



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

Annex 3: Developing family engagement in Community Focused Schools

Information to help schools develop their family engagement provision.

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Contents

Introduction

Supporting positive engagement with families

The FEO

Children and young people who are looked after or are educated other than at school (EOTAS)

Transition

Estyn: The importance of working with families and the community

Further resources

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Information to help schools develop their family engagement provision which supplements the '[Community Focused Schools' guidance](#). Definitions of key terminology used in this guidance can be found in the '[Community Focused Schools' guidance](#).

Introduction

This guidance details some of the ways that schools can develop their family engagement provision. It provides an overview to prompt discussion and links to other relevant guidance where appropriate. Further supplementary resources will be developed to compliment this guidance through ongoing engagement with the sector.

Engaging with families (family engagement) is 1 of the 3 elements of the Community Focused School guidance and provides a starting point for developing a Community Focused Schools approach. Within a Community Focused School, families are made to feel welcomed, listened to and valued. Their needs, and those of their children, are understood and catered for. They are encouraged to play an active role in their child's learning and are supported to best utilise and enhance the home learning environment, which includes the physical characteristics of the home, but also the quality of the learning support that they provide themselves.

Schools should encourage the involvement of all families in the work that they do but should have a particular focus on supporting families from lower income households. Reaching out to families and working with them has shown to have a positive impact on overcoming the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational attainment ([Jeynes, 2015](#); [See and Gorard, \(2015\)](#)) and should be at the forefront of schools' work.

“Tackling the impact of poverty on attainment is at the heart of our national

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mission in education. It is the only way that we can succeed in our aim of achieving high standards and aspirations for all.” (Jeremy Miles, (2022))

Supporting positive engagement with families

There are 3 approaches that can help to support positive engagement with families:

- person-centred, where families are listened to and valued
- strengths-based, where families' strengths and skills are acknowledged and built upon
- **trauma-informed**, where we acknowledge the widespread impact of trauma and understand and promote the potential paths for healing

When schools invest the time, commitment and resources to family engagement, it has a positive impact on:

- wider relationships between schools and families
- promoting diversity, equity and inclusion
- supporting understanding of and involvement in a school's curriculum, helping to support progress in learning and aspirations
- behaviour
- attendance
- achievement
- out-of-school activities
- community cohesion
- emotional and physical well-being
- ensuring support and services are fit for purpose

A whole-school approach to family engagement

Developing family engagement requires a whole-school approach that is:

- strategic
- shared by all stakeholders
- co-constructed with families and communities, reflecting their cultural values and needs

It is important to consider the following points when developing a whole-school approach.

Leadership

Support from the headteacher, senior leaders and/or governors is essential for strategies to be successful. As is the need for collaborative leadership across stakeholders to ensure shared voice, decision-making and goals.

More information on leadership for a Community Focused School can be found in The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit '[Theme 1: Leadership for a self-improving system Resources 1–7](#)'.

Designated member of staff

When schools identify a staff member, or teams of staff, to lead family engagement, their practice is more effective (Goodall, J. and Vorhaus, J. 2011. Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement. London: Department for Education.)

We have adopted the title of family engagement officer (FEO) to describe

anyone who works closely with families and the community which the school serves. More information on FEOs, including to whom this title is used to refer, can be found in the 'FEO section'.

Collaboration

The ability to adopt collaborative leadership is essential to create successful partnerships with other agencies and services. This collaboration requires a collective vision for the school, families and communities.

Planning and evaluation

Family engagement should:

- be a focus within broader school improvement planning
- support the learning and teaching within the school
- be included in the school's wider self-evaluation practice, and the impact of the strategies adopted monitored and measured for effectiveness

Further information on embedding a whole school approach

More information on embedding a whole school approach can be accessed in The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit '[Theme 2: Embedding a whole-school approach to FaCE Resources 1–2](#)'.

Communication

Schools and families agree that the basis for developing positive relationships is effective two-way communication. Schools that build meaningful relationships

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with families communicate with them regularly in a variety of ways, making sure there is a good flow of information going both ways. They ensure that there are genuine opportunities for communication which supports the ‘mutual exchange of values and knowledge’ (Arnot, M. and Schneider, C. 2018, **‘Transactional school-home-school communication: Addressing the mismatches between migrant parents’ and teachers’ views of parental knowledge, engagement and the barriers to engagement’**).

Consulting with families about the most effective ways to communicate is important. Estyn reports that while most schools already use a variety of ways to communicate with parents, only a few consult parents on their preferences around communication (**Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. 2018. Involving Parents: Communication between schools and parents of school-aged children**).

