respondents selected for the interview*

As most principals were reluctant to be interviewed, interviews were conducted in three aided schools only and both the principal and the parent manager were interviewed. Aided schools have been chosen for several reasons. First of all, principals in government schools are civil servants. They cannot express their views freely as they have to abide by the civil service regulations and most would prefer not to be interviewed. Moreover, the findings from the questionnaires show that there is

more similarity in government schools but more variations in aided schools. Furthermore, when the study was conducted, aided schools were not required by the Education Department to have parent managers and these schools have chosen to include parent managers on their own initiative.

Owing to difficulties in gaining informed consent for the interviews, there are only 6 interviewees. This may result in a lack of representation and it is difficult to generalize the findings to other situations (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Ary et al, 1996). Therefore in selecting the three schools for the interviews, due consideration has been given in order that the structure and organization of SMCs and the particulars of the principals and parent managers match the characteristics of the aided schools in the sample.

Finally, three aided schools were identified and the informed consent of the principals and parent managers obtained. Two of the principals were acquaintances. I was aware of the implications of using personal contacts. Seidman (1998) comments that interviewers and participants who are friends usually assume that they understand each other. Instead of exploring assumptions and seeking clarity about events and experiences, they tend to assume that they know what is being said (Seidman, 1998, p. 36). Nevertheless, the use of personal contacts could be justified here due to difficulty in gaining access. Moreover, the acquaintances were classmates whom I had not seen for more than thirty years and therefore we would not assume we understood each other. Furthermore, one principal only agreed to be interviewed because she was contacted by one of the acquaintances. She knew him so well that she agreed to be interviewed and she also made arrangement for the parent manager in her school to be

interviewed as well.

A comparison of the organization and structure of the SMCs in the three schools selected for the interviews shows that they have many similarities to the schools that responded to the questionnaire. They can match more than half of the schools in the number of parent managers, tenure of office of parent managers, number of SMC meetings and time when SMC meetings are held. Details are shown in Table 11.

School	Schools selected for the interviews	Sample
Number of parent managers	1 (100%)	1 (59%) 2 (41%)
Tenure of office of parent managers (in years)	2 (100%)	1 (28%) 2 (62%) 3 ( 7%) 4 ( 3%)
Number of SMC meetings in one academic year	3 (67%) 4 (33%)	1 ( 3%) 2 ( 7%) 3 (62%) 4 (24%) 5 ( 4%)
Time when the SMC meetings are held	Saturdays (67%) Weekday mornings or afternoons (33%)	Saturdays (7 %) Weekday mornings or afternoons (69%) Others: 24%

Table 11  
Comparison of the organization and structure of SMC  
in the 3 selected schools and the questionnaire sample

It is more difficult to match the characteristic and particulars of the selected principals and parent managers with the questionnaire respondents. Nevertheless, they are most similar in the age of parent managers, years of experience as parent managers and occupations of parent managers. They are less similar in educational qualifications of principals and parent managers. Details are shown in Table 12.

School	Schools selected for the interviews	Sample
Sex of principals	Male 67% Female 33%	Male 59% Female 41%
Educational qualifications of principals	Master 100%	Degree 48% Master 48% Doctorate 4%
Sex of parent managers	Male 33% Female 67%	Male 58% Female 42%
Educational qualifications of parent managers	Secondary 5 (67%) Secondary 7 (33%)	Primary (11%) Secondary 5 (26%) Secondary 7 (15%) Tertiary (15%) University or above (33%)
Age of parent managers	30-50 (100%)	30-50 (92%) Others 8%
Years of experience as parent managers	1 (67%) 2 (33%)	1 (67%) 2 (17%) Others 16%
Occupation of parent managers	Professional or managerial (67%) Housewife (33%)	Professional or managerial (60%) Housewife (33%) Non-professional or manual ( 7%)
Parent managers' role in parent-teacher association	Chairperson (67%) Vice-chairperson (33%)	Not available

Table 12

Comparison of the personal particulars of the principals and parent managers in the selected schools and the sample

It is obvious that the interview sample is too small and an increase in the number of interviewees will make the findings more representative. Nevertheless, it must be understood that this is a compromise associated with difficulties in gaining access and getting informed consent. As a matter of fact, though there are only 6 interviewees (3 principals and 3 parent managers), this still represents about one-tenth of the questionnaire respondents. Details are shown in Table 13.

SMC managers	Number interviewed	Number of questionnaire respondents	Percentage of the sample interviewed
Principals	3	29	10%
Parent managers	3	27	11 %

Table 13  
Representation of the interviewees

#### *Arrangement of the interviews*

In arranging the interviews, the principals were first approached to get their consent. The consent of the parent managers was obtained through the principals. In order to make interviewees speak more freely and feel more comfortable, interviews were conducted in Cantonese in the schools. The principal and the parent manager were interviewed separately, though the semi-structured questions were more or less the same. Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour. To minimize inconsistency across interviews, I conducted all the six interviews. I was fully aware of the problem of bias that might be introduced by the subjectivity of the researcher, as well as the informants (Hamel, 1993, p. 23). Therefore as far as possible, the exact wordings of the respondents were transcribed and I cross-checked findings from interviews with the survey and checked interviews with available documents to reduce subjective judgement or personal bias (Nisbet & Watt, 1987, p. 74).

As there was no objection from the interviewees, the interviews were taped. The use of the tape recorder has several advantages. It is convenient and inexpensive. The interview can be conducted more smoothly as writing or note taking is not necessary. Taped interviews can be replayed as often as necessary for objective analysis at a later



time (Best, 1998, p. 321).

#### **Data analysis**

Data were obtained from the questionnaires and the interviews. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed by using the statistical software, Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences. For all questions, frequencies of all responses were calculated and the data were tabulated for comparison. Additionally, for all rank order questions, a combined score was calculated from the rankings as follow: 1<sup>st</sup>=3, 2<sup>nd</sup>=2, and 3<sup>rd</sup>=1. For some questions, a combined score was calculated from all the ratings by assigning the score of 2 to very important, 1 to marginally important and 0 to not important.

In order to find out the impact of the reform on government and aided schools, cross tabs were conducted to compare the organization and structure of SMCs in government and aided schools. As different views on the role of parent managers by principals and parent managers may affect the development of partnership on home-school relations, cross tabs were conducted to compare the responses of principals and parent managers and the results were presented and analysed. Cross tabs were also conducted to compare the responses of working parent managers and housewife parent managers. Only results with significant differences were presented.

On the other hand, the interviews were taped and transcribed for further analysis. Transcribing the interviews from an oral to a written mode structures the interview conversations in a form amenable for closer analysis (Kvale, 1996, p. 168). In this

study the transcription was a verbatim account in order that it could reflect as accurate a picture as possible. The information obtained from the interviews was used to supplement, validate and clarify the data gathered from the questionnaires.

I was aware of the implications which might have on the interpretation of the interview data as the interviews were conducted in Cantonese and then translated into English. Therefore attempts have been made to ensure that the interpretation represented the actual views and opinions of the respondents. As both the principal and the parent manager in the same school were interviewed, I cross-checked the data. Moreover, I also compared the returned questionnaire findings with the interview findings. Nevertheless, in translating from one language to another, there may still be an introduction of another 'layer' of interpretation, despite all efforts to minimize this possibility.

## **Ethics**

In conducting this study, two ethical principles: informed consent and confidentiality have been observed. Berger & Patchner (1994) remark that for individuals to be able to voluntarily participate they must be given an explicit choice about whether or not they wish to participate in the study (Berger & Patchner, 1994, p. 93). When the questionnaires were sent to principals and parent managers, they had every right not to complete and return them. For the interviews, informed consent was obtained from the selected principals and parent managers. Before conducting the interviews, the purposes of the study were explained to all interviewees. They had the right to decide

if they were to be interviewed. During the interview they could refuse to answer any questions with which they felt uncomfortable.

All data and information collected were treated in strict confidence. Confidentiality is a promise that the person(s) will not be identified or presented in identifiable form (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996, p. 319). In this study, the questionnaires were coded and safely kept. I am the only person who can identify the respondents. The names of principals, parent managers, schools and sponsoring bodies are not disclosed. In the interviews, sometimes a balance has been struck. One or two events and incidents cannot be described in detail, as this may reveal the identity of the principal or the school. Moreover, what the interviewee has said in informal conversations after the formal interview has not been included.

### **Limitations**

This study investigates the impact of the reforms to enhance parental participation on government and aided secondary schools in Hong Kong. It compares the structure and operation of SMCs in government and aided schools and it also compares the views of principals and parent managers on the role of parent managers. As the response rate of the questionnaire has exceeded 40 per cent, the findings should reflect the population to a satisfactory degree. However, a higher response rate can be obtained when principals are less sensitive to revealing matters related to SMCs to researchers or if the questionnaires can be sent directly to parent managers, instead of through the principals.

Besides, only three principals and three parent managers have been interviewed and this represents about one-tenth of the sample only. It is also very difficult to match the characteristics of the principals and the parent managers in the sample.

Moreover, the research has been compromised by difficulties associated with gaining access. Two research methods namely the use of documents and observation of meetings cannot be conducted as the three selected schools do not allow access to SMC documents or observation of SMC meetings, regarding all these as confidential.

Furthermore, the findings from questionnaires and interviews can only show the 'perceived' role of parent managers by principals and parent managers. Further researches will be required to study the 'actual' role of the parent managers. Another limitation of the present study is that it has not investigated PTAs and their links with parent managers in the SMCs.

Finally, this study is restricted to collecting the views of principals and parent managers and has not sought those of other managers in the SMCs, such as teachers, past graduates and school sponsoring bodies etc. Again, this is an important focus for future research.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the study can assess the impact of the reform on government and aided schools, examine if there is greater parent participation in both types of schools, identify the obstacles to genuine participation and make suggestions to develop better partnership in home-school relations in future.

## **Chapter 4 Findings**

The findings in this chapter are based on the information collected from the questionnaires and the interviews with principals and parent managers in three aided schools. The results of the questionnaires are presented first and the views of the principals and parent managers in the interviews are used to provide additional information or elaboration on some of the findings of the questionnaires.

### **What is the impact of the reforms on aided compared with government schools?**

#### *Organization and structure of school management committees*

The information on SMCs was obtained from questionnaires returned by the principals in 12 government schools and 17 aided schools. It shows that the reforms had greater impact on government than aided schools. The structure and organization of SMCs in government schools were in many ways very similar to the proposal in the consultative document “Transforming schools into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities”. On the other hand, the organization and structure of SMCs in aided schools were in many ways different from the suggested model in the government proposal. Details are shown in the following paragraphs.

The government proposed that there should be at least two parent managers. This proposal was adopted in all the 12 government schools. However, not even one aided school appointed two parent managers as suggested. In all the 17 aided schools, there was only one parent manager (Table 14).

Government proposal	Number of parent managers	Government schools	Aided schools
2 or more	1		17 (100%)
	2	12 (100%)	
	Number (percentage)	12 (100%)	17 (100%)

Table 14

Number of parent managers in government and aided schools

Similarly, the government proposed the tenure of office of parent managers to be two years and this was practised in 10 government schools (83%). The other two schools (17%) set the tenure of office to be three years. However, in the aided schools, only 8 schools (47%) followed the government proposal of two years. An equal number of schools (47%) set the tenure of office to be one year. For the remaining school (6%), the tenure of office was four years (Table 15).

Government proposal	Tenure of office of parent managers	Government schools	Aided schools
2 years	1 year		8 (47%)
	2 years	10 (83%)	8 (47%)
	3 years	2 (17%)	
	4 years		1 ( 6%)
	Number (percentage)	12 (100%)	17 (100%)

Table 15

Tenure of office of parent managers in government and aided schools

The government proposal on the number of SMC meetings held in an academic year has also greater influence in the government schools. 11 government schools (92%) held three SMC meetings as suggested. The remaining school (8%) held four meetings. In the aided schools, the number of meetings ranged from one to five. Over 75% of the schools held either three or four meetings. Though the government proposal of three meetings was the most popular, it was only adopted in 7 schools (41%) (Table 16).

Government proposal	Number of SMC meetings normally held in each school year	Government schools	Aided schools
not less than 3	1		1 ( 6%)
	2		2 (12%)
	3	11(92%)	7 (41%)
	4	1 ( 8%)	6 (35%)
	5		1 ( 6%)
	Number (percentage)	12 (100%)	17 (100%)

Table 16

Number of SMC meetings normally held in each school year in  
government and aided schools

The consultative document did not suggest when the SMC meetings should be held. Nevertheless, it is found that there was more uniformity in government schools. Ten of the twelve government schools (84%) held SMC meetings on weekday mornings or afternoons. In the aided schools, there was more flexibility in the timing of SMC meetings, but more than half (59%) of the aided schools also held SMC meetings on

weekday mornings and afternoons (Table 17).

Government proposal	Time when SMC meetings are held	Government schools	Aided schools
NIL	Weekday mornings or afternoons	10 (84%)	10 (59%)
	Evenings	1 ( 8%)	3 (17%)
	Not fixed	1 ( 8%)	2 (12%)
	Saturdays		2 (12%)
	Number (percentage)	12 (100%)	17 (100%)

Table 17

Time when SMC meetings were held in government and aided schools

#### *Appointment and qualifications of parent managers*

The findings in this part are based on the returned questionnaires from 27 principals and parent managers in government schools and 29 principals and parent managers in aided schools. Additional information obtained from the interviews with principals and parent managers has been used for illustration and elaboration. It is found that the government proposals have been adopted in most government and aided schools.

In the appointment of parent managers, the government proposal that the parent managers should be elected by members of the PTAs has great influence on both government and aided schools. The findings show that 23 government schools (86%) and 25 aided schools (86%) followed the government's recommendation and considered PTA to be the most important party in the appointment of parent managers. Principals, vice-principals and teachers were ranked second, third and fourth



important party in both types of schools. Though the government also proposed the involvement of other parties such as alumni association and student union, it is noted that more government schools than aided schools responded to the government's suggestion. 9 government schools (33%) would involve alumni association and 6 government schools (22%) would involve the chairman or officials of the student union. On the other hand, only 2 aided schools (7%) and one aided school (3%) would involve alumni association and student union respectively (Table 18).

How important would you consider the involvement of the following parties in the appointment of parent managers?	Government schools		Aided schools	
	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
Parent Teacher Association	23 (86%)	50 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	25 (86%)	54(1 <sup>st</sup> )
Principal	18 (67%)	44 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	17 (59%)	42(2 <sup>nd</sup> )
Vice Principal	12 (44%)	37 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	8 (28%)	30(3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Teachers	12 (44%)	37 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	10 (34%)	30(3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Alumni / Graduates' Association	9 (33%)	29 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	2 ( 7%)	14(6 <sup>th</sup> )
Chairman/ Officials of the Student Union	6 (22%)	24 (6 <sup>th</sup> )	1 ( 3%)	15(5 <sup>th</sup> )
Total	27 (100%)	221	29 (100%)	185

Table 18  
Important parties in the appointment of parent managers  
suggested by respondents in government and aided schools

The interviews show that all three parent managers were appointed by the PTA. Two were chairpersons and one was the vice chairperson of PTA. One principal (P3) stressed that the parent manager should have close contacts with the PTA in order to

have better representation. Another principal (P2) believed that the appointment of parent manager to the SMC had a symbolic meaning. Parents were seen to be represented in the school's management committee as an important stakeholder and this would be very encouraging to the PTA committee members and the parents.

The government proposed the minimum education level of parent managers to be secondary or above. This suggestion was followed in 17 government schools (70%) and 22 aided schools (76%). However, 8 government schools (30%) and five aided schools (17%) did not set any minimum education level. Two aided schools (7%) set the minimum at primary only (Table 19).

Government proposal	Education level for parent managers	Government schools	Aided schools
		Number (percentage)	Number (percentage)
Secondary or above	Primary	0 (0 %)	2 (7%)
	Secondary or above	19 (70%)	22(76%)
	No minimum level	8 (30%)	5(17%)
	Number (percentage)	27 (100%)	29 (100%)

Table 19  
Minimum education level for parent managers  
suggested by respondents in government and aided schools

As for the age of parent managers, the government only proposed that parent managers should be aged between 21 and 70. This was followed in both types of schools. However, most government (65%) and aided (69%) schools preferred parent managers to be aged between 30 and 50. It is also found that 8 government schools (30%) indicated that any age would be suitable and their views were shared by 8 aided

schools (28%) (Table 20).

