

# Results from the Survey of Parent/Guardians May 2021<sup>1</sup>

## Summary

What is the Parents Association about and what should it be doing? We wanted to know what parents/guardians thought. We invited you to tell us and 177 of you did.



This is the first time a survey like this has been carried out among the parents/guardians. It has been a challenging time for everyone in the school but the responses were mostly very positive, offering support to the work of the association and giving very useful comments and suggestions as to how it can play its part even better going forward. While a small committee (the Parents Association Committee - PAC) meets monthly to plan events and share ideas, importantly the Parents' Association is made up **of every parent/guardian** in Canalway Educate Together School. We hope this survey will become an annual part of the work of the association- finding out what it can do to support each other, our children and the school.

## Key Messages

- The Parents' Association and the Parents' Association Committee are a valued resource and doing very positive work, and many respondents said thank you.
- Respondents especially noted the good work of the PAC in coordinating extra-curricular activities and fundraising.
- Respondents want more opportunities to meet with other parents, share information, advice and support, and build community.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanne Moore, Carol Ballantine and Jen Diaz Green

- Not all respondents are aware that the Parents' Association includes every parent or guardian in the school. We need to communicate the existence and function of the Parents' Association better.
- There was a strong interest in getting more involved with the Parents' Association, either by serving on the PAC, or by volunteering time and skills.
- There were a number of comments about communicating with school management, and representing parents' collective concerns and issues.

## **Next Steps**

The Parents Association is taking these results on board and already are taking steps to:

1. Improve communications with parents/guardians as to the role of the PA; how you can support its work and get more involved; and supportive information for particular stages of school-life e.g. starting at the school and moving on to secondary.
2. Facilitate more peer support, information and support events and practical supports to parents/guardians including a Buddy System and Information Pack for new parents/guardians; tailored information and support events such as transition to secondary school.
3. Reflect the views of parents/guardians in the work of the PA and include this in its Constitution.
4. Clearly communicate the purpose of fundraising for the school. Government capitation grants do not cover the full costs of running the school, and so educational "extras" such as IT resources, library books, sports equipment and so on are only available to our kids when we raise money for them. This should be made clearer to all parents.
5. Aim to repeat a survey annually to inform the work of the PA; and
6. Share the results of the survey with the School Board.

# Results from the Survey of Parent/Guardians May 2021<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

A survey of parents/guardians was carried out in April 2021. In total, 177 parents/guardians responded and gave us their views on what the Parents Association can do more of going forward.

This short report presents the results of this survey. It is structured as follows:

Section 1 presents the Responses to the Survey Questions.

Section 2

## Section 1: Responses to the Survey Questions

A survey of parents/guardians was carried out in April 2021. 177 parents/guardians responded to the short survey. The survey offered an important opportunity to express views and the vast majority of contributions were about offering support, making helpful suggestions as to activities and functions and only a small handful indicated difficulties or concerns. **The first key message from this survey is that parents/guardians are very positive about the PA and its work, expressing thanks and support.**

### 1. Who is in the Parents Association?

There were 192 responses to the question, 'who do you think is in the school's Parents Association?'. A small percentage of people selected more than one option. Less than half (45.5%) of responses indicated that every parent/guardian is a member. A further 2.3% of responses selected every parent/guardian *and* class reps. So nearly half (47.8%) of the responses selected correctly pointed to every parent/guardian being a member, but a very small amount of those also added the class reps.