More information about developing effective two-way communication can be found in through the following links:

- The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit **‘Theme 3: Welcoming families to engage with the school Resources 1–9**
- **Parentkind’s ‘Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools’**

Curriculum for Wales

As of September 2022, as part of **Curriculum for Wales**, headteachers of maintained schools are under a duty to make arrangements to provide information to parents about a learner’s progress. The new requirements around sharing information recognise the important role parents can play in bridging the gap between school and home and supporting learners to make progress. Headteachers will have the flexibility to determine the most appropriate format in which to communicate with parents and they will be encouraged to use a variety of communication methods to best engage and maximise parental

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understanding and involvement.

The FEO

Dedicated staff working with parents are currently referred to by different titles, depending on their context. These titles may include:

- parent liaison officer
- community pastoral worker
- family support worker
- well-being officer

We have decided to use the title of FEO to describe anyone who works closely with families and the community which the school serves.

In many cases, the role of the FEO has been filled by a non-teaching member of school staff or a third-sector project worker. In some cases, this role is carried out by a team of staff.

Those carrying out the FEO role often already know families and the local community well and can build upon the natural links already in place. What is most important is that by using a trauma-informed way of working, they will have the skills and expertise in family facilitation to build the trusting relationships required to work with families.

One of the clearest and most important messages from more than 25 years of research is that engaging with parents must be context specific to be successful (Goodall, 2022). It is important that FEOs adopt a strengths-based approach to working with families, and model for other staff how to have good, respectful relationships with parents (National College for School Leadership 2010).

Listening to parents and families and providing opportunities for them to

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participate in the development of any support and interventions is important. A parent needs analysis can help the school understand what parents are already doing with their children and identify the best ways to engage them further in their children's learning (Goodall, J. and Vorhaus, J. 2011. Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement. London: Department for Education). This will lead to a bespoke approach for each school. As such, each school will have a distinct set of priorities which form the basis of their family and community engagement plan. The FEO will work in conjunction with the senior leadership team (SLT) and wider school staff to implement key duties within this plan.

Roles and responsibilities of the FEO

Some of the key roles and responsibilities of the FEO are to:

- establish and foster good relationships with families of children and young people at the school
- ensure the school is welcoming to families and take steps to get to know them
- encourage and support parental involvement in the school and engagement in children's learning
- encourage effective dialogue between parents and teachers about children's progress and how that progress can be supported at home
- promote the self-esteem of parents to help them maximise their own personal and interpersonal skills, which will enable them to respond to their family's needs by communicating openly and providing good parenting
- provide accessible routes through which parents can express their views and be consulted on specific issues
- share information on practical childcare and parenting skills, identifying the need for support, including how to meet the emotional needs of children, for example setting boundaries and consistent discipline
- promote and facilitate opportunities for adult and community learning
- make a range of communication methods available, appropriate to the

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family's needs and preferences

- follow data protection protocols and keep records and all documentation related to meetings or contact with children and young people and their families in a confidential place
- value and promote diversity, equity and inclusion, ensuring engagement with groups of families who may be under-represented in school life
- provide opportunities for peer support groups for parents

It is important that any school-based family support activities should have the improvement of children's learning as a clear and consistent goal within the context of a school's curriculum. Therefore, the FEO should have a clear focus on working with the staff within the school to help families support their child's learning at home. This would include:

- understanding how the family currently supports learning in the home
- gathering an understanding of what families need from the school and how best they can support them
- communicating to families the most effective ways they can support their children's learning at home
- providing or signposting to available resources to support the enrichment of home learning

Parental involvement and parental engagement

The way that schools develop their engagement with parents and families can be categorised by parental involvement with school, with schooling and with learning (Goodall, J and Montgomery, C.2014. Parental Involvement to Parental Engagement: A Continuum). When parents are engaged in their children's learning in the home, it is most effective. Schools are best placed to consider how to support parents to engage with their child's learning.

The distinction between parental involvement and parental engagement is an

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important one, that can be often misinterpreted by schools.

With parental involvement:

- parents are seen as helping the school
- agency rests with the school
- the emphasis is on parents coming into school

With parental engagement:

- parents are seen as supporting learning
- agency shared between partners
- the emphasis is on the home learning environment

While parental involvement is useful and can be an important part of a schools' development, it is parental engagement in children's learning which has the biggest impact on achievement and outcomes. The Engaging Parents Toolkit (Goodall, 2023) is a practical resource that can support schools to consider their practice against these definitions and develop their parental engagement provision.

As children develop, the ways in which parents and carers engage with the school and their children's learning will become different. There are other things to consider when building relationships with parents and carers in a secondary setting for example, or in a rural setting which is geographically diverse. However, whatever the school, setting or provision, engaging with families is important and makes a big difference.

More information on helping families to actively support their children's learning can found in The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit '**Theme 4: Helping families to actively support their child's learning Resources 1–5**'.

The importance of the FEO role for families

The FEO role has been highlighted as being effective in bridging the gap between children and their parents and families in their home life contexts and school staff and school contexts. Many parents and family members may have had a poor educational experience themselves and may be anxious when engaging with the school. The FEO can help to understand these broader factors and support all parents to feel valued, welcomed, listened to and supported.