Government proposal	Age of parent managers	Government schools	Aided schools
		Number (percentage)	Number (percentage)
Between 21 and 70	30-50	17 (65%)	20 (69%)
	Any age	8 (31%)	8 (28%)
	Under 30 or over 50	1 ( 4%)	1 ( 3%)
	Number (percentage)	26 (100%)	29 (100%)

Table 20  
Most appropriate age of parent managers  
suggested by respondents in government and aided schools

The government did not set any criteria for the appointment of parent managers but the views of respondents in government and aided schools were very similar. Both ranked ‘interest in the education of young people’ and ‘commitment to provide quality education for young people’ first and second. ‘Familiarity with the school’ was ranked third. ‘Academic qualifications’ and ‘language ability’ were ranked either fourth or fifth. Both ranked ‘socio-economic status’ last (Table 21).

In your view which are the most important factors in the appointment of parent managers?	Government schools		Aided schools	
	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
Interest in the education of young people	11 (41%)	29 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	14 (48%)	36 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
Commitment to provide quality education for young people	9 (33%)	28 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	14 (48%)	30 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
Familiarity with the school	6 (22%)	17 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	6 (21%)	25 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Academic qualifications	5 (19%)	15 (4 <sup>th</sup> )	3 (10%)	9 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Language ability or ability to communicate	3 (11%)	10 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	4 (14%)	12 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
Socio-economic status	0 (0%)	3 (6 <sup>th</sup> )	1 (3%)	4 (6 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	27 (100%)	102	29 (100%)	116

\* Some respondents might have ranked more than one item first or second, resulting in the total exceeding 56.

Table 21  
Most important factors in the appointment of parent managers

### **What is the match/mismatch between the aims of the reform and the attitudes and expectations of the parents?**

The findings in this part are from the questionnaire responses of 27 parent managers in government and aided schools and the interviews with parent managers. The findings indicate that parents support government reforms to increase parent participation and enhance parent participation in decision-making. However, the government aim to enhance the parents' role in monitoring does not seem to match the expectation of the parents.

In the consultative document the government has stressed how active parent participation can bring significant educational benefits and proposed different ways of parental support for the school. The returned questionnaires show that three important benefits of parents' involvement in children's schooling suggested by the government were supported by the parents. However, the parents had their own preferences and priorities. According to 23 parent managers (85%), the most important benefit of parents' involvement in children's schooling was 'strengthening communication between school and parents'. Only 3 parent managers (11%) considered 'providing practical support for the school' and 'helping schools to become more responsive to the needs of society' most important (Table 22).

What are the most important benefits of parents' involvement in children's schooling?	Number (percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
can strengthen communication between school and parents	23 (85%)	76 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
can provide practical support for the school	3 (11%)	48 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
can help schools become more responsive to the needs of society	3 (11%)	40 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	27 (100%)	164

\* Some respondents might have ranked more than one item first or second, resulting in the total exceeding 27.

Table 22  
Benefits of parents' involvement in children's schooling  
(Views of parent managers)

Besides, the government proposed four different ways that parents could support their children's living. The findings from the 27 questionnaires show that parents ranked the four different ways in exactly the same order as they were proposed in the consultative document. 17 parent managers (63%) considered 'getting to know the school and its

policies better' most important. 5 parent managers (19%) chose 'undertaking homework supervision and guidance'. 3 parent managers (11%) each chose 'undertaking ancillary learning activities at home' and 'meeting with other parents to share ways of supporting their children's learning' (Table 23).

How can parents best support their children's learning?	Number (percentage)	Combined Score (Rank)
getting to know the school and its policies better	17 (63%)	63 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
undertaking homework supervision and guidance	5 (19%)	39 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
undertaking ancillary learning activities at home	3 (11%)	37 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
meeting with other parents to share ways of supporting their children's learning	3 (11%)	29 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	27 (100%)	168

\* Some respondents might have ranked more than one item first or second, resulting in the total exceeding 27.

Table 23  
Support for their children's learning  
(Views of parent managers)

The government also proposed that parents could support the school through a range of voluntary services. However, 16 parent managers (59%) still considered 'organizing extra-curricular activities' to be parents' best support for the school. Other voluntary services were considered less important. Only 6 parent managers (22%) chose 'assisting during lunch hours or festive occasions'. 5 parent managers (19%) chose 'working as teaching assistants' and 2 parent managers (7%) each chose 'helping out in the library' and 'coaching sports activities' (Table 24).

How can parents best support the school?	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
organizing extra-curricular activities	16 (59%)	61 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
assisting during lunch hours or festive occasions	6 (22%)	50 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
working as teaching assistants	5 (19%)	28 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
helping out in the library	2 ( 7%)	26 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
coaching sports activities	2 ( 7%)	8 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	27 (100%)	173

\* Some respondents might have ranked more than one item first or second, resulting in the total exceeding 27.

Table 24  
Support for the school  
(Views of parent managers)

The interviews indicate that all three parent managers were positive about parental involvement in these activities. One parent manager (PM3) explained the advantages of parent participation and assistance.

When parents were in schools organizing and supporting the functions, their children could see and feel their concern for them. Their participation was good support for their children and this could give the children more confidence too.

Another parent manager (PM2) considered it an honour to be able to offer assistance to the school. She emphasized that a large number of parents were available and they had done much for the school. Despite limited involvement from parents, the third parent

manager (PM1) was confident that those parents who joined the PTA would consider the activities successful and find the experience very enjoyable.

It is also confirmed that parental assistance was mainly in extra-curricular activities and the activities were organized by the PTA. Parents mainly assisted during Parents' Day and PTA activities, such as a medical check-up for parents. Parents would also help in seminars for parents and students. In one school, parents assisted in inter-school choral and music competitions and helped in field trips. In another school, students visited a food factory and a hospital accompanied by parents. A project for secondary one students and a career guidance talk were also organized by parents.

Besides increasing parent participation, another aim of the reforms is to enhance parental participation in decision-making of the school and this also matches the attitudes and expectations of parents. The parent managers are found to be willing to take up a more active role. 22 parent managers (81%) and 21 parent managers (78%) considered 'inviting parents to discuss and help to make decision affecting their children' and 'inviting parents to examine and discuss the needs and goals of the school' most important school practices for getting parental involvement. Their third preference was 'working in partnership with the PTA in involving parents in school activities'. The more passive role of parents, such as 'inviting parents to attend functions at the school' and 'sending parents information about the school and the programme' were ranked fourth and last (Table 25).



How important would you consider the following school practices for getting parent involvement?	Number (percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
inviting parents to discuss and help to make decisions affecting their children	22 (81%)	49 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
inviting parents to examine and discuss the needs and goals of the school	21 (78%)	48 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
working in partnership with the Parent Teacher Association in involving parents in school activities	19 (70%)	46 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
inviting parents to attend functions at the school	17 (63%)	44 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
sending parents information about the school and its programme	16 (59%)	43 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	27 (100%)	365

Table 25  
Important school practices for getting parent involvement  
(Views of parent managers)

However, the government's aim of enhancing the parents' role in monitoring does not match the expectation of the parents. The questionnaire findings show that the majority of parents (over 70%) considered parents can make strong contribution in the following three areas: 'establishing a community network and support system', 'setting the mission and the goals of the school' and 'determining policies on teaching and learning'. The two monitoring roles namely 'enforcing relevant legislation' and 'being responsible for programme planning and budgeting' only received a support of 7% & 26 % respectively (Table 26).

In which of the following areas can parents make a strong contribution to school decision making?	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
establishing a community network and support system	21 (78%)	21 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
setting the mission and the goals of the school	20 (74%)	20 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
determining policies on teaching and learning	19 (70%)	19 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
being responsible for programme planning and budgeting	7 (26%)	7 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
enforcing relevant legislation	2 ( 7 %)	2 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	27 (100%)	69

Table 26  
Areas in which parent managers can make a strong contribution  
(Views of parent managers)

**Has greater participation been achieved in either type of school?**

The findings in this part are from the questionnaires returned by 56 principals and parent managers in government and aided schools. They were asked their perception of the areas of interest to parent managers in SMCs. The following results show that there was greater participation in government schools than aided schools.

In government schools, the respondents considered that parent managers showed much interest in 10 of the 19 suggested areas of work in SMC. 81% of the respondents considered that parent managers showed much interest in medium of instruction and

homework/ assessment policy. Other areas of work in which most parent managers showed interest included student welfare (76%), school rules and regulations (73%), school development plan (70%), teaching and learning (65%), school missions and goals (63%), curriculum (61%), student complaints (58%) and student admission (58%) (Table 27).

Areas	Government schools		
	Much Interest	Some Interest	No Interest
medium of instruction	21 (81%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)
homework / assessment policy	21 (81%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)
student welfare	19 (76%)	6 (24%)	
school rules and regulations	19 (73%)	5 (19%)	2 (8%)
school development plans	19 (70%)	8 (30%)	
teaching and learning	17 (65%)	9 (35%)	
school missions & goals	17 (63%)	10 (37%)	
curriculum	16 (61%)	9 (35%)	1 (4%)
student complaints	15 (58%)	10 (38%)	1 (4%)
student admission	15 (58%)	10 (38%)	1 (4%)
extra-curricular activities	9 (36%)	16 (64%)	
student expulsions	7 (29%)	12 (50%)	5 (21%)
community network and support system	6 (23%)	19 (73%)	1 (4%)
teacher appraisal/ performance	6 (23%)	17 (65%)	3 (12%)
furniture, equipment and school premises	5 (19%)	18 (69%)	3 (12%)
fund-raising	5 (19%)	19 (70%)	3 (11%)
finance & budget	3 (11%)	14 (54%)	9 (35%)
induction/ staff development	2 (8%)	19 (73%)	5 (19%)
teacher recruitment & deployment	2 (8%)	17 (68%)	6 (24%)

Table 27

Areas that are of particular interest to parent managers in SMC  
(Government schools)

In aided schools, the respondents considered that parent managers showed much interest in only 7 of the 19 areas of work in SMC. Top on the list was student welfare (93%). It was followed by school development plans (82%), teaching and learning (72%), medium of instruction (61%), extra-curricular activities (57%), school missions and goals (56%) and homework and assessment policy (50%) (Table 28).

Areas	Aided schools		
	Much Interest	Some Interest	No Interest
student welfare	27 (93%)	2 (7%)	
school development plans	22 (82%)	5 (18%)	
teaching and learning	21 (72%)	7 (24%)	1 (4%)
medium of instruction	17 (61%)	10 (36%)	1 (3%)
extra-curricular activities	16 (57%)	12 (43%)	
school missions & goals	15 (56%)	10 (37%)	2 (7%)
homework / assessment policy	14 (50%)	9 (32%)	5 (18%)
school rules and regulations	13 (46%)	12 (43%)	3 (11%)
community network and support system	12 (43%)	16 (57%)	
student complaints	11 (41%)	16 (59%)	
furniture, equipment and school premises	11 (39%)	13 (47%)	4 (14%)
student admission	10 (36%)	14 (50%)	4 (14%)
curriculum	8 (30%)	17 (63%)	2 (7%)
induction/ staff development	8 (30%)	10 (37%)	9 (33%)
fund-raising	7 (27%)	13 (50%)	6 (23%)
teacher appraisal/ performance	7 (25%)	20 (71%)	1 (4%)
student expulsions	6 (22%)	15 (56%)	6 (22%)
finance & budget	4 (15%)	17 (66%)	5 (19%)
teacher recruitment & deployment	2 (7%)	17 (63%)	8 (30%)

Table 28  
Areas that are of particular interest to parent managers in SMC  
(Aided schools)

Nevertheless, it is perceived that more than 20% of the parent managers in both government and aided schools showed no interest in the following areas of work: finance and budget, teacher recruitment and deployment, student expulsions and

induction/ staff development (Table 29).

	Government schools	Aided schools
Areas	No Interest	No Interest
finance & budget	9 (35%)	5 (19%)
teacher recruitment & deployment	6 (24%)	8 (30%)
student expulsions	5 (21%)	6 (22%)
induction/ staff development	5 (19%)	9 (33%)
furniture, equipment and school premises	3 (12%)	4 (14%)
teacher appraisal/ performance	3 (12%)	1 (4%)
fund-raising	3 (11%)	6 (23%)
school rules and regulations	2 (8%)	3 (11%)
homework / assessment policy	1 (4%)	5 (18%)
student admission	1 (4%)	4 (14%)
curriculum	1 (4%)	2 (7%)
medium of instruction	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
community network and support system	1 (4%)	
student complaints	1 (4%)	
teaching and learning		1 (4%)
school missions & goals		2 (7%)

Table 29

Areas that are of no particular interest to parent managers in SMC

Though the above figures indicate that parent managers showed much interest in nearly 50% of the areas of work in SMC, the findings from the interviews below seem to indicate, on the contrary, that there was still insufficient parent participation. Moreover, the influence of parent managers in the decision-making process was also rather insignificant.

#### *SMC meetings*

The interviews show that parent managers played an insignificant role in SMC meetings. The documents for a meeting were usually sent one or two weeks before the date of the meeting. The agenda was set by the school supervisor and the principal. In one school, each agenda was accompanied by a paragraph of explanation. In another school, suggestions from teachers' meetings and sometimes PTA meetings would be considered.

Theoretically in all three schools, all members of the SMC could raise items for discussion, though in practice members seldom raised any discussion items. One principal (P3) stressed that every SMC member, including the parent manager, could raise any discussion items at the meeting. In her words,

We allowed them to raise any items for discussion but we did not ask them individually before the meeting. At the meeting, we would ask if they had any items for discussion. I did not recall if any item was raised for discussion by the parent manager at the meeting.

It is found that parent managers seldom raised any items for discussion. One parent manager had never raised any item for discussion. Another parent manager raised an application to the sponsoring body for additional funding. The third parent manager raised several issues on kiosk, school uniform and lunch arrangement.

Though all important matters, such as use of resources, finance report, school development plan, educational initiatives and evaluation etc, would have to be endorsed at the meeting, voting was seldom necessary, as consensus would usually be

reached at the meeting. All parent managers admitted that their influence in the decision-making process was minimal.

One parent manager (PM2) described the SMC meetings as mainly “reports by the principal”.

Meetings were held once every 3 months. The principal would ‘report’ the financial status, work for the coming months and the coming activities etc. He would also ‘report’ decisions of the sponsoring body to our requests. He just ‘reported’ to members of the SMC.

Another parent manager (PM3) was very positive about the school. He attributed the lack of participation to the great trust in the principal.

The third parent manager (PM1) explained that active participation was not necessary as the principal and the teachers were doing a very good job. She elaborated,

The development of the school was very comprehensive. Parents did not have to worry about the public examination results. The principal had done a very good job. As for the curriculum, the school would decide and it was also very comprehensive. The principal and the teachers had done a lot. The teachers were extremely good. Whenever they met the parents, they would say hello and take the initiative to offer help.

### *Performance and contribution of parent managers in SMCs*

The findings from the questionnaires show that the performance of parent managers in aided schools was perceived to be better than those in government schools. 19 respondents in aided schools (68%) considered the performance of parent managers to be good but only 9 respondents in government schools (33%) shared the same view (Table 30).

Performance of parent managers	Government schools	Aided schools	Total
	Number (percentage)	Number (percentage)	Number (percentage)
Good	9 (33%)	19 (68%)	28 (51%)
Satisfactory	18 (67%)	7 (25%)	25 (45%)
Unsatisfactory	0 ( 0%)	2 ( 7%)	2 ( 4%)
Total	N=27 (100%)	N=28 (100%)	55 (100%)

Table 30

Performance of parent managers in  
government and aided schools

It is also noted that principals rated the performance of parent managers higher than parent managers themselves. 19 principals (66%) considered parent managers' performance good, while only 9 parent managers (35%) considered their own performance good (Table 31).



Performance of parent managers	Principals	Parent managers	Total
	Number (percentage)	Number (percentage)	Number (percentage)
Good	19 (66%)	9 (35%)	28 (51%)
Satisfactory	9 (31%)	16 (61%)	25 (45%)
Unsatisfactory	1 (3%)	1 (4%)	2 (4%)
Total	N=29 (100%)	N=26 (100%)	55 (100%)

Table 31

Performance of parent managers

(Views of principals and parent managers)

In the interviews, the principals agreed that there were some issues which parent managers could make greater contribution in SMCs. One principal (P2) said that he would seek the views of the parent manager on some particular issues. For example, when the school had to decide whether it should emphasize academic achievement or comprehensive development, it would be better to consult the parent manager's views. Though parents were not professionals and might not have too much knowledge in educational matters, they were very concerned about their children's learning. It was better to gain their support.