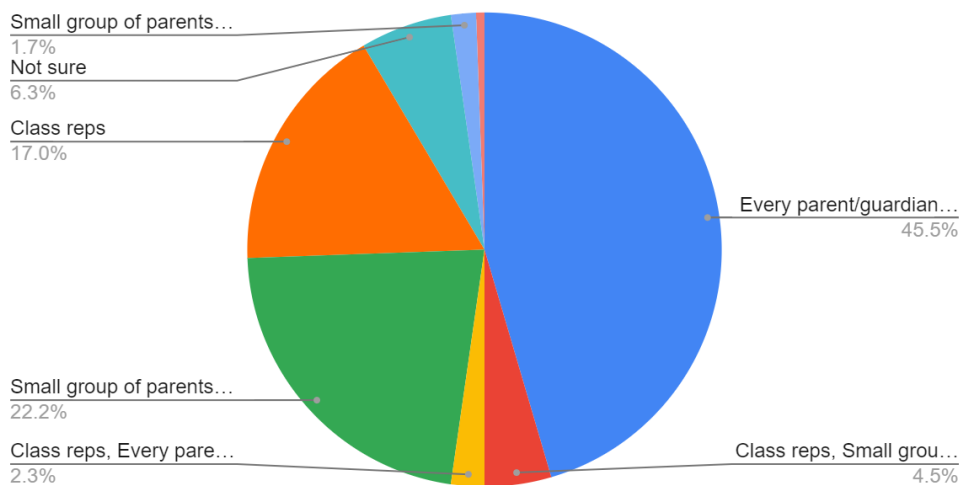
Figure 1 shows us that 23.2% of responses selected small groups of parents and class reps as being the PA. Adding in the 'not sures' this means that nearly a third (29.5%) of responses either did not know or misunderstood. **This suggests that more information is required on the PA and the role/membership of all parents and guardians in it. A key message is that there is an information gap that could be addressed.**

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<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Moore, Carol Ballantine and Jen Diaz Green

Figure 1: Who do you think is in the School's Parents Association?

### Count of Who do you think is in the school's Parents Association?



## 2. What does the PA mostly do?

There was 722 responses to the question, what does the Parents Association mostly do? That's an average of 4 responses per person. The most frequently selected function was fundraise, with 85.9% of responses. This was followed by representing the views of the parents (58.2%); supporting parents/guardians to become involved in the operation of the school (47.5%); support the work of school management and students (42.4%); and coordinate afterschool activities (40.7%).

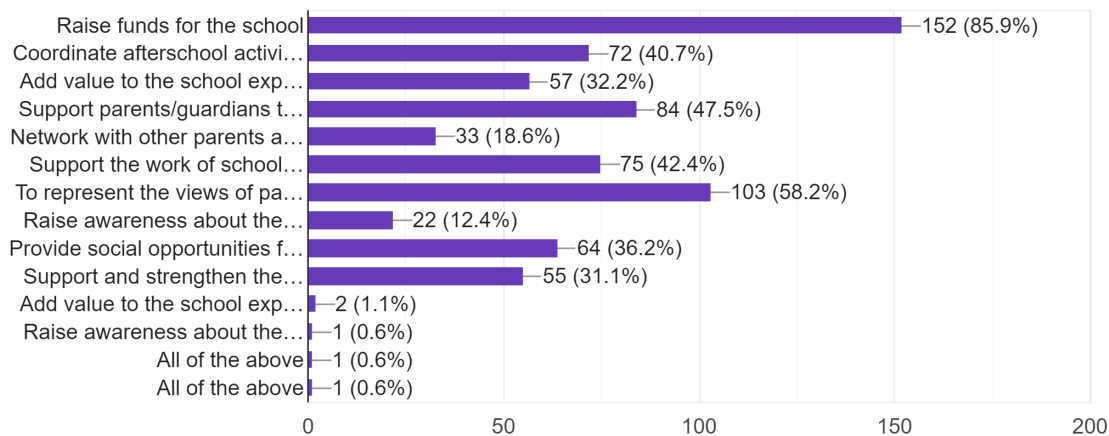
**This suggests that there is a high level of awareness of the PA's role in raising funds, but that there also recognition/perception of the range of other functions the PA does.** The perceptions of what the PA is a mixture of what we do mostly but also includes functions that are generally not done such as supporting the work of school management and representing the views of the school. Some of the functions refer to pre-covid times (e.g. after school activities) while others would seem to recognise there has been a lack of social opportunities (36.2%). In previous years, it is likely (but not certain) that the perception of social opportunities being provided would be higher. There are opportunities for the PA to do more on connecting outwards to the wider community and with other parents associations.