Linking to other roles, agencies and settings

An important aspect of an FEO role is to provide a key and consistent point of contact for school staff and staff from outside agencies. As part of their role, FEOs may be required to:

- liaise with members of school staff regarding families or children as necessary
- liaise with the attendance officer and education welfare officer (EWO) to provide support for families and children whose attendance is a concern
- liaise with the school additional learning needs coordinator (ALNCo) and early years ALNCo, as well as child protection officers
- liaise with the school nurse and Wales Network for Healthy Schools Scheme (WNHSS) to support broader health and well-being issues
- liaise with relevant local authority leads particularly in relation to supporting looked after children (LAC) and vulnerable learners
- develop partnerships with specialist services and signpost families going through difficult times to these services as early as possible to avoid problems escalating, for example Families First, parenting advice services or the Family Information Service
- be a point of contact for other agencies including social care, health, the third

sector and others

- develop wider community partnerships that value and reflect the diversity of children, young people, families and communities in Wales
- support school enrichment activities such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs and **Food and Fun** during the holidays, linking with community and third sector groups as appropriate
- develop positive relationships with feeder and onward settings, ensuring that transitions are planned and appropriate information is shared, supporting both the families and the children throughout those transitions
- build links with childcare providers in their area, for example non-maintained nursery settings, day care nurseries and Cylch Meithrin
- engage with the local play provider and play work settings, including providers of open access play. For many communities, the best space for play are the school grounds, and increased access out of school hours would support those children and families
- build links with local youth work services and encourage the development of relationships and appropriate information-sharing between school staff and youth workers
- liaise with local authority engagement and progression co-ordinators and youth homelessness coordinators to ensure young people have positive transitions into education, employment or training when they leave school, reducing the risk of homelessness
- support engagement and relationships with wider community and third-party providers in terms of opportunities around additional provision of enrichment activities

More information on developing community partnerships and multi-agency working can be found in The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit '**Theme 5: Developing community partnerships and multi-agency working Resources 1–2**'.

While many of the activities and work undertaken by the FEO will be school based, it is also important for FEOs to have the flexibility to undertake their roles

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outside school, in community spaces or even in parents' homes. The opportunity to develop outreach work in the community can enhance home/school links and relationships. It is essential that all FEOs follow safeguarding guidance and use appropriate risk assessments when conducting any offsite working.

FEO and community engagement

In addition to working with families, the role of the FEO can also focus on developing wider community partnerships, which should value and promote the diverse nature of our communities in Wales. Wider community partnerships can:

- strengthen the school's family engagement work by helping schools to overcome families' barriers to engagement
- strengthen the school, bringing in resources and enriching the curriculum, as well as informing its ongoing development
- enable schools to make a positive contribution to community life, developing community cohesion, social capital and contributing to adult learning
- make links with community groups and community leaders to collaborate on a wider community basis
- support intergenerational practice, developing greater understanding and respect between generations
- help schools encourage re-engagement with learners through links with wider community and third-party providers to support additional enrichment opportunities

More information on developing community partnerships and multi-agency working can be found in The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit '**Theme 5: Developing community partnerships and multi-agency working Resources 1–2**'.

Tackling child poverty

We all have a duty to tackle child poverty and mitigate its impacts, including the educational inequalities that children experience as a result of living in poverty.

There can be significant barriers to progression for children impacted by poverty but, by taking a community focused school approach, we hope to:

- address these barriers
- encourage equality of opportunity
- overcome the impact of socio-economic disadvantage
- improve the life chances of children and young people

The following guidance provides further support for schools to tackle child poverty:

- **Tackling poverty together: Creating compassionate services to support families in poverty at school**
- **The Price of Pupil Poverty**
- **'Food and Fun' school holiday enrichment programme**

Post COVID-19 pandemic

There are many concerns around the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic, the public health restrictions imposed and the subsequent switch to remote learning has had on our children's learning and well-being. In addition, there are wider implications on attendance, social anxiety and isolation for families as we recover from the pandemic.

However, the disruption to learning experienced throughout the pandemic has also resulted in many families having closer links and more effective

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communication with schools as well as a better understanding of the way they can support their children's learning.

The FEO role can support families and children to:

- re-engage with school
- maximise learning opportunities
- re-establish relationships
- build on some of the practice developed throughout the pandemic, for example greater use of technology to support family engagement with learning

Attendance

All schools strive to support high attendance rates from their children and young people. However, for many varied and often complex reasons, some children may not attend school regularly. The impact of non-attendance for both children and their family members can be significant.

The greatest emphasis for encouraging good attendance should be placed on preventative measures and ensuring positive relationships are developed between families and schools. Parents are more likely to encourage full attendance where they feel part of the school community.

