

## **UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

### **Guidance for Obtaining Consent to Undertake Research with Children in Schools**

#### **Background**

The question is frequently raised whether it is always necessary to get parental consent to undertake research with children in schools or whether the head teacher can provide consent in loco parentis. After consultation with a range of local Head Teachers the following procedures were agreed.

#### **Advice**

Ethical scrutiny of the project and all related documentation (adverts, letters, information sheets, consent forms, debriefs) must be undertaken within the university and approval received. If the Head Teacher is happy with the study and the procedures to be followed, researchers should be guided by the school. Letters to parents can be made available if required by the school. It is considered good practice to obtain written informed consent from parents wherever possible but sometimes Head Teachers are reluctant to send letters home and are happy to provide consent in loco parentis especially if the research is uncontroversial. While the gold standard is that parents should opt in, head teachers may have a view of whether opt in or opt out can be used. Generally for sensitive topics, opt in is the preferred option. However, in all cases a real effort should be made to get informed consent from the participants themselves. Even young children can give consent and can withdraw consent. For example they should be asked if they are happy to take part (in child friendly language using images if necessary) and told they may return to their class/group at any time they wish. If a child is reluctant to take part, or expresses any discomfort during the study this should be taken as withdrawal of consent and the child should be returned to their group/class.

If consent is being given in loco parentis by the head teacher the head teacher should complete a consent form and he/she should have been fully briefed on the study and procedures being used. It should be made clear that the data collected is for a student project if this is the case.

All researchers including students working with in schools should follow the guidance for research with vulnerable populations.

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