He also considered the parent manager the most suitable person to explain school policy to parents. He mentioned the example of the allocation of lockers to students. It was obvious that students and parents would consider lockers necessary for students. However, the school found that many students put all their books and exercise books into the lockers and could not do homework or revision at home. When parents' views were consulted by the parent manager, a compromise was reached. Secondary 1 and 2

students were allowed to use lockers. Secondary 3 or above students were not allowed. This resolution seemed to be acceptable to both parents and the school.

Another principal (P1) was also very satisfied with the contributions of the parent manager. He considered that she served as a bridge between the school and the parents and established a “partnership” relation. He elaborated,

She could help parents to understand school aims and policies. She supported, appreciated and praised the work of the teachers. Activities organized by the PTA received a better response and participation. She was always very positive about the school.

The views of the parent managers on their own contribution in SMC are quite different from the principals. One parent manager (PM2) shared the views of the principals and considered her greatest contribution in the SMC meetings to be able to voice parents’ opinions. Though she was not able to influence the decision-making process, at least she could make parents’ voices heard. She quoted a successful application for funding from the sponsoring body. However, she was rather humble and gave the credit to the PTA committee members. She remarked that she might have made only a small contribution at the SMC meeting as she could speak up for the principal. This would show that the application had the support of both parents and the school.

Another parent manager (PM1) considered that her main contribution to be the promotion of parent participation in extra-curricular activities, which benefited both students and parents. She considered performing voluntary work in the home for the

elderly a very happy experience as this could broaden her scope and she could also learn more.

The third parent manager (PM3) opined that he made some special contribution in SMC because of the knowledge and skills he acquired. He quoted two such examples of his contribution in the SMC. The first was on 'school administration and management system'. He said,

I learned information technology myself from a commercial organization. Later I found that the knowledge and skills I had mastered were useful to the school. As I had sufficient knowledge and I was familiar with this system, I had more confidence to express my views. I could look at this system from the perspectives of the managers and the users.

The second example he quoted was on teacher appraisal. He elaborated,

I learned appraisal system from some management courses. Therefore I knew how to appraise the teachers. In fact what I learnt was not applicable to my job but this was useful now. I could help the school. This might not be a sense of achievement but it really made me happy. I found it hard to believe what I just learnt could be applied so quickly. The knowledge I acquired was so valuable since I could 'help' the school.

### *School development plan*

The questionnaire findings show that more than 70 per cent of the parent managers were interested in the school development plan. However, in the interviews both principals and parent managers admitted that parent managers did not have much involvement. The new school development plan was usually discussed towards the end of the academic year by the teachers. Comments would be received and considered before the plan was finalized for submission to the SMC. One principal (P1) agreed that there was very little time for thorough discussion as the plan was a thick document. Most members had a very superficial understanding, getting only the gist of the plan.

Another principal (P3) added,

Though the school development plan was distributed to members before the SMC meeting, to be honest, the plan was not 'decided' by the SMC. At the SMC meeting, members would only ask a few questions and give some opinions before they endorsed the plan.

The third principal (P2) explained why the parent manager did not have much involvement. Perhaps she did not have sufficient understanding or there might be other reasons. The principal elaborated,

Maybe she considered herself a parent. She did not want to challenge the school, especially in front of the principal, teachers and the sponsoring body.

She just wanted to make the school better. She might have other constraints or worries. She did not want to make life difficult for the principal or teachers. In my opinion, unless the matter was very important and urgent, she would not raise it for discussion.

All parent managers admitted that they did not participate in the discussion of the school development plan. One parent manager (PM2) remarked that the school development plan was “reported” by the principal. She was only concerned about the suitability of the plan for the school and whether parent assistance was required.

Another parent manager (PM3) explained the reasons for his inactive participation. He said,

The school had a certain ‘mode’ of doing things. If I wanted to participate in the discussion of the school development plan, I could. However, this would require a ‘change’ and there was a priority. In the past year, I did not see the need to effect this change. As we wanted to change to the better, we must consider the reaction and readiness of various parties: the school, the teaching staff and the parents etc. We had to wait until the right ‘climate’ came.

#### **What are the obstacles to more genuine participation?**

##### *Representation of parent managers*

One main obstacle to more genuine participation is the representation of parent

managers. The interviews show that parent managers had difficulty in representing parents. Though the three parent managers were either chairperson or vice chairperson of the PTA and they were all elected by the PTA, their selection involved no more than 20 parents.

One parent manager (PM1) recalled how she was chosen to be the chairperson of the PTA.

To fulfil my responsibility as a parent, I attended the first PTA meeting. There were about twenty parents. The meeting started with a game and each parent had a label showing his/ her name. After the game, the participants wrote down the name of the person they wanted to select and I was chosen. ... I guessed I was chosen because I looked special, like a person with mixed nationalities and I was more talkative.

Another parent manager (PM3) explained how he was chosen by the committee members of the PTA.

Perhaps I was very talkative. I often asked questions as I wanted to know more. I always had my own views but I also represented the parents. I could express their views. I was sure I was chosen because I was talkative and I had more opinions.

The third parent manager (PM2) explained happily why she was willing to be parent manager.

I have established the PTA of this primary school and served in the PTA for several years. The PTA of this school was also established by me and several parents. I accepted the post for two reasons. First of all the principal appreciated my contributions. Moreover, I was recommended by the PTA because I was most familiar with the operation of PTA and the school. They believed I could answer any queries.

The representation of parent managers in SMCs was also not clear. They were not sure if they were representing parents. In the interview, one parent manager (PM1) said that she was regarded as being neutral by other SMC members. She represented neither the school nor the parents. She was just like other school managers, considering matters as objectively as possible. Another parent manager (PM2) considered herself to be representing the parents. She would seek parents' views before the meeting and report to the PTA afterwards, unless the issue was confidential. The third parent manager (PM3) did not know to whom he owed allegiance. He described his representation as follow:

At first I thought I would express my personal views. However, I was at the same time a parent. I would consider issues from the point of view of parents. Before I made any decision, I would constantly place myself in the perspectives of the parents.

I suppose I had multiple purposes. As a parent, I would certainly exercise parents' rights and try to get the most benefits for parents. However, I would

also try to strike a balance. Sometimes I would also consider issues from the school's perspective. This seemed rather contradicting but the truth was that my role would sometimes change. I did not always consider issues from the point of view of parents.

Even the three principals could not identify the representation of parent managers clearly. One principal (P2) opined that the parent manager was regarded by the committee as just one of the SMC members. However, it was difficult to tell if she was presenting her own views or the views of parents, as she had constant contacts with the PTA. Another principal (P3) considered that the parent manager was representing his personal views only. According to her,

I think he would consult other parents if there were important issues that really required consultation. As far as I could see there were no such issues.

However, both respondents agreed that some issues related to parents might be directed to the parent manager at the meeting. One principal (P1) said that the parent manager was often invited to help the school to promote school functions and activities, especially seminars for parents. The parent manager would send invitation cards and encourage more participation.

When asked whether the parent managers would be consulted on any particular issues, another principal (P3) replied,

Err, this was very personal. Take for an example, at one time we were



considering the promotion of a particular teacher. It was found that the teacher was teaching the daughter of the parent manager and we tried to seek his views. He might be able to provide 'additional' information for our consideration.

One parent manager (PM3) also agreed that there were occasions when he would be consulted in the capacity of a parent. As an example, he quoted the issue of school subsidies on textbooks and exercise books. He was actually consulted at the SMC meeting on whether the subsidies could be cancelled. At once he understood his role as 'parent representative' and he made the decision from the point of view of the parents.

*No formal or established channel to collect parent views*

In addition to the problem of representation, the interviews show that parent managers had no formal or established channel to collect parent views. One principal (P2) even considered it unnecessary for the parent manager to take special action or measures to collect the views of other parents. He added,

The PTA was the best place to collect parents' views. Besides, the parents could call at the school and see the principal direct, if they wanted to express their opinions. Some parents brought lunch for their children and they were frequently in the school. The PTA resource centre was also an informal place for home-school communication. Some parents would use the PTA resource centre and exchanged their views about the school.

It is found that parent managers collected views mainly from the PTA. One parent

manager (PM1) was in close contact with other committee members of the PTA. At times, she would have lunch or tea with them and she would keep them informed and seek their views if necessary. For urgent matters, she would call them. She added that she usually acted on the decision of the PTA. In this way, she would be safeguarded against any complaints from parents, as she would be supported by the PTA. Other parents would only be approached if necessary.

Another parent manager (PM2) got parents' views during talks organized for parents. She also talked to other parents in school and communicated their views to the school.

The third parent manager (PM3) collected opinions through informal channels too. When asked how he could know the views of the parents, the parent manager explained,

We communicated very often. This was mainly the fruits of my past 'homework'. I was able to collect parent views by 'listening more, talking more and listening more'. I was a member of a union in the district where the school was located. I did voluntary work and I had contacts with other parents. We exchanged our views on many issues, such as our expectation of children and education. We also discussed the type of education most suitable for our children. We talked about education reforms, such as the benchmark examination for language teachers. That was how I got parent views. I got them naturally from time to time as I met and discussed with them. This was what I did in the past, not when issues were being discussed at the SMC meetings.

Consultation with most parents is rather rare. When asked if the parent manager had been under parent pressure to express parent views, one principal (P3) replied very firmly,

No, no. Never. There had never been any big and important issues in this school that required consultation with parents.

#### *Low academic qualifications*

The returned questionnaires show that only about half (48%) of the parent managers had tertiary or university education. About two-fifths (41%) had secondary education. The remaining (11%) received primary education only (Table 10). However, in the interviews, all three principals did not consider academic qualifications important. Nevertheless one principal (P2) classified parents into two groups. In his view, those with good academic qualifications could contribute in administrative and professional areas. Those with weaker academic qualifications could contribute in liaison and communication with other parents.

On the other hand, two of the three parent managers expressed the opinion that academic qualifications were very important. One parent manager (PM1) added that most documents discussed at the SMC meetings were in English. She considered secondary 5 to be the minimum qualifications for parent managers for people of her generation only; for younger people who had the benefit of the expansion of tertiary education, higher academic qualifications should be expected.

*Limited experience in school management and poor understanding of education and school operation*

Problems encountered by parent managers are identified from questionnaire responses. Both principals (66%) and parent managers (48%) ranked parent managers' 'limited experience of school management' to be the main problem and ranked parent managers' 'poor understanding of education and school operation' second. Other factors such as 'membership too time-consuming', 'resistance of others to parent managers' views', 'insufficient information provided by the school' and 'non-cooperation of teacher managers', were not really considered to be problems or difficulties encountered by parent managers (Table 32).

What were the difficulties / problems encountered by parent managers in SMCs?	Principals		Parent managers	
	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
Parent manager's limited experience of school management	19 (66%)	72 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	13 (48%)	56 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
Parent manager's poor understanding of education and school operation	5 (17%)	53 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	4 (15%)	44 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
Membership too time-consuming	7 (24%)	32 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	4 (15%)	19 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
Resistance of others to parent manager's views	1 (3%)	13 (4 <sup>th</sup> )	2 (7 %)	11 (6 <sup>th</sup> )
Insufficient information provided by the school	1 (3%)	12 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	4 (15%)	30 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Non-cooperation of teacher managers	1 (3%)	10 (6 <sup>th</sup> )	1 (4%)	12 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	29 (100%)	192	27 (100%)	172

\* Some respondents might have ranked more than one item first or second, resulting in the total exceeding 56.

Table 32  
Difficulties/ problems encountered by parent managers in SMC  
(Views of principals and parent managers)

In the interviews, two of the three principals remarked that the parent managers might not be familiar with some educational issues and school management. One principal (P1) explained that sometimes he had to give some explanation to her though she could acquire a basic understanding of the educational issues very quickly.

Another principal (P3) added that the parent manager would not say much on unfamiliar topics. She elaborated,

He would express his views on school policies because these might affect the studies of her daughter. However, when the discussion was on educational reforms, he did not say much. Perhaps he was not very familiar with them.

When asked what the parent managers would do when they had issues they did not understand, one principal (P3) replied that the parent manager would ask her questions before and after the SMC meetings. In her words,

Yes. Surely, he would ask me questions and I would explain to him. He would not feel embarrassed to ask. My explanation to him was sometimes short and sometimes more detailed, depending on the situation. It was difficult to give detailed explanation every time. In general, I could say he could get sufficient knowledge of the basic issues, though not the details.

All parent managers agreed that they were not familiar with some educational issues and school management. One parent manager (PM1) admitted she was reluctant to express her views on educational issues which she was not familiar with. She was also not familiar with the school administrative system, especially when short forms or abbreviations were used. In the discussion of matters unfamiliar to her, she let the school make the decision.

Another parent manager (PM2) quoted some of the things she did not understand. Examples given were 'application for funding', 'drafting of the school development plan' and 'teacher appraisal' etc. She might approach the vice principal before or after the meeting for clarifications and explanations. If the issue was not related to parents,

she would not take the trouble to ask. Usually, she would keep quiet on matters she was not familiar with.

Only one of the three parent managers (PM3) would ask questions at the SMC meeting. He said,

To be honest, I did not know everything at the SMC meeting. Of course I would use my time to read relevant documents. At the meeting, special terms might be mentioned, such as GM and CM. When I asked, I knew these were different ranks of teachers: graduate master/ mistress and certificated master/ mistress. Whenever there were things I did not understand, I would ask.

#### *Confidentiality of the documents/ SMC meeting*

Interviewees indicated that all minutes of the SMC meetings were regarded as confidential. At the meeting, the confidential documents would only be tabled. All confidential documents had to be returned to the school immediately after the meeting. One parent manager (PM3) emphasized the confidentiality of the SMC meetings and documents.

Many documents were confidential. Sometimes some documents were tabled. What was said at the SMC meetings was confidential. Everything. We would keep everything confidential.

In fact he was very careful. He consulted the principal before the interview to confirm

what things could be disclosed and what could not. He was very 'protective' of the school.

#### *Insufficient training and support for parent managers*

In the interviews, only one of the three principals considered the support from the Education Department sufficient. On the issue of training, this principal (P3) said,

The seminars were organized in different times. I could recall that some parents already attended some of the seminars before we appointed any parent manager in the SMC. After the parent manager was appointed, there were one or two seminars. It was difficult to tell if these were sufficient. There were so many different topics and issues. It was really impossible to tell parent managers everything.

However, all three parent managers considered the training to be insufficient. Two had not attended any training organized by the Education Department. The other parent manager (PM3) confirmed that he had attended only one of the four seminars organized especially for parent managers. One parent manager (PM2) remarked that parents usually became parent managers first before they had any training. All parent managers found that the training programmes often clashed with parents' working hours and usually only one session was held. Parents could not choose times suitable for them. There was insufficient flexibility in the arrangement of the seminars.

Besides the seminars and training programmes, the Education Department had



published two documents to provide assistance to parent managers. These were the pamphlet “Handbook on the responsibilities of school managers” and the “School Administrative Guide”. All three parent managers had a copy of the pamphlet but only one parent manager remarked that this was useful and easy to read. The Education Department only distributed two copies of the School Administrative Guide to the schools. The schools would keep one and place the other in the general office for the reference of all school managers. One principal (P3) commented that the School Administrative Guide in the general office was seldom read as it could also be found in the Education Department’s webpage.

The parent managers did not find the School Administrative Guide useful. One parent manager (PM2) remarked that it was too thick and difficult to read. She did not have time and sometimes she could not understand. Another parent manager (PM3) confirmed that he had read the School Administrative Guide from the webpage of the Education Department. He had already printed a copy and read it quite frequently. He commented on its usefulness,

To be honest, it was not very helpful as it was only a guide. It could not help me to make a decision on any particular issue.