Supporting attendance

FEOs can support the relationships between families and schools and can encourage and develop links which have a positive impact on attendance. Some key actions which can support positive attendance include the following:

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Building positive relationships when the children first start school

Building positive relationships with families is important. Home visits provide the opportunity to meet parents in a more relaxed setting and to share information about the importance of good attendance. This also allows the FEO to have an understanding of the individual context of children and families within the school.

Providing clear guidance and information on attendance

FEOs can help to co-ordinate communication between school and families on attendance and the school's expectations on this.

Facilitating feedback and co-construction

Allowing parents to feedback their thoughts on attendance and to be involved in co-constructing the policy and approaches that the school adopts.

Dealing with more specific attendance concerns

When dealing with more specific attendance concerns, there is a need to look at the particular context of families and their children's circumstances to make sure that the underlying reason for the absence is acknowledged and that any support is tailored to meet any individual need.

FEOs can draw upon their knowledge of families and their circumstances to unpick the factors that may be affecting attendance and then signpost to support as required. They may be able to:

- meet with the parents to understand the individual needs and context, consider the specific barriers to attendance and work together to draw up a

bespoke support plan

- draw upon their knowledge of a broad range of additional services to signpost to wider support services, for example, transport or housing

Professional learning

It is important that appropriate professional learning is offered to those adopting an FEO role. The specific professional learning requirements will depend on:

- the context of the setting
- the individual needs of the post holder
- the wider whole-school priorities

Some of the professional development needs that schools have already identified for their FEOs have been:

- **adverse childhood experiences**
- **trauma-informed approaches**
- advice and guidance
- coaching

Using nationally recognised standards can be useful to identify professional learning requirements. **The Professional standards for assisting teaching** and the professional standards for teaching and leadership are useful reference points.

Children and young people who are looked after or are educated other than at school (EOTAS)

This guidance acknowledges that not all children and young people are

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educated in schools and not all children and young people are supported by their families at home. These children and young people are some of the most vulnerable learners. Regardless of a child or young person's place of care or education, the principles of effective community focused practice, as detailed within this guidance, remain.

Children and young people who are looked after may be cared for in their own home, a foster home, residential unit or residential school. These children and young people face barriers to achieving success in education and it is vital that schools know who their learners who are looked after are and that they keep in contact with the appropriate carer, who may be a relative carer, foster carer, or a local authority carer. Care planning for children and young people who are looked after should clarify who is taking responsibility for keeping in contact with the school and helping the child with their education. Careful planning and effective joint working between carers or social workers and teachers is of equal importance.

More information on supporting families of children and young people who are looked after or are EOTAS can be found in The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit '**Theme 3: Welcoming families to engage with the school Resources 1–9**'.

Transition

Starting and changing school can be an emotionally challenging event for both children and their families. Being proactive and planning for effective transitions that support both children and their parents is important. Parents will want to know about the school, the staff, what their children will be learning and how they are developing (Save the Children, 2022).

The earlier that schools start to develop relationships which can support

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effective transitions, the better. The Family and Community Engagement Toolkit **‘Theme 3: Welcoming families to engage with the school Resources 1–9’** can help support schools plan for this.

When schools and settings design and review their curriculum, they should consider what arrangements can be put in place to ensure effective transition.

This includes developing and embedding a robust and effective process for the transition of learners along the 3 to 16 continuum. This should be an ongoing process that recognises the diverse needs of all learners and supports each individual in their learning journey. Consideration should also be given to any curriculum and assessment planning that takes place across the cluster.

To support this process:

- primary schools should engage with leaders of feeder settings
- primary and secondary schools should engage with each other
- primary and secondary schools should engage with leaders of PRUs and other EOTAS settings

Estyn: The importance of working with families and the community

The importance of working with families and the community has been reinforced in several Estyn reports, including in their Community School Thematic Report 2020 **‘Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life’**.

Within the report, they identify schools and settings who have effective family engagement are those who:

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- work with parents and families as equal partners
- understand needs of families and the community and adapt to those
- provide opportunities for consulting and communicating with parents to ensure their voice is heard
- provide help and encouragement to families so that they can effectively support their child's learning at home
- have strategic plans about how they will work with families and the community
- have specific staff dedicated to this work
- expect all staff to develop their professional skills in order to undertake their role within the school

Supplementary guidance on inspecting the approaches taken by schools and local government education services to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and well-being is available on [Estyn's website](#).

Further resources

More information and resources are available:

- [Family and community engagement toolkit](#)
- Engaging Parents Toolkit (pending publication)
- [Parentkind – Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools](#)
- [Leading and developing parental engagement – a tool to help you audit and improve your practice \(ioe.ac.uk\)](#)
- [Estyn – Supplementary guidance: inspecting the approaches taken by schools and local government education services to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and well-being](#)

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