Figure 2: What do you think the Parents Association mostly does? (for a full list of these questions see the footnote)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Fig 2 What does the PA mostly do?  
 Raise funds for the school  
 Coordinate afterschool activities

## What do you think the Parents Association mostly does?

177 responses



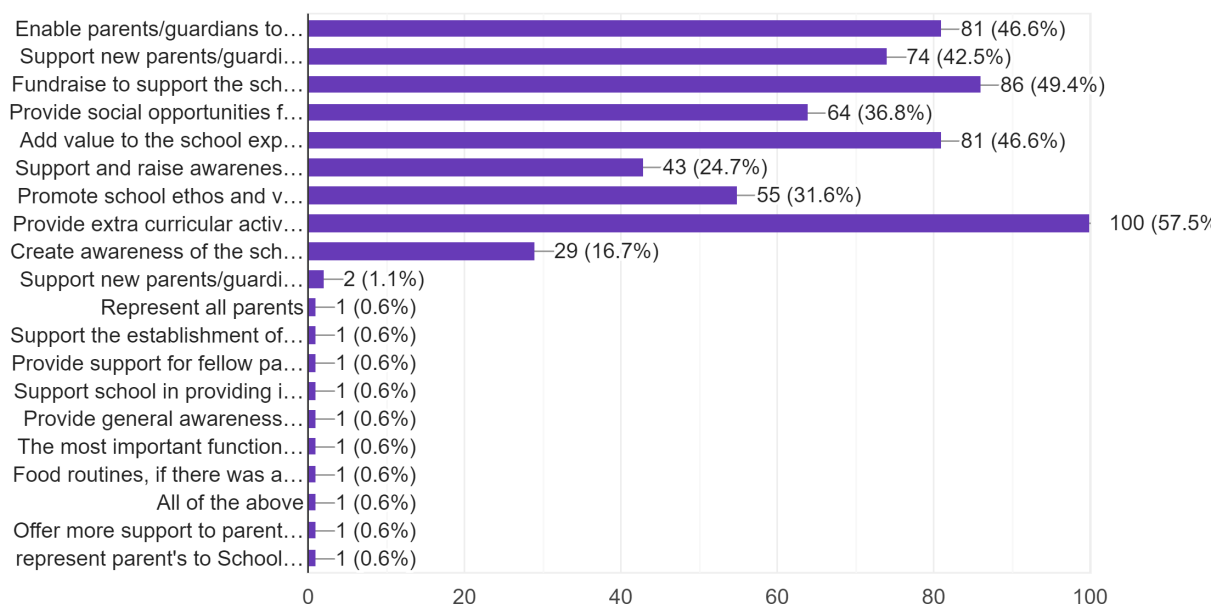
### 3. What else could/should the PA do?

There were 625 responses to this question from 174 people, with an average of 3.6 responses per person. There was a strong preference for the PA to provide extra curricular activities (57.5%), followed by fundraise to support the school (49.4%); enable parents/guardians to become proactively involved in their child's school life (46.6%); add value to the school experience for parents and children (46.6%); and support new parents/guardians (42.5%). Social opportunities, promote the school ethos and values and raise awareness about the school were less frequently selected but still notable. Additional points mentioned once or twice included support for special needs children and parents, developing slower/healthier foot routines, secondary school options, supports around bullying, food disorders, representing parents views to the school, supporting the development of an afterschool. **A key message from these responses is that there is interest in the PA providing more support to parents in varying forms.**

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- Add value to the school experience for parents
  - Support parents/guardians to become involved in the operation of the school
  - Network with other parents associations
  - Support the work of school management, staff and students
  - To represent the views of parents/guardians
  - Raise awareness about the school in wider community
  - Provide social opportunities for parents/guardians and families
  - Support and strengthen the school ethos

**Figure 3: What else could/should the PA do? (see Footnote for full list of questions)<sup>4</sup>**

Fun fact! Every parent is a member of the parents association. Key activities have included fundraising to support the school, organising social...hat else could/should it/we all do in your opinion?  
174 responses