**What can be done to enhance parent participation and establish partnership in home-school relations?**

### *Training and support from the Education Department*

The questionnaire findings show that the views of principals and parent managers on the type of training most useful for parent managers are very similar. 18 principals (62%) and 14 parent managers (52%) considered courses or seminars on 'education' most important. Courses or seminars on 'management' were considered next in importance by 9 principals (31%) and 11 parent managers (41%). Both principals and parent managers considered courses/ seminars on 'interpersonal skills', 'language' and 'accounting and finance' to be less useful (Table 33).

What courses/ seminars were most useful for parent managers?	Principals		Parent managers	
	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
Education	18 (62%)	68 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	14 (52%)	57 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
Management	9 (31%)	56 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	11 (41%)	57 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
Interpersonal skills	1 ( 3%)	24 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	3 (11%)	25 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Language	2 ( 7%)	22 (4 <sup>th</sup> )	2 ( 7%)	21 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
Accounting and finance	1 ( 3%)	21 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	0 (0 %)	9 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	29 (100%)	191	27 (100%)	169

\* Some respondents might have ranked more than one item first or second, resulting in the total exceeding 56.

Table 33

Courses/ seminars most useful for parent managers

(Views of principals and parent managers)

In the interviews, one principal (P3) commented on the type of training courses needed. She said,

I consider it most important for the parent manager to understand the operation of the Education Department and the educational issues. A lack of understanding would make it very difficult for discussion and decision-making. Actually what was most important for the parent manager was to take the initiative to gain a better understanding of educational issues. In this way he could help the school.

Both principals and parent managers agreed that training for parent managers should be organized by the Education Department. A parent manager (PM2) stressed that the training should preferably be organized before parent managers were appointed. As most of the parent managers might come from committee members of the PTA, she suggested that the training should be offered to committee members of the PTA, in addition to the school managers. It would be better and more cost-effective to organize the training programmes according to districts to suit the parents of different schools in the same district.

As regards to the aims and objectives of the training programs, there is some difference in opinion. One principal (P1) opined that the training programs should have two main objectives. The first was to help parents understand their role and the second was to help parents to support the school. A parent manager (PM2) commented that the most important objective of the program was to train parent managers to be able to “answer questions raised by the supervisor”. She suggested two or three talks on the duties of

school managers and things that school managers must know. Another parent manager (PM1) suggested seminars on curriculum and the staffing system of the school.

When asked how the Education Department could best support parent managers, 18 principals (62%) and 22 parent managers (81%) considered 'experience-sharing seminars' most important. The other three supports, namely 'publishing a school manager's handbook', 'distributing materials to parent managers' and 'offering assistance from Regional Education Office', were also considered important by about half (41% to 63%) of the respondents. The least important support was 'publishing a School Administrative Guide' (Table 34).

What support provided by the Education Department was most important for parent managers?	Principals		Parent managers	
	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)	Number (Percentage)	Combined score (Rank)
Organizing experience-sharing sessions/ seminars	18 (62%)	47 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	22 (81%)	44 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
Publishing a School Managers' Handbook	18 (62%)	47 (1 <sup>st</sup> )	11 (41%)	33 (5 <sup>th</sup> )
Distributing materials for school managers	17 (59%)	46 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )	17 (63%)	42 (2 <sup>nd</sup> )
Offering support /assistance from Regional Education Office	12 (41%)	39 (4 <sup>th</sup> )	16 (59%)	39 (3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Publishing a School Administrative Guide	7 (24%)	34 (5 <sup>th</sup> )	11 (41%)	35 (4 <sup>th</sup> )
Total (Percentage)	29 (100%)	213	27 (100%)	193

Table 34

Best support for parent managers

(Views of principals and parent managers)

*Identification of areas that parent managers can perform better than the principal*

In the interviews, all three principals considered that parent manager did a much better job in liaising with parents, explaining school policies to parents and recruiting the support of other parents more efficiently. One principal (P2) explained,

She was really good in this aspect. She could 'sell' school policies to the parents. For example, if the school planned to have students work on a project outdoors, she could explain to the parents and 'convince' them. She could promote a better understanding of school policies by parents.

All parent managers shared the principals' views. One parent manager (PM2) elaborated,

Sometimes there might be issues that the school found it difficult to reflect to parents. The school would convey the message to the PTA and we could handle this better. Sometimes we heard parent voices faster than the principal. This was the only area we might be better than the principal.

Another parent manager (PM3) remarked,

I would be seen as a parent. This gave me some advantages. I could not do things better than the principal but my image was better. Other parents might consider that I would make decisions from the point of view of parents. I was believed to be protecting their interests. Therefore I was in a better position to explain school policies to other parents.

The third parent manager (PM1) also agreed that she could liaise with other parents better than the principal. She could calm down the reaction of other parents. She explained why she was in a better situation.

Even if things really went wrong, the principal could then step in and take remedial action.

The principals quoted examples that showed how parent managers could do a better job than the principals. One principal (P1) quoted an example which affected the school's public image. The newspapers reported that the police were investigating some mismanagement of the school in relation to a problem student. When the parent manager called an emergency meeting of the PTA, more than thirty other parents turned up besides the committee members of the PTA. They finally took action and published an announcement in the newspaper supporting the school and clarified the matter.

He also mentioned another example. At one time the school had to decide whether to wait for funding from the Education Department for the installation of air-conditioning or use school funds. It was a difficult decision as students might consider the classrooms too hot and their studies would be affected. Their views would be shared by many parents who were concerned with their children's learning. However, when the parent manager explained to the parents the decision of the SMC to wait for government funding, she was able to convince the other parents.

Another principal (P3) gave an example to illustrate how the parent manager did a much better job in liaising with parents. She explained that the main issues were discussed at the SMC meeting and the parent manager should have sufficient understanding of the issues and the rationale of the decision. It would be better for him to explain to the parents. She quoted the opening hours of the school as an example.

In the past, there were no fixed opening hours. Some students arrived at the school very early. Some arrived at 6:30 am in the morning. Some left school very late. I began to worry about the safety of the students. There was also the problem of insurance. I proposed that students should only be allowed to arrive at school at 7:30 am and the students had to leave school by 5:30 pm. One day a parent called me and kept on talking very impolitely for quite some time. The parent was expressing her grievances.

The principal went on to explain her reasons for setting the opening and closing school hours.

The school bell rang at 8:15 am. There were forty-five minutes for the students. Even if there were traffic jams, the students could still arrive on time. In the evenings, there was only one male security guard. I was worried. I could not guarantee the safety of my students. The school library closed at 5:30 pm. That would mean the school gate would only close at 5:40 pm. I did all these for the safety of my students.

However, there were also queries from some teachers and parents. The principal said,

I was sure that the parent manager could explain this better to the parents. He understood the insurance policy. It would be easier for him to explain to other parents.



*Better understanding of the expectations of the parent managers*

The questionnaire findings show that most principals cannot perceive or identify the interest and expectations of parent managers in the SMCs. When the responses of the principals and parent managers are compared, it is found that the principals perceived there was greater parent participation in SMC. They considered that parent managers showed much interest in 9 areas of work: student welfare (93%), medium of instruction (75%), homework/ assessment policy (68%), teaching and learning (62%), school development plans (59%), student admission (57%), school rules and regulations (54%) student complaints (52%) and extra-curricular activities (52%) (Table 35).

Areas	Much Interest	Some Interest	No Interest
student welfare	27 (93%)	2 ( 7%)	
medium of instruction	21 (75%)	6 (21%)	1 ( 4%)
homework / assessment policy	19 (68%)	6 (21%)	3 (11%)
teaching and learning	18 (62%)	10 (35%)	2 ( 3%)
school development plans	16 (59%)	11 (41%)	
student admission	16 (57%)	10 (36%)	2 ( 7%)
school rules and regulations	15 (54%)	10 (36%)	3 (10%)
student complaints	14 (52%)	13 (48%)	
extra-curricular activities	15 (52%)	14 (48%)	
curriculum	11 (41%)	14 (52%)	2 ( 7%)
community network and support system	9 (33%)	18 (67%)	
furniture, equipment and school premises	9 (32%)	16 (57%)	3 (11%)
fund-raising	8 (31%)	15 (58%)	3 (11%)
school missions & goals	8 (30%)	17 (63%)	2 ( 7%)
student expulsions	5 (20%)	15 (60%)	5 (20%)
finance & budget	5 (18%)	15 (56%)	7 (26%)
teacher appraisal/ performance	3 (11%)	22 (78%)	3 (11%)
induction/ staff development	2 ( 7%)	13 (48%)	12 (45%)
teacher recruitment & deployment		17 (65%)	9 (35%)
Total (Percentage)	29 (100%)		

Table 35  
Areas that are of particular interest to parent managers in SMC  
(Views of principals)

On the other hand, parent managers perceived that they showed much interest in 7 areas only: school development plans (93%), school missions and goals (89%), teaching and learning (77%), student welfare (76%), medium of instruction (65%), homework/ assessment policy (62%) and curriculum (50%). Most principals were not aware that parent managers had most interest in 'school development plans', 'school missions and goals' and 'teaching and learning' (Table 36).

Areas	Much Interest	Some Interest	No Interest
school development plans	25 (93%)	2 ( 7%)	
school missions & goals	24 (89%)	3 (11%)	
teaching and learning	20 (77%)	6 (23%)	
student welfare	19 (76%)	6 (24%)	
medium of instruction	17 (65%)	8 (31%)	1 ( 4%)
homework / assessment policy	16 (62%)	7 (27%)	3 (11%)
curriculum	13 (50%)	12 (46%)	1 ( 4%)
student complaints	12 (46%)	13 (50%)	1 ( 4%)
extra-curricular activities	10 (42%)	14 (58%)	
teacher appraisal/ performance	10 (38%)	15 (58%)	1 ( 4%)
student admission	9 (35%)	14 (54%)	3 (11%)
community network and support system	9 (33%)	17 (63%)	1 ( 4%)
induction/ staff development	8 (31%)	16 (61%)	2 ( 8%)
student expulsions	8 (31%)	12 (46%)	6 (23%)
furniture, equipment and school premises	7 (27%)	15 (58%)	4 (15%)
teacher recruitment & deployment	4 (16%)	17 (65%)	5 (19%)
fund-raising	4 (15%)	17 (63%)	6 (22%)
finance & budget	2 ( 8%)	16 (64%)	7 (28%)
Total (Percentage)		29 (100%)	

Table 36  
Areas that are of particular interest to parent managers in SMC  
(Views of parent managers)

Moreover, the expectations of parent managers themselves are not the same. When the views of non-housewife parent managers and housewife parent managers are compared, two significant differences are identified. First of all, housewife parent managers were less interested in curriculum. Only one-third (33%) of them showed interest, compared with 56 per cent of the non-housewife parent managers. Secondly, about half (44%) of the housewife parent managers showed greater interest in 'extra-curricular activities', 'community network and support system' and 'furniture, equipment and school premises'. The interest of non-housewife parent managers in these three areas ranged from 17 percent to 33 per cent only (Table 37).

Areas	Non-housewife parent managers		Housewife parent managers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
School development plans	17	94 %	8	89 %
School missions & goals	17	94 %	7	78 %
teaching and learning	15	83 %	5	56 %
student welfare	14	78 %	5	56 %
medium of instruction	11	61 %	6	67 %
curriculum	10	56 %	3	33 %
school rules and regulations	10	56 %	7	78 %
homework / assessment policy	9	50 %	7	78 %
student complaints	8	44 %	4	44 %
teacher appraisal/ performance	7	39 %	3	33 %
induction/ staff development	7	39 %	1	11 %
extra-curricular activities	6	33 %	4	44 %
student admission	6	33 %	3	33 %
student expulsions	6	33 %	2	22 %
community network and support system	5	28 %	4	44 %
teacher recruitment & deployment	3	17 %	1	11 %
furniture, equipment and school premises	3	17 %	4	44 %
fund-raising	2	11 %	2	22 %
finance & budget	1	6 %	1	11 %
Total (Percentage)	18 (100%)		8 (100%)	

Table 37

Areas that are of particular interest to parent managers in SMC  
(Comparison of views of non-housewife parent managers  
and housewife parent managers)

*Reduce parent managers' feeling of inferiority*

The findings show that parent managers hold lower qualifications when compared

with principals in the schools. In academic qualifications, all 28 principals had degree or above qualifications. 14 of them (48%) had a master's degree and 1 of them (4%) got a doctorate. However, only 9 parent managers (33%) had university or above education. 14 of them (52%) had only secondary or below education (Table 10).

As for the occupation of the parent managers, 16 of them (60%) were either professionals or in managerial positions. 2 of them (7%) were in non-professional or manual work and 9 of them (33%) were housewives (Table 38).

Occupations	Number (percentage)
Professional or managerial	16 (60%)
Non-professional or manual	2 ( 7%)
Housewife	9 (33%)
Total (percentage)	27 (100%)

Table 38

Occupations of parent managers

Though principals remarked that academic qualifications were not important, they did not consider housewives particularly suitable. Some respondents remarked that there were two different types of housewives: those with academic qualifications and professional experiences who had chosen to become full-time housewives rather than to pursue a career and those with limited formal education. One principal (P2)

preferred those housewives who could have got employment in society but chose to become housewives to spend more time in the family to take care of their children. He considered that they had the advantage of having more time to work for the PTA and the SMC than women with careers. One parent manager (PM1) expressed reservations about the suitability of those housewives with limited education and working experiences to be parent managers.

Owing to the imbalance in power and qualifications, most principals considered that the parental role should mainly be 'teacher at home' and 'helper of teachers in school'. It is found that most parent managers were willing to restrict their role to performing voluntary work and support services. Most parent managers would be very reluctant to seek assistance from principals. They regarded this as "troubling" them, unless it was absolutely necessary and urgent. In the words of one parent manager (PM1),

The principal was very good. He was very devoted and committed and the school was well-managed. I would prefer to wait until he was "less busy" or I would try to get the required information from the Education Department myself. However, in most cases, I was only too lazy to get assistance.

## **Chapter 5     Analysis, synthesis and discussion**

My findings suggest that the government reforms are not very successful. The government aims to enhance parent participation and make professionals in schools accountable to lay people, while the literature suggests that parents mainly care about their children's education and have little interest in performing the monitoring role. Moreover, most of my findings seem to confirm various expectations from the literature. The government reforms have had little impact on the aided schools. There is increased participation but parents play an insignificant role in decision-making. There are mismatches between reform aims and parent expectations and mis-perception between principals and parent managers. Partnership between schools and parents has not been established. Parents will only actively participate in matters they consider urgent, especially those that affect their children's learning. Parents in Hong Kong are also beginning to work with the schools to demand additional resources or better learning environment from the Education and Manpower Bureau. The following paragraphs analyse these findings in detail and consider the implications.

### **Reforms in government and aided schools**

#### *Number of parent managers*

The questionnaires returned by the principals in 12 government schools and 17 aided schools confirm that the reforms have greater impact on government than aided schools. There are two parent managers in all government schools but there is only

one parent manager in the aided schools (Table 14). In the interview, one parent manager (PM2) even remarks that there is no need to have two parent managers. This is not surprising as all government schools are under the Education and Manpower Bureau. It is natural for the government to introduce reforms in government schools first because the principals are civil servants and they are used to accepting orders from their superiors. In fact parent managers have already been included in all government primary and secondary schools by December 2003.

On the other hand, most aided schools are still rather reluctant to include parent managers in SMCs. They are operated by sponsoring bodies and at present they can choose whether they will include parent managers or not. As a result, most aided schools have chosen not to have parent managers. By December 2003, there are parent managers in only 11.8 per cent of primary schools and 17.1 per cent of secondary schools (Lee, 2004, p. A16), as many large sponsoring bodies are still against the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002 which require sponsoring bodies to include parent managers and register SMCs as incorporated bodies.

Nevertheless, some aided schools have already responded to the government's proposal and included one parent manager in SMCs. This will give the government the impression that these schools and sponsoring bodies are co-operative and supporting educational reforms. However, the schools and sponsoring bodies are rather careful and cautious. As there is only one parent manager, the sponsoring bodies consider that the influence of parent managers can be minimized or confined, though there is no evidence suggesting that parents wish to exert such influence.



### *Structure and organization of SMCs*

The questionnaire findings show that the structure and organization of SMCs in government schools are in many ways very similar to the proposal in the consultative document 'Transforming schools into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities' (ACSM, 2000). In more than 80% of the schools, the tenure of office of parent managers is two years. There are three SMC meetings in an academic year and they are mainly held on weekday mornings or afternoons (Tables 15-17). This uniformity and similarities may be expected as it is always safer for government schools to follow the suggested proposal. Moreover, it is also not advisable for the principals to adopt a different organization or structure of SMC in their school, as the original proposal has been carefully planned by a working party and some members may be the principals' supervisors.

In the aided schools, the government proposals, such as three SMC meetings in an academic year and two-year tenure, are only followed in about 40-50 per cent of the aided schools. There is less uniformity and more flexibility in the tenure of office of parent managers and the number and timing of SMC meetings. This is expected as aided schools are managed by different sponsoring bodies and not under the government.

### *Role of PTAs*

In my findings, there is only one government proposal that has impact in both government and aided schools. In the appointment of parent managers, the

government proposed that parent managers should be elected by members of the PTA and this proposal is followed in both government and aided schools. The questionnaire results show that more than 85 per cent of government and aided schools have followed the government's recommendation (Table 18). The interviews also show that all three parent managers are either chairperson or vice chairperson of PTA and they are all appointed by the PTA.

In my opinion, it is quite natural for both government and aided schools to follow the government proposal to have parent managers elected by PTAs, as this may be the easiest and quickest way to appoint a parent manager. In the interview, one principal (P2) remarks that this can enhance the importance of the PTA and show that schools value their contribution. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that chairpersons and executive members of PTAs are usually elected by a small number of parents, twenty to thirty in most cases. Most parents are not involved.

#### *Is legislation necessary?*

In the UK, legislation, through a series of acts in the 1980s and 1990s, has succeeded in increasing the powers of school governing bodies and enhancing parent participation in the UK. It has also been argued that legislation is necessary to combat the inertia that dominates schools' approaches to home-school relations (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 4). It is difficult to decide whether it is a wise decision for the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to legislate to force the aided schools to include parent managers in SMCs and register SMCs as incorporated bodies, instead of encouraging sponsoring bodies and schools to do this

voluntarily. The government's decision may weaken the established partnership with some large sponsoring bodies.

It is true that progress has been slow in past years. Without legislation, most aided schools may not make the change. However, several sponsoring bodies have expressed difficulty in appointing such a large number of school managers as they operate many schools (Apple Daily News, 4 December 2002, p. A02). Moreover, some sponsoring bodies have adopted a two-layer management system. They have already included parent representatives in the lower level of the SMC, where they can participate in matters that affect their children's learning directly.

The passing of the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002 by the Legislative Council in July 2004 may have mixed effects. Some sponsoring bodies and parents have responded very positively. Six sponsoring bodies operating a total of 90 schools will register SMCs as incorporated bodies in January 2005 and they will be rewarded with an additional funding of \$ 1,200,000 and \$ 600,000 for each secondary and primary school respectively by the government (Ming Pao Daily News, 6 October 2004, p. A14). To prepare parents to be parent managers, a new Parents Association was formed in September 2004 (Ta Kung Po, 18 September 2004, p. A16).

On the other hand, legislation may have damaged years of harmonious working relations between some sponsoring bodies and the government. Many sponsoring bodies are concerned that their school mission and religious policies would be affected (Ming Pao Daily News, 27 November 2000, p. B17). Some supervisors do not agree that the inclusion of parent managers would improve the quality of the

school (University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994). Other concerns include change of school tradition, such as school emblem and school uniform, and sale of school premises and assets (Chong & Leung, 2003, p. A13). Some sponsoring bodies even suspect that the government is trying to reduce their powers and tighten control over them, using the excuse of parent participation (Lam, 2004, p. P07).

Though the government has made some revisions, such as reducing the number of parent managers from two to one and extending the transitional period from three to five years, three large sponsoring bodies, the Catholic Diocese, Sheng Kung Hui and the Methodist Church, have made it very clear that they will not register SMCs as incorporated bodies (Sing Tao Daily, 21 September 2004, p. F2). In September 2005, the Catholic Diocese will establish School Management Executive Committees with teacher and parent members in all primary and secondary schools (Ming Pao Daily News, 15 October 2004, p. A12). At the same time, the Catholic Diocese is still considering legal action against the government (Oriental Daily News, 5 November 2004, p. A28). The Methodist Church will increase the number of parent managers in SMCs from one to two and they will encourage parents and teachers to participate in school management (Ming Pao Daily News, 21 September 2004, p. A16). It seems difficult to re-establish the working partnership or relations between the government and these sponsoring bodies.

#### **Aims of reform and expectations of parents**

##### *Increased parental participation*

My findings show that government measures to increase parent participation matches the expectations of the parents. The returned questionnaires show that 85 per cent of the parents agree that parents' involvement in children's schooling can strengthen communication between school and parents (Table 22). In the interviews, all three parent managers are positive about parental assistance and consider it an honour to assist the school. This confirms the literature finding that there is general agreement that parental involvement can benefit children's learning (Jennings, 1990; Karther and Lowden, 1997; Ballantine, 1999). There is general support for more parent participation, though government aims and parent expectations do not always match.

The questionnaire findings also indicate that the majority (59%) of parents still consider organizing extra-curricular activities the best support for the school. Only 19 per cent consider 'working as teaching assistants' the best support (Table 24). This can be understood as parents can choose to assist in the type of extra-curricular activity at times they feel most comfortable and their involvement can be more flexible. Moreover, many teachers do not really welcome parents as teaching assistants in the classroom (Chan, 1990; Wan, 1992; University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994) and many parents also feel that they do not possess the knowledge and skills to assist in classroom teaching.

The above findings show that the attitude of parents is now more positive and involved, though data on the actual parent participation in extra-curricular activities has not been collected. Before the reforms, studies show that the level of parent participation was rather low. Less than 10 per cent of the schools would invite parents to assist in extra-curricular activities (Chan, 1989; Wan, 1992). Very few

parents assisted school activities. Only 3 per cent taught interest classes, 5 per cent performed voluntary services and 7 per cent were responsible for extra-curricular activities (Education Department and Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 1999). Nevertheless, it remains to be confirmed whether actual parental participation has increased as a result of the reform.

#### *Participation in decision-making and monitoring*

The attitude of parents also matches government reforms to enhance their participation in the decision-making of the school. The questionnaire findings suggest that about four-fifths (78-81%) of the parents are willing to take up a more active role, as compared to 63 per cent in 1999. Compared with the findings by the University of Hong Kong Research Team in 1994, parents are now not satisfied with being informed or being invited to attend functions at the school only. Parents opine that schools should invite parents to 'discuss and help make decisions affecting their children' and 'examine and discuss the needs and goals of the school' (Table 25). Parental involvement may have also resulted from the initiative of parents themselves to improve their children's achievements and to assert their democratic rights (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997; OECD, 1997).

The majority (70%) of the parents consider they can make strong contribution in 'setting the mission and goals of the school' and 'determining policies in teaching and learning'. However, parents do not like to take up the monitoring role. The returned questionnaires suggest that less than 30 per cent of the parents are interested in 'enforcing legislation' or 'being responsible for budgeting' (Table 26). This

confirms the literature finding that parents are not able to perform the monitoring role effectively as they lack the knowledge required and have strong trust in the head's professional expertise and judgement (Shearn et al, 1995; Creese, 1997; Munn, 2000).

#### *Summary*

My findings show that the aims of the reforms cannot completely match parents' expectations. The government has three aims in introducing the reforms, but parents only welcome measures to enhance their participation and play a more active role in decision-making in relation to their children's education. The parents care mainly about their children's learning and believe their participation can bring benefits to them (Jennings, 1990; Karther & Lowden, 1997; Ballantine, 1999).

Moreover, parents nowadays have received more education and this enables them to play a more active part in their children's education. According to government figures, there has been a marked improvement in the educational attainment of the population. The proportion of the population with secondary or higher education has increased from 40 per cent in 1976 to 71 per cent in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2003, p. 69). They are more concerned about their children's education as this is still believed to be the main route to upward mobility in Hong Kong. My findings confirm that the majority of the parents wish to play a more active part in setting the mission and goals of the school and determining policies in teaching and learning.

However, parents are more reluctant to take up the monitoring role for various reasons. As parents they are non-professionals and they may lack the required knowledge and skills. Moreover, most of them have their own occupation and they cannot afford the time required. Finally, like parent governors in the UK, most parents have great trust in the school heads (Views of PM1 & PM2). Perhaps it is necessary to re-consider the government aim of holding professionals accountable to parents.

#### **Parent participation in government and aided schools**

##### *Perceived interest and actual participation*

My findings indicate a discrepancy between the perceived interest and actual participation of parents in the work of SMCs. According to the questionnaire findings (Tables 27 & 28), parent managers in both types of schools are perceived to show much interest in about half of the nineteen listed areas of work in the SMCs. Compared to a similar study by Ho in 2002, parents' interest in these areas of work has increased from 30-40 per cent (Ho, 2002, pp. 29-31) to 50-93 per cent. Parent managers in both types of schools show much interest in the medium of instruction, homework and assessment policies, student welfare, school development plan, teaching and learning, school missions and goals. It is also perceived that parents in government schools have a greater interest in the work of SMCs than parents in aided schools.

The findings also suggest that parents are more willing to participate and their



participation is not confined to matters directly related to their children's learning in classrooms. More parents like to be more involved in devising the school development plan and setting the goal and mission of the school. It is encouraging to find that more than 70 per cent of the parents show interest in school development plans, indicating a substantial increase, compared to 27 per cent in a similar study in 1999 (Education Department and Home-school Co-operation Committee, 1999, p. 20).

However, though the parent managers are perceived to show greater interest in more areas of work in the SMCs, the interviews seem to suggest there is very little actual participation. Like parent governors in the UK, parent managers have played an insignificant part in SMC meetings (Martin, Taylor & Rashid, 1995; Shearn et al, 1995; Munn, 2000). The three parent managers interviewed confirm the literature view that they play an insignificant role in school board meetings. They do not set the agenda and are given insufficient preparation for the meeting.

All three parent managers agree that though all important matters such as use of resources, finance report and education initiatives etc have to be endorsed at the meeting, voting is seldom necessary. The findings also confirm the view in the literature that there is little desire for greater participation in decision-making and there is strong parental trust in the head teacher's professional judgment and expertise (Munn, 2000).

Moreover, the three parent managers also confirm that they do not have much actual involvement in the school development plan. Again this confirms the previous work

of Munn in 1998. They have insufficient participation in drafting the school development plan, of which they have only a superficial understanding. Most parent managers do not want to challenge the school and make life difficult for the principals and teachers. They endorse the plan as they trust the plan is good for the school (Views of PM3). It is obvious that the level of parent participation is a long way from the highest level, which is the decision-making process referred to by Greenwood and Hickman in 1991, Chrispeels in 1996 and Epstein in 1997.

Unlike parents in the UK, parent managers in Hong Kong show little interest in fund-raising. It is because fund-raising is not common in Hong Kong. The government has just reduced the university funding by about \$ 11 billion and encouraged the eight universities in Hong Kong to raise funds to cover the cut by providing a matching fund of \$ 10 billion in 2003-04 (Apple Daily News, 4 March 2004, p. A01). In November 2004, the government provided an additional matching fund of \$ 5 billion (Ming Pao Daily News, 17 September 2004, p. A14). Following the success of fund-raising in universities, the government has announced plans to provide a matching fund of \$ 2 billion for primary and secondary schools to upgrade their computer facilities but one school principal remarked that the income of parents is not high and it is very difficult to raise funds (Sing Pao Daily News, 2 November 2004, p. A10).

#### *Monitoring role*

My findings also confirm that while parents are willing to participate in matters relating directly to their children, they are reluctant to fulfil a role in monitoring and

accountability (Creese, 2000). The questionnaire findings (Tables 27 & 28) indicate that about 10-35 per cent of the parent managers are still not interested in areas such as finance and budget, staff development, teacher deployment and recruitment. Compared with two local studies (The University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994, p. 15 & Ho, 2002, pp. 29-31), there has been little change in parents' attitude towards work related to teacher deployment and recruitment.

Like the parent governors in the UK, parents' role in budgeting is also of loose monitoring (Martin, Ransom & Rutherford, 1995; Earley, 2000). Perhaps it is time to re-consider the government's intention of holding schools accountable to parents. Parents may not have the interest or the required skills and knowledge and they have their own priorities, which may be different from those of the government.

### *Summary*

The main issue is that many parents are content with their role being defined by the school and have little desire to participate directly in decision-making (Riley, 1995). Like the parents in the UK, they are only welcome in a supporter's or a learner's role in support of their children's education (Hallgarten, 2000). They are less welcome in areas such as curriculum, budget and teacher appraisal and the role of parents is mainly supportive and advisory (Shearn et al, 1995). On the other hand, parents may not participate actively as they may lack the knowledge, skills, interests and the time.

As a result, most parents play an active role in areas that the schools have defined for them. In the interviews, all principals and parent managers agree that schools mainly

confine parent participation to the organization of extra-curricular activities and the performance of voluntary work. Parent manager make insignificant contribution in school administration and management, unless they possess special skills (PM3). Anyway, it is encouraging to find that all the three principals interviewed consider that there are several areas that parent managers can make greater contribution. Parent managers' view would be sought at the SMC meetings on particular issues related to students. They are also considered the most suitable people to explain school policy to other parents.

### **Obstacles to more genuine participation**

#### *Problems of representation*

The findings show that parent managers in Hong Kong face many of the same obstacles encountered by parent governors in the UK and they confirm many of the themes expressed in the literature. One main obstacle to more genuine parent participation is the representation of parents. Like parent governors in the UK, parent managers are elected by a very small number of parents (Golby, 1993). The interviews with the three parent managers indicate that parent managers are elected by fewer than 20 members of the PTA. There is no competition. Though all three parent managers are either chairperson or vice chairperson of PTA, they have not been elected because of their knowledge or ability.

Moreover, like parent governors in the UK, most of the principals and parent managers interviewed are not certain whether parent managers are acting as

delegates with a mandate or exercising independent judgment (Vincent, 1996; Munn, 2000). Sometimes parent managers would make decisions from the parents' view point but at other times, they would consider issues from the school's perspective.

This may be expected because parent managers have no formal channel to collect parent views and have difficulties in reporting back to the parents who elected them (Golby, 1993; Research and Information on State Education Trust, 1994; Munn, 2000). The interviews suggest that the PTA has become the main place to gather parents' views. Parent managers stress that they maintain close contacts with other PTA committee members and they will call them if necessary. Some parent managers collect parent views through other informal channels such as contacts during lunch-time and gatherings or talks for parents. In any case, consultation with other parents is rather rare. In the interview, one of the three principals (P2) even considers it unnecessary for parent managers to collect parent opinion and express parent views at the SMC meetings.

#### *Inadequate qualifications, skills and experience*

At the same time, the parent managers' qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience can also be obstacles to parental participation. According to the questionnaire findings, less than half of the parent managers have tertiary or university education (Table 10). More than half (60%) of the parent managers are from professional or managerial occupations or others with higher income and education level (Lareau, 1987; Brown, 1991 quoted in Ho, 1995; Golby, 1993; Riley, 1994 & 1995; Scanlon, Earley and Evans, 1999). Less than one-tenth (7%) come

from non-professional or manual occupations, which are poorly or under-represented (Golby, 1993; Munn and Brown quoted in Deem, Brehony & Heath, 1995).

The questionnaire respondents consider the two main problems faced by parent managers to be 'limited experience of school management' and 'poor understanding of education and school operation' (Table 32). Again, like parent governors in the UK, they do not fully understand the educational issues and the jargon or terms used in the meeting (Golby, 1993; Munn, 2000). The interviewees (PM1, PM2 and P3) confirm that parent managers do not say much on issues that they do not comprehend. Sometimes, the documents are also confidential and will be tabled at the meeting. This makes it impossible for parent managers to read them first and seek parents' views before the meeting, though many parent managers do not mind as they are 'protective' and 'supportive' of the school (Views of PM3).

#### *Inadequate training*

Parent managers have little preparation for their role as governors (Morgan, 1990). Training for parent governors is also inadequate. All the three parent managers interviewed considered that most parent managers in Hong Kong have not received any training provided by the Education Department. Very few have received induction training as they usually become parent managers first before they are informed of the kind of training that will be provided. It is obvious that parent managers in Hong Kong are even less prepared than parent governors in the UK, who may have received some induction but no further training afterwards (Scanlon, Earley and Evans, 1999).