#### 4. Getting Involved in the PAC

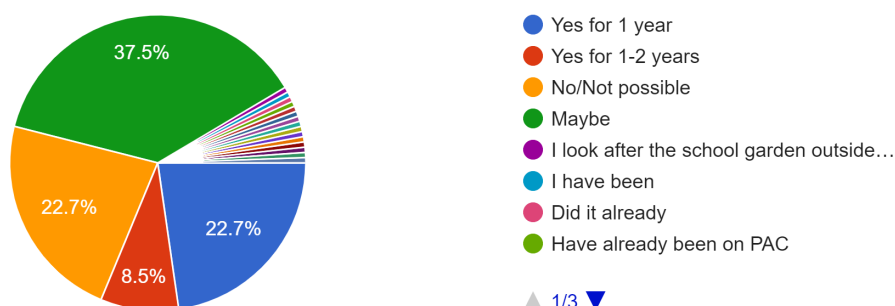
Just less than a third of parents who took part in the survey said they would consider being on the PAC for either 1 or 2 years (31.2%). There was a large chunk of maybes/not now (39.5% combined). Only 22.7% said no and 10% had been involved already. **A key message is that there is strong interest in getting involved in the PA and on the committee for many parents and for those who are unsure, more information would be valuable.**

<sup>4</sup> Fig 3: What else could/should the PA do?

- Enable parents/guardians to become pro-actively involved in their child's school life
- Support new parents/guardians e.g. through buddy system or provide information pack
- Fundraise to support the school
- Provide social opportunities for parents
- Add value to the school experience for parents and children
- Support and raise awareness about the school in the community
- Promote school ethos and values
- Provide extra curricular activities for children
- Create awareness of the school in wider community

Would you ever consider being on the Parents Association Committee (PAC) in future?

176 responses



## Section 2: Overview of Comments and Suggestions

### How can the Parents Association best support the school?

This part of the survey was an open text box. There were 53 responses in total (all are copied in the annex to this report).

We organised the suggestions by theme, and the highlights are as follows:

- 5 responses were along the lines that the Parents' Association is **doing a great job**; 9 responses said they had no further suggestions.
- The dominant theme among specific suggestions (10 responses) was for the Parents Association **to do more to support parents/guardians**: specifically, to facilitate networking and getting to know each other among parents; to enable information sharing and exchange; and to build community.
- The next most common theme (8 responses) was for **improved communications**. This involved more regular communication from the PAC; provision of a forum for discussion; sharing of PAC meeting agendas and more regular outreach to parents to find out what they wanted.
- With 6 responses, the next most common theme was **parent-school connections**. These responses demonstrate something of a lack of clarity on the roles of different bodies in the school: these responses should be **shared with the parents' representatives on the Board of Management**.
- Suggestions for support to children (5 responses) included after-school activities, hot meals for lunch and an international day. They also included the suggestion of surveying the children on how funds should be spent.
- It's noteworthy that only 4 of the responses dealt with fundraising. Of those, two suggested voluntary contributions for families who didn't have time to participate in events and activities.

## How can Parents/Guardians support the PA?

There was a lot of interest and support for the PA. Specific suggestions on what people could offer included:

- With time, admin, or in any other way necessary
- Dig in when needed, being opportunities in funding or engagement that I am aware of due to my work, apply for funding etc
- Maybe co-ordinate with the school to organise a sand sculpture workshop to raise funds.
- Could offer a free Mindstiling program.
- Video editing if can help 😊
- Attend events and support financially where possible, answer surveys like this, generally show enthusiasm and awareness for the work that they do. The christmas quiz was fantastic. I'm not a very good committee person, but I am an enthusiastic supporter and happy to help out on an ad-hoc basis for events
- Previously co-ordinated a intercultural schools programme, happy to share any learning.
- I think anyone that puts themselves forward is fantastic
- I can take a part and help on anything I can if being asked.

In summary, the survey has provided a very strong supportive response was received by parents and guardians. Many are willing to get more involved and only require additional information, communication and support.

### **The Key Messages**

The first key message from this survey is that parents/guardians are very positive about the PA and the work it has done, expressing thanks and support to everyone who has taken part in events and initiatives.

The second message is that not everyone knows that the PA is made up of all parents/guardians and that more information is required. There is an information gap that could be addressed.