An examination of the number of training programmes and seminars provided by the Education Department confirms that training is insufficient. In 2002-03 only six experience-sharing sessions were organized. Moreover, all these were organized during the daytime (Education Department, 2003). This makes it rather difficult for parent managers to attend them. In view of the large number of untrained parent managers, much time, manpower and resources will be required if the government is determined to prepare them to perform their roles and duties more effectively (Ta Kung Po, 7 June 2003, p. B11).

Recent developments have been more positive. The Education and Manpower Bureau will increase the number of training programs for parent managers from six to ten and it has commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to offer these programs. The initial target is for 800 parent managers. The first will be offered by the end of 2004 (Ta Kung Po, 23 September 2004, p. A16). However, it is not known if the parent managers have the interest and time to attend training and many of the obstacles cannot in any case be removed by providing more training for parent managers.

### *Discussion*

The findings seem to suggest that the government is pushing something for which there is little enthusiasm. Very few parents are interested in the work of SMCs. Though the government commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a consultancy report on the promotion of parent education in Hong Kong in

2001, the recommendations have not been implemented. The government does not have the funding to establish a new post in schools, Home-school Liaison Officer, and establish a Parent Learning Centre. Besides, the government and employers cannot provide more support, such as more flexible working hours or paid leave, to encourage more parental participation.

The main issue is that parents would become active when there is something to be active about, such as the closure of schools. It is difficult to involve them in routine business (Munn, 1998). Recent actions taken by parents have again confirmed Munn's findings. Owing to the drop in the birth-rate, the number of primary students has dropped tremendously and this has resulted in government plans to close schools which cannot admit 23 primary one students. In September 2004, 31 primary schools cannot offer primary one classes as they fail to admit 23 primary one students. These schools will have to cease operation after two years (San, 2004, p. E08).

In a crisis like this, parents are actively involved in campaigns to save schools. To save a rural primary school from being closed down, one parent even successfully sought legal aid and brought the case to court to sue the government. She was supported by the school principal and other parents, though all her efforts failed in the end (Ta Kung Po, 9 March 2004, p. B02).

In the interview, a parent manager (PM1) also reported that parents became active when the school's public image was affected. The PTA and the parents took action to publish an announcement in the newspaper supporting the school and clarifying the matter. In crisis or urgent matters like this, parents will react immediately and this



does not need government legislation to bring about.

#### **Establishment of partnership in home-school relations**

My findings confirm the view that partnership between schools and parents has not been established (Chan, 1989; Wan, 1992; University of Hong Kong Research Team, 1994; Education Department and Committee on Home-School Co-operation, 1999; Ho, 2002; City University of Hong Kong, 2003). Partnership is a relationship between equals in terms of power and control (Jowett, Baginsky & MacNeil, 1991; Lareau, 1996). My findings confirm that partnership does not exist as the relationship between schools and parent managers is not an equal one (Woods, 1988; Dale, 1996; Vincent, 1996; Hood, 2003). Some parent governors or managers may also have a feeling of inferiority (Research and Information on State Education Trust, 1994). The questionnaire findings show that parent managers are in many ways inferior to principals, especially in academic qualifications and understanding of educational issues. All principals have university or above qualifications, but only one-third of the parent managers are university graduates.

My findings also confirm the problem of inequalities and differences between parents, which is another obstacle to the establishment of partnership. Middle class parents have more representation and chances to make their voice heard (Crozier, 2003). Like the parent governors in the UK, the majority (60%) of parent managers are professionals. Only 7% are non-professionals, though it is noted that one-third (33%) are housewives (Table 38). In the interviews, though principals remark that academic qualifications are not important, some principals have reservations on those

housewives with limited education. Parents are regarded as 'junior' partners and the roles of parents are best restricted to be 'teachers at home' and 'helpers of teachers in school'.

Partnership implies a basis of equality in moving towards a common goal (Golby, 1993). The findings of the questionnaire show that partnership between schools and parents cannot be fully established as principals cannot rightly perceive or identify the interest and expectations of parent managers in the SMCs. Most principals are not aware that many parent managers are interested in 'school development plans', 'school missions and goals' and 'teaching and learning' (Table 36).

Furthermore, schools also fail to identify the different expectations of parent managers. The interests of working parent managers and housewife parent managers are not the same. Though both of them show interest in areas such as 'school development plans', 'school mission and goals', 'teaching and learning', 'student welfare', housewife parent managers are less interested in 'curriculum'. They are more interested in 'community network', 'furniture, equipment and school premises' (Table 37).

Nevertheless it is encouraging to find that principals and parent managers have identified some areas where parent managers have the interest and ability to perform well. Both agree that parent managers can do a better job liaising with other parents, explaining school policies and recruiting parent support. The interviews show that some kind of partnership in these areas has been established.

## Summary

It is true that the government is determined to enhance parent participation and has taken various measures to achieve this aim. In fact the funding for Home-School Co-operation projects has increased from \$ 1.3 million in 1993-94 to \$ 9.3 million in 2002-03 (Table 3). However, the Hong Kong legislation to enhance parental participation is an import that has been copied from the UK and it has experienced most, if not all, of the obstacles and problems that occurred in the UK. It operates in a culture of convergence and passivity which is even less responsive to government aspirations than the UK.

It is obvious that some fine-tuning here and there cannot solve the problems and make the reforms work. First of all, prescribing top down legislation to bring about bottom up involvement does not work. The legislative energy is the driver, not the number or desire of parents who are committed. Legislation can only increase the number of parent managers in SMCs but it cannot ensure that parent managers can contribute to decision-making in the school. Parents may be numerically or physically 'represented' but their voice is not influential. In some cases, parents remain passive partners (Manzon, 2004, p. 48).

Many teachers do not welcome parents into their classrooms. Educators sometimes feel threatened by increased parent involvement. Accepting the importance of what parents can offer – “valuing experience over expertise” – can be threatening to teacher's professional status (Sussell, Carr & Hartman, 1996, p. 55). As a result, the roles of parents are always confined to supporter or helper. In fact, professionals in

schools should not be defensive as the literature suggests parent governors and parent managers always support the school and the heads (Shearn et al, 1995).

There are also some mismatches between government intentions and parent expectations. The government sees parental involvement as governance. In reality, parents expect partnership in their children's learning. They have little interest in areas such as 'budget' and 'teacher appraisal and deployment' and do not perform the monitoring role of holding schools responsible to parents.

Finally, it is very difficult to establish a partnership of equality between schools and parents. It is not realistic to expect school heads to transfer some of their powers to the parents and allow parents to play a more active role in decision-making in all areas of school administration. In reality, it is better to re-define the roles of the parents to focus on areas they have the interest and ability to perform well. Perhaps it is necessary to re-consider the reforms and suggest ways to make the most of the positive aspects.

## Chapter 6 Conclusions

Government initiated partnership is seen as the way forward for educational betterment (Manzon, 2004, p. 11), as parents in many countries feel inadequate to participate in their children's education and delegate the responsibility to the schools (OECD, 1997). With the introduction of the consultative document 'Transforming schools into dynamic and accountable professional learning communities' (ACSM, 2000), it is obvious that the government aims to promote parent participation to the level of decision-making so that parents in Hong Kong can take up the monitoring role and hold schools accountable to them. After the passing of the Education (Amendment) Bill in July 2004, all aided schools have to include parent managers in SMCs and SMCs must be registered as incorporated bodies by 1 January 2010. However, my findings show that the government reform does not seem to work.

### **Suggested reasons for the failure of the reform**

#### *Failure of imported reform to gain support from local sponsoring bodies*

The whole reform is an import from the UK, without much sensitivity to the local situation and to cultural differences. In an interview, Prof Cheng Kai-ming, a member of the Education Commission, highlighted that there was a strong sense of borrowing, not cultural borrowing, but borrowing of measures, forms, procedures and structures since the early 1990s (Manzon, 2004, p. 51).

Ms Fanny Law, former Director of Education and present Permanent Secretary for

Education and Manpower, explained that she did not start off the reforms by looking at models overseas.

I started from a very pragmatic point of view. We need parents as a key stakeholder and major partner in education. Suddenly I realized what I was doing was similar to what other people were doing but we did not start off by imitating (Manzon, 2004, p. 49).

The education system in Hong Kong has been influenced by developments in the UK. Some of the examples include the introduction of the target oriented curriculum in 1994, school-based management in 1991, quality school education and quality assurance inspection in 1997. The reform to increase parent participation is another example of an import from the UK, though Ms Fanny Law of the Education and Manpower Bureau does not admit it. Many reasons have been suggested for governments to introduce the reform to enhance parent participation. These may include democratization (Beattie, 1985), decentralization (Dimmock et al., 1996; OECD, 1997), accountability (Pang, 2003; Manson, 2004) and 'saving time and money' (Dimmock et al., 1996).

However, government legislation met with much greater opposition than expected. Some large sponsoring bodies, namely the Catholic Diocese, Sheng Kung Hui and the Methodist Church, have openly opposed the reform and they together operate more than 200 primary and secondary schools (Ming Pao Daily News, 22 April 2004, p. A02). They suspect the government is trying to use parent participation to reduce or even take back their powers to manage the schools (Lam, 2004, p. P07).

In recent years, the Catholic Diocese and Sheng Kung Hui have reasons to believe that the government regards them as being uncooperative or even disobedient. In 1994, the government introduced the target-oriented curriculum, formerly called target and target-related curriculum, into primary schools in Hong Kong but all primary schools operated by Sheng Kung Hui did not implement this curriculum. In 2001, a number of children born in Mainland China arrived in Hong Kong but they failed to obtain legal residence in Hong Kong. As a result, they could not go to school. However, two primary schools operated by the Catholic Diocese admitted the children, much to the dislike and disagreement of the Education Department (Sing Tao Daily, 16 December 2001, p. A13 & Hong Kong Economic Times, 20 December 2001, p. A27).

Though the Education (Amendment) Bill was passed in July 2004, the Catholic Diocese, Sheng Kung Hui and the Methodist Church have made it clear that they will not register SMCs as incorporated bodies. Bishop Joseph Zen of the Catholic Diocese considers that the Education (Amendment) Bill contravened the Basic Law and has taken legal action against the government. If legal action was defeated in the Court of First Instance, the case would be brought to the Court of Final Appeal. He added that the Catholic Diocese may stop sponsoring some of the 90 schools which it operates now. His action is supported by Sheng Kung Hui (Apple Daily News, 9 December 2005, p. A14). Sheng Kung Hui has announced earlier that it will not submit applications to operate new schools. At the same time, it does not rule out the possibility of returning all Sheng Kung Hui schools to the government (Ming Pao Daily News, 22 April 2004, p. A02).

Responses to a survey conducted by the Education and Manpower Bureau indicate that only about one hundred (10%) aided schools will register SMCs as incorporated bodies in 2005. This figure is rather disappointing as the Education and Manpower Bureau has expected a total of two hundred schools (Ta Kung Po, 22 December 2004).

#### *Mismatch between government intentions and parent expectation*

There is a mismatch between the official policies to increase family involvement and the actions that most parents want to take to support their children's education (Sanders & Epstein, 1998, p. 496). Whereas the government aims at decision-making and accountability, parents are most interested in knowing how to support their children at home (Manzon, 2004, p. 15).

My findings confirm that the majority (59%) of parents still consider organizing extra-curricular activities the best support for the school. They are reluctant to fulfil a role in monitoring and accountability (Creese, 2000), as one-tenth to one-third of the parent managers are still not interested in areas such as finance and budget, staff development, teacher deployment and recruitment. Less than one-third of the parents are interested in enforcing legislation or being responsible for budgeting.

#### *Failure of principals to identify parents' expectation*

My findings show that most principals cannot identify the interest and expectations



of parent managers in the SMCs. The principals perceive that parent managers show much interest in 9 areas of work: student welfare (93%), medium of instruction (75%), homework/ assessment policy (68%), teaching and learning (62%), school development plans (59%), student admission (57%), school rules and regulations (54%), student complaints (52%) and extra-curricular activities (52%). However, parent managers perceive that they show much interest in 7 areas only: school development plans (93%), school missions and goals (89%), teaching and learning (77%), student welfare (76%), medium of instruction (65%), homework/ assessment policy (62%) and curriculum (50%).

Moreover, most principals are not aware that parent managers have most interest in 'school development plans', 'school missions and goals' and 'teaching and learning'. They also fail to recognize that parent managers show more interest in 'curriculum' than 'student admission' and 'student complaints'. Perhaps they are also resistant to involving parents in these areas as there is more resistance to involving parents in decision-making and curriculum design and less opposition to involving parents in fund-raising and volunteering in traditional ways from school to home (Sanders & Epstein, 1998, pp. 495-496).

Furthermore, principals also fail to identify the expectations of housewife parent managers and non-housewife parent managers. Housewife parent managers are less interested in curriculum. Only one-third of them show interest, compared to more than half (56%) of the non-housewife parent managers. Besides, about half (44%) of the housewife parent managers show greater interest in 'extra-curricular activities', 'community network and support system' and 'furniture, equipment and school

premises', compared to 17% to 33% of the non-housewife parent managers.

#### *Discrepancy between perceived interest and actual participation of parent managers*

A comparison of my questionnaire findings and the interviews indicates a discrepancy between the perceived interest and actual participation of parent managers in the work of SMCs. The questionnaire findings indicate that parent managers show much interest in medium of instruction, homework and assessment policies, student welfare, school development plan, teaching and learning, school missions and goals. However, their actual involvement remains low. The three parent managers interviewed confirm the literature view that they play an insignificant role in school board meetings and they have no participation in drafting the school development plan. It is obvious that actual participation is much less than perceived participation.

#### *Obstacles to more genuine participation*

Parent managers lack representation. The parent representative is expected to be responsible to the parents as a whole and also to the governing bodies or management committees (Lello, 1979, p. 4). My findings show that they are elected by fewer than 20 members of the PTA. Moreover, they are not clear whether parent managers are parent delegates or representatives (Vincent, 1996; Munn, 2000).

Another obstacle is that a school's parent governors, even if they are elected (and many are elected unopposed), do not usually keep closely in touch with their

'constituents' and are unlikely to have the time and inclination to do so (Ulrich, 1996, p. 55). The three parent managers interviewed indicate that some parent managers collect parent views through contacts during lunch-time and gatherings for parents. Formal consultation with other parents is rather rare. Moreover, all documents and decisions of the SMC are confidential. As a result, the parent manager (PM3) cannot collect parent views, though he has no intention to do so.

At the same time, the parent managers' qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience can also be obstacles to parental participation. The findings show that less than half of the parent managers have tertiary or university education. They have 'limited experience of school management' and 'poor understanding of education and school operation'. When parent governors fail to fulfil their obligations, this can lead to too much power being concentrated in the hands of the school heads and the governing bodies becoming merely a rubber-stamp for the decisions (Earley & Creese, 2003, p. 247).

Training for parent governors is also inadequate. In the interviews, the three parent managers comment that most parent managers in Hong Kong have not received any training provided by the Education Department. In the academic year 2004-05, the Education and Manpower Bureau has commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to offer training programmes for 800 new or potential parent managers in different times of the year. However, some parents may not be able to attend them as they have to work on Saturdays and Sundays as well.

*Failure to establish a partnership between schools and parents*

There is still a general resistance of parents to being involved in school governance. Parents may be numerically or physically 'represented', but their voice is not influential. They are simply 'cosmetic' (Manzon, 2004, p. 48). There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power to affect the outcome of the process (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

Partnership is a relationship between equals in terms of power and control (Jowett, Baginsky & MacNeil, 1991; Lareau, 1996) but my findings show that parent managers cannot match the principals in terms of academic qualifications and understanding of educational issues.

Partnership implies working towards a common goal (Golby, 1993) but this has not been achieved in most schools in Hong Kong. The findings show that about one-third of the principals perceive that parent managers have much interest in fund-raising but only 15 per cent of the parent managers show much interest. In fact, most parents are least interested in fund-raising. Parents' lack of interest in fund-raising is shown when some parents openly expressed resentment against a fun-fair and dinner organized by a primary school in November 2004 to raise funds for the installation of multi-media computing facilities. The school successfully raised HK \$ 110,000 but the parents complained that they were under pressure to make donations (Oriental Daily News, 15 November, 2004, p. A20).

Several studies also reveal that parents in school governing bodies remain a minority voice, a phenomenon not exclusive to Asian countries, where the culture reinforces

the professional authority of school personnel, but also in some countries of the European Union and in less-developed countries like Uganda (Manzon, 2004, p. 15).

### **Benefits of the reforms**

#### *Increased parental participation*

My findings show that government measures to increase parent participation match the expectations of the parents. The returned questionnaires show that 85 per cent of the parents agree that their involvement in children's schooling can strengthen communication between school and parents. In the interviews, the three parent managers are positive about parental assistance.

#### *More positive attitude towards participation in decision-making*

Parents support the government's intention to enhance their participation in the decision-making of the school. The findings suggest that about four-fifths of the parents are willing to take up a more active role. Parents suggest that schools should invite parents to 'discuss and help make decisions affecting their children' and 'examine and discuss the needs and goals of the school'. The majority (70%) of the parents consider they can make a strong contribution in 'setting the mission and goals of the school' and 'determining policies in teaching and learning'.

*There are certain areas of work that parent managers can perform better than principals*

In the interviews, all three principals consider that parent managers can do a much better job in liaising with parents, explaining school policies to parents and in recruiting the support of other parents. One principal (P2) adds that parent managers can explain school policies and convince other parents.

All parent managers share the principals' views and they suggest several reasons to explain why they can do a better job. One parent manager (PM1) says she can calm down the reaction of other parents. Another parent manager (PM2) elaborates that she hears parent voices faster than the principal. The third parent manager (PM3) remarks that he can gain better support as other parents may think that he makes decisions from the point of view of parents.

All six interviewees have quoted examples that show how parent managers can do a better job than the principals. These examples include publishing an announcement in the newspaper to clarify rumours that have affected the school's public image, a decision on whether to use school funds or wait for funding from the Education Department for the installation of air-conditioning and setting the opening hours of the school.

## **Conclusion**

*The reforms have affected the government's harmonious working relations with the sponsoring bodies*

It is obvious that government legislation to force sponsoring bodies to register SMCs as incorporated bodies has damaged the harmonious working relations with some sponsoring bodies. The spirit and intensity of the effort to work together, which is at the heart of its potential success, can never have been mandated by top-down bureaucratic directives (Seeley, 1989, p. 48). Mr Cheung Man Kwong, Legislative Councillor, comments that the government and some sponsoring bodies can no longer work as partners. As only 100 schools have registered SMCs as incorporated bodies, it shows that even schools which are pro-government are taking a wait-and-see attitude indicating that they do not fully support the reforms at heart (Ming Pao, 8 December 2005, p. A6). For the reforms to succeed, the government and the sponsoring bodies should cooperate and re-establish their former partnership.

*The reforms cannot match government intentions and parent expectations*

There is a limited amount that the government can achieve through legislation, though laws can give parents more power in policy-making and governance. A basic premise of home-school relations is that unless parents are knowledgeable about education, schools cannot be accountable to parents (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 6). It should not be assumed that parents will always want what the government thinks best (Kelley-Laine, 1998, pp. 343-345). The government can provide clear guidelines and training to ensure that all partners understand the opportunities and limits of their collaboration and identify parents' agendas in order to make best use of their energy and resources.

*There are obstacles to more genuine participation*

To remove the obstacles, parent managers should be trained before they are appointed. More training programs can be held in different times, including weekday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays to cater for different preference of parents. Schools should provide parent managers with the information necessary to make informed decisions and use everyday language to discuss issues important to the school (Riley, 1995, p. 13). Parent managers should also establish a closer relationship with the PTAs so that they can better represent parent views. They should also have some formal channels to collect parent views and report back to parents.

*The roles of parents are not clear and schools cannot identify parent interests*

Attempts to involve parents in collaborative decision-making does not mean simply inviting one or two parents to sit on committees already overburdened with administrators. The roles of the parents may be re-defined to focus on areas in which they have the interest and ability to perform well (Riley, 1995, pp. 13-14). Many parents are still reluctant to become involved in their children's formal education, lacking confidence and knowledge, or regarding classroom affairs as the teachers' domain (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 6). Schools and parents can develop shared goals and their own plans to achieve them. Researchers may help to hasten the development of more responsive partnerships by collecting and interpreting data from parents and students on their educational interests and needs (Sanders & Epstein, 1998, p. 496).

*Parents are only active in matters they consider important*



The main issue is that parents would become active when there is something to be active about, such as the closure of schools (Munn, 1998). In October 2003, more than one hundred parents and students petitioned against the announced closure of a primary school operated by the Catholic Diocese in stages. The parents worry that the quality of teaching and learning will drop in the coming years (Hong Kong Daily News, 27 October 2003, p. A07). It is obvious that when parents realize there are critical moments or crisis, they will be active and this requires no government legislation to bring about.

In Hong Kong, due to the decrease in birth rate, many primary schools cannot admit sufficient primary one students and face the danger of school closure. In the academic year 2004-05, 31 primary schools failed to admit 23 primary one students and these schools will be closed in 2007 (Apple Daily News, 29 February 2004, p. A10). In a crisis like this, one school has worked together with parents to save the school. They have raised HK \$ 940,000 to operate a primary one class using their own funding and succeeded in avoiding the fate of school closure (Ta Kung Po, 29 August 2004, p. A08).

*Resources and support for parents are insufficient*

Parents need more support and resources. If funding is available, the Education and Manpower Bureau may consider the creation of a new post, Coordinator for Home-school Relations, in schools to promote parent education and parent participation. A parent learning centre can be established in each district. In addition to a resource and training centre, it can also provide a place for parents in different

schools to get together to exchange opinions and experiences (Ho, 2002, p. 115).

#### **Limitations of the study**

The study of the role of parent managers in SMCs is regarded as rather sensitive by many sponsoring bodies and schools. Even the Education and Manpower Bureau does not disclose the names of schools with parent managers in SMCs to researchers. As one main research method of this study is the questionnaire survey, it is difficult to calculate the response rate because the number of secondary schools with parent managers in SMCs is not known. Moreover, many principals are very reluctant to be interviewed on matters related to SMCs and there is no way to contact parent managers directly. In the end, only six interviews with principals and parent managers have been conducted. Though it can represent about one-tenth of the sample, the sampling is too small to generalize the results of this study.

Besides the questionnaire and the interview, some other research methods cannot be used due to difficulties in gaining access and informed consent. Attempts have been made to access the minutes of SMCs meetings but the information is regarded as confidential and not to be disclosed to researchers. In conducting the interviews, it is also observed that one parent manager is very careful about what has been disclosed, worrying that the school's image may be adversely affected. Similarly, informed consent for the observation of SMC meetings cannot be obtained. The role and performance of parent managers in SMC meetings cannot be observed.

Furthermore, this study has only studied the perceived role of parent managers and it

has found a discrepancy between perceived roles and actual parent participation. There is no information on parents' actual participation in SMCs.

Finally, the respondents of this study are principals and parent managers in SMCs. The views of sponsoring bodies, teacher managers, alumni association managers and other managers have not been collected.

#### **Recommendations for further research**

One important area worth further research is the relationship between parent managers and PTAs. The interviews have indicated that there is a close link between parent managers and PTAs. Parent managers have been elected by PTAs and they collect opinions from committee members of the PTAs and report back informally to them. It will be helpful to study the role of PTAs in the election of the parent managers and identify the work and contribution of parent managers that cannot be done by the PTAs.

This study has also found that one-third of the parent managers are housewives and their concerns are different from other parent managers. It may be necessary to identify their interest as they can afford more time.

A study of the actions taken by the Catholic Diocese, Sheng Kung Hui and the Methodist Church in response to the passing of the Education (Amendment) Bill 2002 can be useful in order to find out whether parent participation in school management can be enhanced without registering SMCs as incorporated bodies.

Though the Methodist Church has refused to register SMCs as incorporated bodies, it will double the number of parent representatives in the school affairs committees. It remains to be seen if these sponsoring bodies can do a better job in enhancing parent participation in the schools operated by them.

It will also be useful to conduct case studies on some schools using methods such as document study and observation of meetings. The views of other managers besides the principals and the parent managers should be collected. The actual role of parent managers and their participation in SMCs can also be examined.

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## APPENDIX A: Questionnaire to principals (Section A)

### A study of the role of parent managers in school management committees in secondary schools in Hong Kong Questionnaire for Principals 家長校董在香港中學校董會擔任角色調查問卷(校長)

Please indicate your responses with a ✓ in the appropriate box ☐.

請在空格內，以 ✓ 回答下列問題：

#### 1. FACTUAL DETAILS:

基本資料

#### Personal Details

個人資料

##### a. What is your sex?

性別

☐ Male

男

☐ Female

女

##### b. How many years have you been a Principal at this school?

在所屬學校任職校長有多久？

☐ 5 or less

5 年或以下

☐ 6-10

6-10 年

☐ 11-15

11-15 年

☐ 16-20

16-20 年

☐ 21 or more

21 年或以上

##### c. What is your highest academic qualification? \_\_\_\_\_

閣下具備最高的學歷是 \_\_\_\_\_

**Structure And Organization Of School Management Committee (SMC)**

**校董會的架構和組織**

d. How many school managers are there?

校董會有多少名校董？

☐ 5 or less

5 名或以下

☐ 6-10

6-10 名

☐ 11-15

11-15 名

☐ 16-20

16-20 名

☐ 21 or more

21 名或以上

e. How many SMC meetings are NORMALLY held in each school year?

每學年通常召開多少次校董會會議？

☐ 1

1 次

☐ 2

2 次

☐ 3

3 次

☐ 4

4 次

☐ 5 or more

5 次或以上

f. When are SMC meetings usually held?

校董會多在何時召開？

☐ Weekday mornings or afternoons

星期一/二/三/四/五早上或下午

☐ Saturdays

星期六

☐ Sundays

星期日

☐ Evenings

晚上

☐ School holidays

學校假期

☐ Not fixed

不固定

g. How many PARENT managers are there in the SMC in your school?

閣下所屬學校有多少名家長校董成員？

☐ 1

1 名

☐ 2

2 名

☐ 3

3 名

☐ 4 or more

4 名或以上

h. What is the tenure of the PARENT managers in the SMC?

家長校董在校董會任期年限有多久？

☐ 1 year

1 年

☐ 2 years

2 年

☐ 3 years

3 年

☐ 4 years or more

4 年或以上

**APPENDIX B: Questionnaire to parent managers (Section A)**

**A study of the role of parent managers in school management committees  
in secondary schools in Hong Kong  
Questionnaire for Parent Managers  
家長校董在香港中學校董會擔任角色調查問卷(家長校董)**

Please indicate your responses with a ✓ in the appropriate box ☐.

請在空格內，以✓回答下列問題：

**A. PERSONAL DETAILS:**

個人資料

**a. What is your sex?**

性別

☐ Male

男

☐ Female

女

**b. How many years have you been a Parent Manager at this school?**

閣下在所屬學校任職家長校董有多久？

☐ 1 or less

1 年或以下

☐ 2

2 年

☐ 3

3 年

☐ 4 or more

4 年或以上

**c. What is your age?年齡**

☐ Under 30

30 歲以下

☐ 30 – 50

30-50 歲

☐ Over 50

50 歲以上

d. What is your highest academic qualification?

教育程度

☐ Primary

小學

☐ Secondary 5

中五

☐ Secondary 7

中七

☐ Tertiary

大專

☐ University or above

大學或以上

e. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

閣下職業是 \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX C: Questionnaire to principals and parent managers (Section B)**

**A study of the role of parent managers in school management committees  
in secondary schools in Hong Kong**  
家長校董在香港中學校董會擔任角色調查問卷

**B PARENTAL ROLE IN EDUCATION**  
家長在教育中擔任的角色

1. What are the most important benefits of parents' involvement in children's schooling? Please RANK these benefits in order of importance, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> etc with 1<sup>st</sup> as most important.  
家長參予其子女的學習，最大的得益是甚麼？請依重要性次序用 1<sup>st</sup>、2<sup>nd</sup>、3<sup>rd</sup>等填寫，最重要的答案請用 1<sup>st</sup> 填寫。

Rank 次序

- |   |                                                                 |       |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| a | can strengthen communication between school and parents         | _____ |
|   | 加強學校與家長間的溝通                                                     |       |
| b | can help schools become more responsive to the needs of society | _____ |
|   | 幫助學校更快回應社會需要                                                    |       |
| c | can provide practical support for the school                    | _____ |
|   | 為學校提供實際支援                                                       |       |

2. How can parents best support their children's learning? Please RANK these suggestions in order of importance, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> etc with 1<sup>st</sup> as most important.  
家長如何最有效支援子女的學習？請依其效用次序用 1<sup>st</sup>、2<sup>nd</sup>、3<sup>rd</sup>等填寫，最有效的答案請用 1<sup>st</sup> 填寫。

Rank 次序

- |   |                                                                                   |       |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| a | getting to know the school and its policies better                                | _____ |
|   | 了解學校及其政策                                                                          |       |
| b | undertaking homework supervision and guidance                                     | _____ |
|   | 承諾督導其子女的家課                                                                        |       |
| c | undertaking ancillary learning activities at home                                 | _____ |
|   | 承諾在家中進行輔助學習活動                                                                     |       |
| d | meeting with other parents to share ways of supporting their children's learning. | _____ |
|   | 與其他家長會晤，分享如何支援其子女學習方法                                                             |       |
| e | others (please specify): _____                                                    | _____ |
|   | 其他 (請註明)                                                                          |       |

3. How can parents best support the school? Please RANK the supports in order of your preference, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> etc with 1<sup>st</sup> as first preference.

下列那種途徑最能使家長支援學校工作？請依有效性次序用 1<sup>st</sup>、2<sup>nd</sup>、3<sup>rd</sup>等填寫，最有效的答案請用 1<sup>st</sup> 填寫。

Rank 次序

- |   |                                                                      |       |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| a | working as teaching assistants<br>擔任教學助理                             | _____ |
| b | helping out in the library<br>當圖書館義工                                 | _____ |
| c | assisting during lunch hours or festive occasions<br>協助午膳時間活動或學校節日活動 | _____ |
| d | coaching sports activities<br>任職體育教練                                 | _____ |
| e | organizing extra-curricular activities<br>組織課外活動                     | _____ |
| f | others (please specify): _____<br>其他 (請註明) _____                     | _____ |

4. How important would you consider the following school practices for getting parent involvement? Please indicate your response with a ✓ in the appropriate column.

下列各項學校事務，閣下認為對幫助家長投入參與學校活動的重要性有多大？請在適當位置，✓出閣下的選擇。

	Very Important 非常重要	Marginally Important 稍為重要	Not Important 不重要
sending parents information about the school and its programme 給家長有關學校及其課程資訊			
inviting parents to attend functions at the school 邀請家長參加學校活動			
inviting parents to examine and discuss the needs and goals of the school 邀請家長研究討論學校的需要及目標			
inviting parents to discuss and help to make decisions affecting their children 邀請家長討論和協助決定任何與其子女有影響事宜			
working in partnership with the Parent Teacher Association in involving parents in school activities 以合作伙伴身份參加家長教師會為家長提供的活動			
others (please specify): 其他 (請註明)			

C APPOINTMENT OF PARENT MANAGERS IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 家長校董的委任

5. What is the most appropriate number of parent managers in SMC?

家長校董最理想人數是

- ☐ 1 in 25  
1 比 25  
☐ 1 in 20  
1 比 20  
☐ 1 in 15  
1 比 15  
☐ 1 in 10  
1 比 10  
☐ 1 in 5  
1 比 5

6. How important would you consider the involvement of the following parties in the appointment of parent managers? Please indicate your response with a ✓ in the appropriate column.

閣下認為下列那些人士對委任家長校董是最重要的？請在適當位置上，✓出閣下的選擇。

	Very Important 非常重要	Marginally Important 稍為重要	Not Important 不重要
Principal 校長			
Vice Principal 副校長			
Teachers 教師			
Chairman/ Officials of the Student Union 學生會會長/委員			
Alumni / Graduates' Association 舊生/畢業同學會			
Parent Teacher Association 家長教師會			
Others (please specify): 其他(請註明)			

7. What do you consider to be the most appropriate age of parent managers?

閣下認為哪年齡最適合出任家長董事

- ☐ Under 30  
30 歲以下  
☐ 30-50  
30-50 歲  
☐ Over 50  
50 歲以上  
☐ Any age  
任何年齡均可

8. What do you consider to be the MINIMUM education level for parent managers?  
閣下認為家長董事最少要接受何等教育程度？

- ☐ Primary  
小學
- ☐ Secondary 5  
中五
- ☐ Secondary 7  
中七
- ☐ Tertiary  
大專
- ☐ University  
大學
- ☐ No minimum level  
沒有最低要求

9. In your view which are the most important factors in the appointment of parent managers? Please RANK them in order of importance, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> etc with 1<sup>st</sup> as most important.