The third message is that while there is a high level of awareness of the PA's role in raising funds, coordinating afterschool activities (in previous years) and supporting the school, there were activities which the PA have not generally done such as representing the views of parents and getting involved in the operation of the school. This suggests that greater clarity is needed on the role of the PA and also on how parents/guardians can share their views with the school. It also points for opportunities for the PA to do more on social events in the



next school year, connecting outwards to the wider community and with other parents associations.

In terms of what the PA could do in future, the coordination of extra curricular activities was a popular role, as well as fundraising, supporting parents/guardians to be proactively involved in their child's school life and support new parents/guardians and those parents of children with special needs. There was a lot of support for activities beyond fundraising, but also recognition of its important contribution. A key message from these responses is that parents/guardians would like more support and there was strong interest in the PA providing more support to parents in varying forms.

Another important message is that there is strong interest in getting involved in the PA and on the committee for many parents and for those who are unsure, more information would be valuable as to what is involved.

In the 53 individual comments made, the dominant theme was for the PA **to do more to support parents/guardians**: specifically, to facilitate networking and getting to know each other among parents; to enable information sharing and exchange; and to build community.

The next most common theme was for **improved communications**. This involved more regular communication from the PAC; provision of a forum for discussion; sharing of PAC meeting agendas and more regular outreach to parents to find out what they wanted.

The third most frequently mentioned theme was **parent-school connections**. These responses demonstrate something of a lack of clarity on the roles of different bodies in the school: these responses should be **shared with the parents' representatives on the Board of Management**; and parents should be made aware that their "voice" in school management is via the BoM and not the parents association.

## **Next Steps**

The Parents Association is taking these results on board and already are taking steps to:

1. Improve communications with parents/guardians as to the role of the PA; how you can support its work and get more involved; and supportive information for particular stages of school-life e.g. starting at the school and moving on to secondary.
2. Facilitate more peer support, information and support events and practical supports to parents/guardians including a Buddy System and Information Pack for new parents/guardians; tailored information and support events such as transition to secondary school.

3. Reflect the views of parents/guardians in the work of the PA and include this in its Constitution.
4. Clearly communicate the purpose of fundraising for the school. Government capitation grants do not cover the full costs of running the school, and so educational “extras” such as IT resources, library books, sports equipment and so on are only available to our kids when we raise money for them. This should be made clearer to all parents.
5. Aim to repeat a survey annually to inform the work of the PA; and
6. Share the results of the survey with the School Board of Management.

## **Annex: Full list of responses to question: How can the Parents' Association best support the school?**

### **You are already doing a great job (5 replies)**

- You guys are doing a fab job
- Keep up[ the good work. Focus on continuing to do good work in the areas you work in. No need to over stretch the PAC
- Doing amazing job already
- No, I'm very happy about the school community
- PACs job has been made far more difficult in the last year, appreciate the work that has gone on, often unseen by the wider group of parents in the school

### **No suggestions (9 replies)**

- No
- I don't know.
- Just what I said above.
- None.
- None
- No
- No idea
- Nono
- No not at present.

### **Support to Parents/ build community (10 replies)**

- Buddy system is an excellent idea. Even if perhaps the junior infant classes were in a WhatsApp group with then senior infants classes they are then with a recent intake of people who have learned school and local ways
- An introductory leaflet, via website or newsletter with structure, roles, purpose, initiatives and contact details set out
- Organise more outdoor group activities when the weather is better. Those who started particularly entry at higher classes in the last year have not had much opportunity to get to know and be supported by parents in their child's class. Suggestion would be a treasure hunt - outdoors fun for all the family! It has been tricky with COVID but a few more activities - not necessarily to fund raise- more to build community - would be welcome. A buddy system for new parents would be a good idea. Match with parents with children of a similar age I think the need for parental involvement needs to be promoted more - what is the benefit to me/us?
- Acknowledgement that parent peer support is important. And to look at how PA can provide opportunities for parents to build relationships with each other.. The parent rep set up of a WhatsApp group provides an important space for parents to check in with other parents on for example school work kids are doing or other issues coming up for their child and wondering if anyone else's child for example is finding x hard.. However during COVID19 there was not the same opportunities to engage with other parents or teachers in person. Harder I felt to engage in a WhatsApp group when you hadn't an opportunity to build an initial relationship with them outside of it. (At drop off and pick up) I have a child in SI and I would say I know who every parent is and who their child is. I also have a child in JI but it was a very different experience in terms of engagement with parents because of COVID19. I hardly know any parent.and we are coming into last term of school year. I would like to see a role in co ordinating for example an online event for JI class parents with breakout rooms for parents in particular to put faces (unmasked!) to names and to start building relationships.
- If possible, have a database or list of Easter & summer camps for clueless parents!