閣下認為哪因素對委任家長校董是最重要的？請依其重要性次序用 1<sup>st</sup>、2<sup>nd</sup>、3<sup>rd</sup>等填寫，最重要的答案請用 1<sup>st</sup> 填寫。

Rank 次序

- |                                                                             |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| a Academic qualifications<br>教育程度                                           | _____ |
| b Socio-economic status<br>社會經濟地位                                           | _____ |
| c Language ability or ability to communicate<br>語言能力或溝通能力                   | _____ |
| d Interest in the education of young people<br>對年青人教育的興趣                    | _____ |
| e Commitment to provide quality education for young people<br>委身於向年青人提供優質教育 | _____ |
| f Familiarity with the school<br>對學校的熟悉程度                                   | _____ |
| g Others (please specify): _____<br>其他 (請註明)                                | _____ |

D CONTRIBUTION OF PARENT MANAGERS IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

家長校董對校董會的貢獻

10. In which of the following areas can parents contribute to school decision making? Please indicate your response with a ✓ in the appropriate column.

家長在下列那範圍內可以幫助學校做決定？請在適當位置上，✓出閣下的選擇。

	Strong contribution 幫助極大	Weak contribution 幫助不大
enforcing relevant legislation 執行有關法例		
setting the mission and the goals of the school 訂立學校的使命和目標		
determining policies on teaching and learning 制定教與學的政策		
being responsible for programme planning and budgeting 負責擬備工作計劃和財政預算		
establishing a community network and support system 建立社區網絡和支援系統		
Others (please specify) 其他(請註明):		

E DIFFICULTIES / PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY PARENT MANAGERS:  
當家長校董的困難/問題：

11. What are your views of the following difficulties/ problem encountered by parent managers in SMC? Please RANK them in order of your preference, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> etc with 1<sup>st</sup> as most difficult.  
閣下對當家長校董的下列困難/問題有何意見？請依困難程度用 1<sup>st</sup>、2<sup>nd</sup>、3<sup>rd</sup> 等填寫，最「困難」的答案請用 1<sup>st</sup> 填寫。

Rank 次序

- |   |                                                                                           |       |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| a | Insufficient information provided by the school<br>學校提供資訊不足                               | _____ |
| b | Membership too time-consuming<br>成為校董一員實在費時                                               | _____ |
| c | Parent manager's poor understanding of education and school operation<br>家長校董對教育和學校運作缺乏理解 | _____ |
| d | Parent manager's limited experience of school management<br>家長校董對管理學校缺乏經驗                 | _____ |
| e | Non-cooperation of teacher managers<br>教師校董不合作                                            | _____ |
| f | Resistance of others to parent manager's views<br>其他校董反對家長校董意見                            | _____ |
| g | Others (please specify): _____<br>其他 (請註明): _____                                         | _____ |

F PERFORMANCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF PARENT MANAGERS IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

家長校董在校董會的表現和貢獻

12. Which of the following areas are of particular interest to parent managers? Please indicate your response with a ✓ in the appropriate column.

以下那一項是家長校董特別有興趣的？請在適當位置，✓出閣下的選擇。

	Much Interest 最有興趣	Some Interest 有些興趣	No Interest 沒有興趣
a) community network and support system 社區網絡和支援系統			
b) curriculum 課程			
c) extra-curricular activities 課外活動			
d) finance & budget 財政及預算			
e) fund-raising 籌款			
f) furniture, equipment and school premises 傢俬、器材和校舍			
g) homework / assessment policy 家課/評核政策			
h) induction/ staff development 入職輔導/教師發展			
i) medium of instruction 教學語言			
j) school development plans 學校發展計劃			
k) school missions & goals 學校使命和目標			
l) school rules and regulations 學校規則和條例			
m) student admission 入學要求			
n) student complaints 學生投訴			
o) student expulsions 開除學籍			
p) student welfare 學生福利			
q) teacher appraisal/ performance 教師考績/表現			
r) teacher recruitment & deployment 教師招聘和職位調配			
s) teaching and learning 教與學			
t) others:其他：			

13. How would you rate the performance of parent managers in your school?

閣下如何評核所屬學校家長校董的表現

- ☐ Good 好  
☐ Satisfactory 滿意  
☐ Unsatisfactory 不滿意

G TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR PARENT MANAGERS 家長校董的訓練及支援

14. Which of the following types of courses/ seminars would you consider most useful for parent managers? Please RANK them in order of your preference, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> with 1<sup>st</sup> as first preference.

閣下認為以下哪種課程/講座，對家長校董最有用？請依其實用性用 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>等填寫，最實用的請用 1<sup>st</sup> 填寫。

Rank 次序

- a Education 教育 \_\_\_\_\_
- b Management 管理 \_\_\_\_\_
- c Language 語言 \_\_\_\_\_
- d Interpersonal skills 社交技巧 \_\_\_\_\_
- e Accounting and finance 會計及財務 \_\_\_\_\_
- f Others (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_  
其他 (請註明) \_\_\_\_\_

15. How can the Education Department best provide support for parent managers?

Please indicate your response with a ✓ in the appropriate column.

教育署如何為家長董事提供最佳支援？請在適當位置，✓出閣下的選擇。

	Very Important 十分重要	Marginally Important 稍為重要	Not Important 不重要
Organizing experience-sharing sessions/ seminars 組織經驗 - 分享會/研討會			
Distributing materials for school managers 分派參考資料給各校董			
Publishing a School Managers' Handbook 出版校董手冊			
Offering support /assistance from Regional Education Office 分區教育處提供支援/協助			
Publishing a School Administrative Guide 出版學校行政指引			
Others (please specify): 其他 (請註明):			

End of Questionnaire/ Thank you  
問卷完 /多謝閣下意見

APPENDIX D: Covering letters

May 26 2002

Dear Assistant Director,

Mr CHIU Shiu Yim, Vincent is registered as a student on the Doctorate of Education Degree (Educational Management) at Leicester University. The title of his thesis is, 'The role of parent managers in school management committees in secondary schools in Hong Kong.'

As part of his research he is asking a number of schools to collaborate with him on gathering data. He intends to use questionnaires and conduct interviews. His work will be conducted in line with ethical guidelines governing educational research so that the anonymity of the respondents and their institution would be maintained.

I should be grateful if you would kindly provide him with a list of secondary schools with parent managers in school management committees to facilitate the research.

All information will be treated with strict confidence. Should enquiries arise, you are welcome to contact me.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Pamela Lomax



Department of Social Sciences  
10, Lo Ping Road,  
Tai Po,  
N.T.

25 June 2002

Dear Principal,

**Doctorate Research on**  
**“The role of parent managers in school management committees**  
**in secondary schools in Hong Kong”**

I apologize for writing to seek your assistance at a time when the school term will end soon. I am a Doctor of Education student in Leicester University conducting the captioned research. I am going to conduct a survey to collect information from all government and aided secondary schools with parent managers in school management committees.

Enclosed please find the following:

- a) questionnaire for principal and return envelope.
- b) letter to parent manager & questionnaire for parent manager, with stamped envelope and return envelope.

I shall be very grateful if you can support my research by completing and returning the questionnaire at your earliest convenience and send the letter and questionnaire to the parent manager on my behalf.

Please note that the questionnaires are coded so that reminder letters can be sent in due course. I guarantee that ethical guidelines will be observed and all information collected will be treated in strict confidence. Names of individuals and schools will NOT be disclosed. (A copy of the letter from my supervisor, Prof Pamela Lomax of Leicester University, is attached.).

I am happy to send you a summary of the findings or the whole report upon completion, if you are interested.

Should you have any queries, please contact me at 2948 7334 (Office) or 9268 5769 (Mobile) and Fax 2948 7329.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

---

Chiu Shiu Yim  
(招紹琰)  
Senior Lecturer

**RETURN SLIP**

- ☐ Completed questionnaire enclosed.
- ☐ Questionnaire returned, our school has no parent managers.
- ☐ I would like to have a copy of the findings.

---

(                      )  
Name: Optional

Department of Social Sciences  
10, Lo Ping Road,  
Tai Po,  
N.T.

25 June 2002

Dear Parent Manager,

**Doctorate Research on**  
**“The role of parent managers in school management committees**  
**in secondary schools in Hong Kong”**

I write to seek your assistance. I am a Doctor of Education student in Leicester University conducting the captioned research. I am going to conduct a survey to collect information from all government and aided secondary schools with parent managers in school management committees.

Enclosed please find the questionnaire for parent manager & return envelope.

I shall be very grateful if you can support my research by completing and returning the questionnaire at your earliest convenience.

Please note that the questionnaires are coded so that reminder letters can be sent in due course. I guarantee that ethical guidelines will be observed and all information collected will be treated in strict confidence. Names of individuals and schools will NOT be disclosed. (A copy of the letter from my supervisor, Prof Pamela Lomax of Leicester University, is attached.).

I am happy to send you a summary of the findings or the whole report upon completion, if you are interested.

Should you have any queries, please contact me at 2948 7334 (Office) or 9268 5769 (Mobile) and Fax 2948 7329.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

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Chiu Shiu Yim

(招紹琰)

Senior Lecturer

**RETURN SLIP**

☐ I would like to have a copy of the findings.

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(                      )  
Name: Optional

## APPENDIX E: Questions for follow-up interviews

A study of the role of parent managers in school management committees  
in secondary schools in Hong Kong  
Interview questions

Parent managers	Principals
<p>A. Appointment of parent managers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did you become parent manager?</li> <li>2. Why are you willing to become parent manager?</li> <li>3. Who appointed you? Was there any election?</li> <li>4. What role did the Parent-teacher Association (PTA) play?</li> <li>5. Will parent managers' contribution be affected by their education qualifications &amp; language abilities?</li> <li>6. Do you consider housewives particularly suitable to be parent managers?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why are parent managers required?</li> <li>2. What do you consider to be the best way to appoint parent managers?</li> <li>3. Will parent managers' contribution be affected by their education qualifications &amp; language abilities?</li> <li>4. Do you consider housewives particularly suitable to be parent managers?</li> </ol>
<p>B. Parental role in education</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your attitude towards parents assisting during lunch hours and festive occasions? What can parents actually do? Why are they required?</li> <li>2. What is your attitude towards parents organizing extra-curricular activities? What can parents actually do? Why are they required?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your attitude towards parents assisting during lunch hours and festive occasions? What can parents actually do? Why are they required?</li> <li>2. What is your attitude towards parents organizing extra-curricular activities? What can parents actually do? Why are they required?</li> </ol>
<p>C. SMC Meeting</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When are documents given to you? Are they often tabled?</li> <li>2. Who decides the agenda? Can you suggest items for discussion?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When are documents given to members? Are they often tabled?</li> <li>2. Who decides the agenda? Can other members suggest items for discussion?</li> </ol>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What were mainly discussed at SMC meetings?</li> <li>4. Were there any things that you wanted to discuss but were not discussed at SMC meetings?</li> <li>5. How much influence do you think you have in the decision-making process? Who is most influential in the decision-making process?</li> <li>6. Is there voting for decision making?</li> <li>7. How would you describe the attitude of other members to you?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What were mainly discussed at SMC meetings?</li> <li>4. Were there any things that you think parent managers wanted to discuss but were not discussed at SMC meetings?</li> <li>5. How much influence do you think parent managers have in the decision-making process? Who is most influential in the decision-making process?</li> <li>6. Is there voting for decision making?</li> <li>7. How would you describe the attitude of other members to parent managers?</li> </ol>
<p>D. Representation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As parent manager, do you represent the parent view or your own personal view?</li> <li>2. Are you consulted as individuals or as parent managers?</li> <li>3. Have you ever tried to collect the views of other parents? What method(s) have you used? Was it effective? If no, why not?</li> <li>4. Have you ever been under pressure from other parents to vote or represent a viewpoint in a particular way?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think parent managers' views represent: the parent view or their own view?</li> <li>2. Do members consult parent managers as individuals or as parent managers?</li> <li>3. Have parent managers tried to collect the views of other parents? What methods have they used? Was it effective? If no, why not?</li> <li>4. Have you ever noticed that parent managers have been under pressure from other parents to vote or represent a viewpoint in a particular way?</li> </ol>
<p>E. Contribution of parent managers in SMCs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are parent managers best suited to establish a community network and support system? How can they achieve this aim?</li> <li>2. Are there any areas that your views will be particularly respected/ sought?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are parent managers best suited to establish a community network and support system? How can they achieve this aim?</li> <li>2. Are there any areas that parent managers' views will be particularly respected/ sought?</li> </ol>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What areas can parent managers contribute most in SMCs? Why?</li> <li>4. What exactly do you want to achieve as parent manager? Are you successful?</li> <li>5. What is your greatest achievement/ satisfaction as parent manager?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. What areas can parent managers contribute most in SMCs? Why?</li> <li>4. What do you think parent managers want to achieve? Are they successful?</li> <li>5. What would you consider the greatest achievement/ satisfaction of parent manager?</li> </ol>
<p>F. School development plan</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are you included/ excluded in the discussion of the school development plan?</li> <li>2. How can parent manager contribute to the drafting of the school development plan?</li> <li>3. If you are included in the discussion of the school development plan, describe how you help to finalize the school development plan/ your contributions.</li> <li>4. Are there any factors that may have limited your participation?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are parent managers included in the discussion of the school development plan?</li> <li>2. How can parent managers contribute to the drafting of the school development plan?</li> <li>3. What factors will limit parent managers' participation?</li> </ol>
<p>G. Difficulties/ problem encountered</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the work of parent managers time-consuming? How much time is demanded from parent managers?</li> <li>2. Are there any reasons/ factors that may discourage your participation?</li> <li>3. What areas of work will require better knowledge of education from parent managers?</li> <li>4. Describe an occasion when you find that lack of knowledge in education will reduce your contribution to the discussion in the SMC.</li> <li>5. Describe an occasion when you find that lack of experience of school management will reduce your contribution to the</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the work of parent managers time-consuming? How much time is demanded from parent managers?</li> <li>2. Are there any reasons/ factors that may discourage parent managers' participation?</li> <li>3. What areas of work will require better knowledge of education from parent managers?</li> <li>4. Describe an occasion when you find that lack of knowledge in education will reduce parent managers' contribution to the discussion in the SMC.</li> <li>5. Describe an occasion when you find that lack of experience of school management will reduce parent managers' contribution to</li> </ol>

discussion in the SMC.	the discussion in the SMC
<p>H. Training for parent managers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you consider support from the Education Department for parent managers sufficient? Why?</li> <li>2. What support from the Education Department for parent managers will be most useful?</li> <li>3. Have you attended any training for parent managers? Why?</li> <li>4. Is the training useful? What have you gained? How is this knowledge/ skills helpful in enhancing your role as parent managers in SMCs?</li> <li>5. Why is the training not useful? What do you expect from the training program?</li> <li>6. What can the principal/ school do to make you a better parent manager?</li> <li>7. What courses/ seminars would you suggest to be organized for parent managers? What should be the duration? What time will be most suitable for this to be organized?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you consider support from the Education Department for parent managers sufficient? Why?</li> <li>2. What support from the Education Department for parent managers will be most useful?</li> <li>3. Have parent managers attended any training? Why?</li> <li>4. Do they think the training useful? What may have been gained? How is this knowledge/ skills helpful in enhancing their role as parent managers? Do they think the training useful? What do they expect from the training program?</li> <li>5. What can the principal/ school do to make better parent managers?</li> <li>6. What courses/ seminars would you suggest to be organized for parent managers? What should be the duration? What time will be most suitable for this to be organized?</li> </ol>



**APPENDIX F: List of interviewees**

Code	Position	Sex	Date of interview
P1	Principal	Male	19 February 2003
P2	Principal	Male	6 March 2003
P3	Principal	Female	15 March 2003
PM1	Parent manager	Female	22 February 2003
PM2	Parent manager	Female	6 March 2003
PM3	Parent manager	Male	15 March 2003