- Enable parents within each class to meet up and get to know each other
- organise back-to-school nights or other orientation events.
- Extra activities, afterschool, sell useful items (t-shirt, lunch boxes, calendars) events per class and not necessary for all the school
- To organise back-to-school nights or other orientation events and parent-teacher conferences throughout the year ensures you are on the same page. more events in general would help bind the community together

### **Communication (8 replies)**

- Could have an outdoor notice board in the yard, it would raise visibility and it's a nice reminder of all the hard work that goes on (*note that we have an outdoor noticeboard in the yard, though it hasn't been used much this year*).
- The role of the class rep is not clear enough. It should be clearer that they can be the voice for the class
- Greater communication and updates. Current updates are through WhatsApp from class representatives- which means 3 WhatsApp messages from different class groups
- Ask parents their views and for their suggestions, and skills they might want to contribute
- Communications to parents school-wide would be great
- Have a school-wide parent forum that can be used to ask questions or share information with other classes.
- Monthly emails
- If PAC can hold meetings (virtually) each month with the specified agenda and asking parents if they have any issues, concerns or suggestions to be taken ahead with school committee and vice versa. Providing regular updates/MOM on these meetings. Action the pending items with the help of other parents etc.

### **Parents-school (6 replies)**

- I have been very disappointed last year and this year that there was no process of consultation, feedback or collaboration on home schooling. I requested multiple times via class rep, who was told that the association's function was a fundraising one, and that any thing else had to go directly to Dermot. I have since asked or suggested via various avenues (questionnaires, forms, emails) that there is a process whereby we can feed into the structure of the home schooling programme. We are, after all, taking up the mantel and becoming teaching colleagues in those circumstances. The truth is, Ireland has been poorly served in terms of home schooling offering compared to many other countries; and even comparatively within Ireland, the offering to CWET students has been very meagre, not open to feedback, consultation and collaboration. This has been a terrible time for people, and despite reaching out a number of times via class reps and directly to the school, I have felt absolutely no mechanism for representation or camaraderie.
- By communication from parents to school with issues and opinions
- To represent the views of parents/guardians
- Communications between school and parents in broader aspects and solutions focused as opposed to we just don't have the resources
- Make it clearer how we can raise issues and contribute.
- The Parent Association can advise the principal and Board of Management on policy issues and incidents that may require a review of school policy, e.g. Bullying, Safety, Homework, Enrolment, Behaviour problems etc.

### **Support to children (5 replies)**

- Creating a variety of school/ after-school activities which will best benefit the children's educational and social life within the future
- Would be a great idea to organise hot meals for lunch in school for a healthy diet.
- Doing a survey among the kids on what they would like the money raised being spent on

- Bringing in parents with skills to show the children(after covid)
- International day event (Which will celebrate the diversity of our school) I think this will make more parents get involved and children will get to know more about themselves, school community, traditions, and culture of a long list of countries already present in our school.

### **Fundraising (4 replies)**

- Organise more social events to raise funds, allow voluntary contributions
- Monthly subscription fee for families €7 for 1 child or €10 for 2+ via Standing Order or Aladdin App for the 10 months children attend 3 large community events Winter Fair or family quiz /Spring Walk/ Summer BBQ to fundraiser and 1 parent night for socialising and fundraising (pub quiz, sing a long etc) streamline the requests for money throughout the year. Take pressure off everyone. Key events to look forward to and take part in. Guaranteed minimum income raised with bonus funds at the events
- Fundraising
- Promotion of the online donations/ fundraising facilities set up a couple of years ago (not sure if it's still in place?) a great option when families can't attend fundraising events in person

### **Other**

- Less fundraising and more overall j input into the school